

## The Metamorphosis

### I

WHEN GREGOR SAMSA awoke from troubled dreams one morning, he found that he had been transformed in his bed into an enormous bug. He lay on his back, which was hard as armor, and, when he lifted his head a little, he saw his belly — rounded, brown, partitioned by archlike ridges — on top of which the blanket, ready to slip off altogether, was just barely perched. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his girth, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What’s happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a real room meant for human habitation, though a little too small, lay peacefully within its four familiar walls. Above the table, on which an unpacked sampling of fabric swatches was strewn — Samsa was a traveling salesman — hung the picture that he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and had placed in a pretty gilt frame. It depicted a lady who, decked out in a fur hat and a fur boa, sat upright, raising toward the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her whole forearm was encased.

Gregor’s gaze then turned toward the window, and the dismal weather — you could hear raindrops beating against the window gutter — made him quite melancholy. “What if I went back to sleep for another while and forgot all this foolishness?” he thought; but that was totally out of the question, because he was used to sleeping on his right side, and in his present state he couldn’t get into that position. No matter how energetically he threw himself onto his right side, each time he rocked back into the supine position. He must have tried a hundred times, closing his eyes to avoid seeing his squirming legs, not stopping until he began to feel a slight, dull pain in his side that he had never felt before.

“My God,” he thought, “what a strenuous profession I’ve chosen! Traveling day in and day out. The turmoil of business is much greater than in the home office, and on top of that I’m subjected to this torment of traveling, to the worries about train connections, the bad meals at

irregular hours, an intercourse with people that constantly changes, never lasts, never becomes cordial. The devil take it all!" He felt a slight itch up on his belly; slowly shoved himself on his back closer to the bedpost, so he could lift his head better; found the itchy place, which was all covered with little white spots that he was unable to diagnose; and wanted to feel the area with one leg, but drew it back immediately, because when he touched it he was invaded by chills.

He slid back into his former position. "Getting up early like this," he thought, "makes you totally idiotic. People must have their sleep. Other traveling salesmen live like harem women. For instance, when during the course of the morning I go back to the hotel to copy out the orders I've received, those fine gentlemen are just having their breakfast. I should try that with my boss; I'd be fired on the spot. Anyway, who knows whether that wouldn't be a good thing for me after all. If I didn't hold myself back because of my parents, I would have quit long ago; I would have walked right up to the boss and let my heart out to him. He would surely have fallen off his desk! That's a peculiar habit of his, too, sitting on his desk and talking down to his employees from up above; and, besides, they have to step way up close because the boss is so hard of hearing. Now, I haven't given up all hope yet; once I have the money together to pay off my parents' debt to him—that should still take five or six years—I'll definitely go through with it. Then I'll make the big break. At the moment, of course, I've got to get up, because my train leaves at five."

And he glanced over toward his alarm clock, which was ticking on the wardrobe. "Father in Heaven!" he thought. It was half past six, and the hands were moving ahead peacefully; in fact, it was later than half past, it was almost a quarter to seven. Could the alarm have failed to ring? From the bed he could see that it was correctly set for four; surely, it had also rung. Yes, but was it possible to sleep peacefully through that furniture-shaking ring? Well, he hadn't slept peacefully, but probably all the more soundly for that. Yet, what should he do now? The next train left at seven; to catch it he would have had to make a mad dash, his sample case wasn't packed yet, and he himself definitely didn't feel particularly fresh and lively. And even if he caught the train, he couldn't escape a bawling out from his boss, because the office messenger had waited at the five-o'clock train and had long since made a report about his negligence. He was a creature of the boss's, spineless and stupid. Now, what if he reported in sick? But that would be extremely distressing and suspicious, because during his five years' employment Gregor had not been ill even once. The boss would surely arrive with the health-insurance doctor, would complain to his parents about their lazy son and would cut short all objections by referring them to the health-insurance doctor, in whose

eyes the only people that exist at all are perfectly healthy specimens who are work-shy. And besides, would he be so wrong in this case? Actually, aside from a truly excessive drowsiness after all that sleep, Gregor felt quite well and in fact was particularly hungry.

While he was considering all this in the greatest haste, still unable to decide whether to get out of bed—the clock was just striking six forty-five—there was a cautious knock on the door at the head of his bed. "Gregor," a voice called—it was his mother—"it's six forty-five. Didn't you intend to make a trip?" That gentle voice! Gregor was frightened when he heard his own answering voice, which, to be sure, was unmistakably his accustomed one, but in which there now appeared, as if rising from below, an irrepressible, painful peeping sound, so that his words retained their clarity only at the very outset but became distorted as they faded away, so that you couldn't tell if you had heard them correctly. Gregor had meant to give a detailed answer and explain everything, but under the circumstances he merely said: "Yes, yes; thanks, Mother; I'm getting up now." Because the door was made of wood, the alteration in Gregor's voice was probably not noticeable, since his mother was pacified by that explanation and shuffled away. But as a result of that brief conversation the other members of the family had become aware that, contrary to expectation, Gregor was still at home; and his father was soon knocking at one of the side doors, softly, but with his fist. "Gregor, Gregor," he called, "what's going on?" And before very long he admonished him again, in a deeper voice: "Gregor! Gregor!" But at the other side door his sister was quietly lamenting: "Gregor? Aren't you well? Do you need anything?" Gregor answered in both directions: "Be right there!" He made an effort, by enunciating most carefully and by inserting long pauses between the individual words, to free his voice of anything out of the ordinary. His father then returned to his breakfast, but his sister whispered: "Gregor, open up, I beg you." But Gregor had not the slightest intention of opening the door; in fact, he was now glad he had formed the cautious habit, an offshoot of his business trips, of locking all his doors at night even at home.

First he wanted to get up in peace and unmolested, get dressed and, especially, have breakfast, and only afterwards give the matter further thought, because, as he now realized, in bed he would never arrive at any sensible conclusion to his musings. He recalled that, often in the past, while in bed, he had felt some slight pain or other, perhaps caused by lying in an awkward position, and that, when he got out of bed, the pain had proved to be purely imaginary; and he was eager to find out how his impressions of that morning would gradually be dispelled. That the alteration in his voice was nothing more than the harbinger of a

nasty cold, a professional hazard of traveling salesmen, he had not the slightest doubt.

To throw off the blanket was quite easy; all he needed to do was puff himself up a little and it fell down by itself. But after that things became difficult, especially since he was so unusually wide. He would normally have used his arms and hands to hoist himself up; but instead of them he now had only the numerous little legs, which were uninterruptedly moving in the most confused way and which, in addition, he couldn't control. Whenever he intended to bend one of them, at first he extended it; and when he finally succeeded in executing his wishes with that particular leg, all of the others meanwhile would thrash about as if they were completely independent, in an extreme, painful agitation. "But I can't stay in bed doing nothing," Gregor said to himself.

First he wanted to leave the bed with the lower part of his body, but this lower part, which, by the way, he hadn't seen yet and of which he couldn't form any clear idea, either, proved to be too difficult to move around; the procedure was so slow; and when finally, having grown almost wild, he gathered all his strength and pushed forward heedlessly, he went in the wrong direction and collided violently with the lower bedpost. The burning pain that he felt taught him that it was precisely the lower part of his body that was perhaps the most sensitive at the moment.

Therefore, he tried to get the upper part of his body out of bed first, and carefully turned his head toward the edge of the bed. He managed to do this easily and, despite its width and weight, finally the bulk of his body slowly followed in the direction his head had turned. But when at last he had moved his head into the open space outside the bed, he became afraid of continuing to edge forward in this manner, because if he finally let himself fall like that, it would take a real miracle to keep his head from being injured. And now of all times he must take every precaution not to lose consciousness; rather than that, he would stay in bed.

But when once again, heaving a sigh after similar efforts, he lay there just as before, and once again saw his little legs battling one another even more pitifully, if that were possible — when he could find no possibility of bringing calm and order into that arbitrary turmoil — he told himself again that he couldn't possibly stay in bed, and that the most sensible thing was to make every sacrifice if there existed even the smallest hope of thereby freeing himself from bed. But at the same time he didn't forget to remind himself occasionally that the calmest possible reflection is far preferable to desperate decisions. At such moments he would direct his eyes as fixedly as possible toward the window, but unfortunately there was

not much confidence or cheer to be derived from the sight of the morning fog, which even shrouded the other side of the narrow street. "Seven o'clock already," he said to himself as the clock struck again, "seven o'clock already and still such a fog." And for a little while he lay there calmly, breathing very gently, as if perhaps expecting the total silence to restore him to his real, understandable condition.

But then he said to himself: "Before it strikes seven fifteen, I just have to be all the way out of bed. Besides, by that time someone from the firm will come to ask about me, because the office opens before seven o'clock." And now he prepared to rock his entire body out of bed at its full length in a uniform movement. If he let himself fall out of bed in this manner, he expected that his head, which he intended to lift up high during the fall, would receive no injury. His back seemed to be hard; when falling onto the carpet, surely nothing would happen to it. His greatest fear was the thought of the loud crash which must certainly result, and which would probably cause, if not a scare, then at least concern on the other side of all the doors. But that risk had to be taken.

When Gregor was already projecting halfway out of bed — this new method was more of a game than a hard task, all he needed to do was keep on rocking back and forth in short spurts — it occurred to him how simple everything would be if someone came to help him. Two strong people — he thought of his father and the maid — would have completely sufficed; they would only have had to shove their arms under his rounded back, extract him from bed that way like a nut from its shell, stoop down under his bulk and then merely wait cautiously until he had swung himself entirely over on the floor, where hopefully his little legs would find their use. Now, completely apart from the fact that the doors were locked, should he really have called for help? Despite all his tribulations, he was unable to suppress a smile at that thought.

He had now proceeded so far that, when rocking more vigorously, he could barely still maintain his equilibrium, and would very soon have to reach a definitive decision, because in five minutes it would be seven fifteen — when there was a ring at the apartment door. "That's somebody from the firm," he said to himself and nearly became rigid, while his little legs danced all the more quickly. For a moment everything remained quiet. "They aren't opening," Gregor said to himself, enmeshed in some unreasoning hope. But then, naturally, just as always, the maid went to the door with a firm tread and opened it. Gregor needed only to hear the visitor's first words of greeting and he already knew who it was — the chief clerk himself. Why was only Gregor condemned to work for a firm where people immediately conceived the greatest suspicions at the smallest sign of negligence? Were all employees simply

scoundrels, was there among them not one loyal, devoted person who, even though he had merely failed to utilize a couple of morning hours on behalf of the firm, had become crazed by pangs of conscience, to the point of being incapable of getting out of bed? Wouldn't it really have been enough to send an apprentice to ask — if all this questioning was necessary at all — did the chief clerk himself have to come, thereby indicating to the entire innocent family that the investigation into this suspicious incident could only be entrusted to the intelligence of the chief clerk? And, more as a result of the irritation that these reflections caused Gregor, than as a result of a proper decision, he swung himself out of bed with all his might. There was a loud thump, but it wasn't a real crash. The fall was deadened somewhat by the carpet, and in addition Gregor's back was more resilient than he had thought, so that the muffled sound wasn't so noticeable. But he hadn't held his head carefully enough and had bumped it; he turned it and rubbed it against the carpet in vexation and pain.

"Something fell in there," said the chief clerk in the room on the left side. Gregor tried to imagine whether the chief clerk might not some day have an experience similar to his of today: the possibility really had to be conceded. But, as if in brutal response to this question, the chief clerk now took a few determined steps in the adjoining room, which made his patent-leather boots squeak. From the room on the right side Gregor's sister whispered, to inform him: "Gregor, the chief clerk is here." "I know," said Gregor to himself, but he didn't dare to raise his voice so loud that his sister could hear him.

"Gregor," his father now said from the room on the left side, "the chief clerk has come and is inquiring why you didn't leave by the early train. We don't know what to tell him. Besides, he wants to talk with you personally. So please open the door. He will surely be kind enough to forgive the disorder in your room." "Good morning, Mr. Samsa," the chief clerk meanwhile called, in a friendly tone. "He isn't well," Gregor's mother said to the chief clerk while his father was still talking at the door, "he isn't well, believe me, sir. How otherwise would Gregor miss a train! The boy has no head for anything but the business. I'm almost upset, as it is, that he never goes out at night; he's been in town for eight days this time, but has stayed at home every night. He sits with us at the table and reads the paper quietly or studies timetables. It's already a distraction for him when he busies himself with fretsaw work. So, for example, during two or three evenings he carved a small frame; you'll be amazed how pretty it is; it's hanging in his room; you'll see it right away when Gregor opens up. Besides, I'm glad you're here, sir; on our own we couldn't have persuaded Gregor to open the door; he's so obstinate; and

I'm sure he's not feeling well, even though he denied it earlier this morning." "I'll be right there," said Gregor slowly and deliberately, but not making a move, so as to lose not a word of the conversation. "I, too, my dear lady, can think of no other explanation," said the chief clerk; "I hope it's nothing serious. Although I am also bound to state that we business people — unfortunately or fortunately, according to how you look at it — very often simply have to overcome a slight indisposition out of regard for the business." "Well, can the gentleman go in to see you now?" asked the impatient father, and knocked on the door again. "No," said Gregor. In the room on the left side a painful silence ensued, in the room on the right side the sister began to sob.

Why didn't the sister go and join the others? She had probably just gotten out of bed and hadn't even begun dressing. And why was she crying? Because he didn't get up and let the chief clerk in? Because he was in danger of losing his job, and because then his boss would once more dun their parents for his old claims? For the time being those were needless worries, after all. Gregor was still here and hadn't the slightest thought of abandoning his family. At the moment he was lying there on the carpet, and no one acquainted with his current state could seriously have asked him to let in the chief clerk. But, after all, Gregor couldn't really be discharged at once on account of this slight discourtesy, for which a suitable excuse would easily be found later on. And it seemed to Gregor that it would be much more sensible to leave him in peace for now instead of disturbing him with tears and exhortations. But it was precisely all the uncertainty that was oppressing the others and that excused their behavior.

"Mr. Samsa," the chief clerk now called in a louder voice, "what's going on? You're barricading yourself in your room, giving just 'yes' and 'no' answers, causing your parents big, needless worries and — to mention this just incidentally — neglecting your business duties in a truly unheard-of fashion. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and of your employer, and I am asking you quite seriously for an immediate, lucid explanation. I'm amazed, I'm amazed. I thought I knew you for a calm, sensible person, and now suddenly you apparently want to begin making an exhibition of peculiar caprices. To be sure, early this morning our employer, when speaking to me, hinted at a possible explanation for your negligence — it concerned the cash receipts that were recently entrusted to you — but, honestly, I all but gave him my word of honor that that explanation couldn't be the true one. Now, however, I see your incomprehensible stubbornness here and I am losing all willingness to say a good word for you in the slightest way. Nor is your position by any means the most solid. I originally had the intention of telling you all this

between ourselves, but since you are making me waste my time here pointlessly, I don't know why your parents shouldn't hear it, too. Well, then, your performance recently has been most unsatisfactory; true, this isn't the season for doing especially good business, we acknowledge that; but a season for doing no business at all just doesn't exist, Mr. Samsa, it can't be allowed to exist." "But, sir," Gregor called out in distraction, forgetting everything else in his excitement, "I'm going to open the door immediately, this minute. A slight indisposition, a dizzy spell, have prevented me from getting up. I'm still lying in bed. But now I feel quite lively again. I am just now climbing out of bed. Be patient for just another moment! I'm not quite as well yet as I thought. But I now feel all right. The things that can affect a person! Just last evening I felt perfectly fine, my parents know that; or it might be better to say that even last evening I had a little advance indication. People should have noticed it from the way I looked. Why didn't I report it at the office?! But you always think that you'll be able to fight off an illness without having to stay home. Sir! Spare my parents! There is no basis for all the complaints you're now making against me; and no one has said a word to me about them. Perhaps you haven't read the last orders I sent in. Besides, I'll still make the trip on the eight-o'clock train, the couple of hours of rest have strengthened me. Don't waste your time here, sir; I'll be at the office myself in no time, and please be good enough to tell them that and give my best wishes to our employer!"

And while Gregor was pouring all of this out hastily, scarcely knowing what he was saying, he had approached the wardrobe without difficulty, probably because of the practice he had already had in bed, and was now trying to draw himself up against it. He wanted actually to open the door, actually to show himself and speak with the chief clerk; he was eager to learn what the others, who were now so desirous of his presence, would say when they saw him. If they got frightened, then Gregor would have no further responsibility and could be calm. But if they accepted everything calmly, then he, too, would have no cause to be upset, and, if he hurried, he could really be at the station at eight o'clock. At first, now, he slid back down the smooth wardrobe several times, but finally, giving himself one last thrust, he stood there upright; he paid no more attention to the pains in his abdomen, severe as they were. Now he let himself fall against the backrest of a nearby chair and held tight to its edges with his little legs. By doing so, moreover, he had also gained control over himself and he fell silent, because now he could listen to the chief clerk.

"Did you understand even a single word?" the chief clerk was asking his parents; "he isn't trying to make a fool of us, is he?" "God forbid," called his mother, who was weeping by this time, "he may be seriously

ill, and we're torturing him. Grete! Grete!" she then shouted. "Mother?" called his sister from the other side. They were communicating across Gregor's room. "You must go to the doctor's at once. Gregor is sick. Fetch the doctor fast. Did you hear Gregor speaking just now?" "That was an animal's voice," said the chief clerk, noticeably quietly in contrast to the mother's shouting. "Anna! Anna!" called the father through the hallway into the kitchen, clapping his hands, "get a locksmith right away!" And already the two girls were running down the hallway with rustling skirts — how had his sister gotten dressed so quickly? — and tore open the apartment door. There was no sound of the door closing; they had most likely left it open, as is the case in apartments where a great misfortune has occurred.

But Gregor had become much calmer. To be sure, he now realized that his speech was no longer intelligible, even though it had seemed clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ears were getting used to it. But anyway they were now believing that there was something wrong with him and they were ready to help him. The confidence and security with which the first measures had been taken, comforted him. He felt that he was once more drawn into the circle of humanity and hoped for magnificent and surprising achievements on the part of both, the doctor and the locksmith, without really differentiating much between them. In order to restore his voice to its maximum clarity for the imminent decisive discussions, he cleared it a little by coughing, but took care to do this in very muffled tones, since possibly even that noise might sound different from human coughing, and he no longer trusted himself to make the distinction. Meanwhile it had become completely quiet in the adjoining room. Perhaps his parents were sitting at the table with the chief clerk and whispering quietly, perhaps they were all leaning against the door and listening.

Gregor shoved himself slowly to the door, using the chair; once there, he let it go and threw himself against the door, holding himself upright against it — the balls of his little feet contained some sticky substance — and rested there from his exertions for the space of a minute. But then he prepared to turn the key in the lock with his mouth. Unfortunately it seemed that he had no real teeth — what was he to grasp the key with? — but, instead, his jaws were actually pretty strong; with their help he did really get the key to move, paying no heed to the fact that he doubtless was doing himself some injury, because a brown fluid issued from his mouth, ran down over the key and dripped onto the floor. "Listen there," said the chief clerk in the adjoining room, "he's turning the key." That was a great encouragement for Gregor; but all of them should have called out to him, even his father and mother; "Go to it, Gregor!" they

should have called, "keep at it, work on that lock!" And, imagining that they were all following his efforts in suspense, he bit recklessly into the key with all the strength he could muster. He danced around the lock, now here, now there, following the progress of the key as it turned; now he was keeping himself upright solely with his mouth, and, as the need arose, he either hung from the key or pushed it down again with the full weight of his body. The sharper sound of the lock, as it finally snapped back, woke Gregor up completely. With a sigh of relief he said to himself: "So then, I didn't need the locksmith," and he placed his head on the handle, in order to open the door all the way.

Since he had to open the door in this manner, he was still out of sight after it was already fairly wide open. First he had to turn his body slowly around one leaf of the double door, and very carefully at that, if he didn't want to fall squarely on his back right before entering the room. He was still occupied by that difficult maneuver and had no time to pay attention to anything else, when he heard the chief clerk utter a loud "Oh!"—it sounded like the wind howling—and now he saw him as well. He had been the closest to the door; now, pressing his hand against his open mouth, he stepped slowly backward as if driven away by some invisible force operating with uniform pressure. Gregor's mother—despite the presence of the chief clerk, she stood there with her hair still undone from the previous night and piled in a high, ruffled mass—first looked at his father with folded hands, then took two steps toward Gregor and collapsed in the midst of her petticoats, which billowed out all around her, her face completely lost to view and sunk on her chest. His father clenched his fist with a hostile expression, as if intending to push Gregor back into his room; then he looked around the parlor in uncertainty, shaded his eyes with his hands and wept so hard that it shook his powerful chest.

Gregor now refrained from entering the room; he stayed inside, leaning on the leaf of the door that was firmly latched, so that all that could be seen was half of his body and, above it, his head tilted to the side, with which he peered toward the others. Meanwhile it had become much brighter outside; clearly visible on the other side of the street was a section of the building situated opposite from them, endless, gray-black—it was a hospital—with its regularly placed windows harshly piercing its facade; the rain was still falling, but only in large drops that were individually visible and were literally flung down upon the ground one by one. An excessive number of breakfast dishes and utensils stood on the table, because for Gregor's father breakfast was the most important meal of the day and he would stretch it out for hours while reading a number of newspapers. On the wall precisely

opposite hung a photograph of Gregor that dated from his military service, showing him as a lieutenant, hand on sword, with a carefree smile, demanding respect for his bearing and his uniform. The door to the hallway was open and, since the apartment door was open, too, there was a clear view all the way out onto the landing and the beginning of the downward staircase.

"Now," said Gregor, who was perfectly conscious of being the only one who had remained calm, "I'll get dressed right away, pack the sample case and catch the train. Is it all right, is it all right with you if I make the trip? Now, sir, you see that I'm not stubborn and I am glad to do my job; traveling is a nuisance, but without the traveling I couldn't live. Where are you off to, sir? To the office? Yes? Will you make an honest report of everything? There's a moment now and then when a man is incapable of working, but that's precisely the right moment to recall his past performance and to consider that, later on, when the obstacle is cleared away, he will surely work all the more diligently and with greater concentration. I am so deeply obligated to our employer, you know that very well. Besides, I have my parents and sister to worry about. I'm in a jam, but I'll work my way out of it. But don't make it harder for me than it already is. Speak up for me in the firm! A traveling salesman isn't well liked, I know. People think he makes a fortune and lives in clover. They have no particular reason to reflect on it and get over that prejudice. But you, sir, you have a better overview of the true state of affairs than the rest of the staff; in fact, speaking in all confidence, a better overview than our employer himself, who, in his role as entrepreneur, can easily be led to misjudge one of his employees. You are also well aware that a traveling salesman, who is away from the home office almost all year long, can thus easily fall victim to gossip, contingencies and groundless complaints that he's completely unable to defend himself against because he generally hears nothing about them; or else he finds out only when he has just come back from a trip, all worn out, and gets to feel the bad results at home, personally, when it's too late even to fathom the reasons for them. Sir, don't go away without saying a word to me that shows me that you agree with me even a little bit!"

But at Gregor's first words the chief clerk had already turned away, and only looked back at Gregor over his jerking shoulder, his lips pouting. And during Gregor's speech he didn't stand still for a minute, but, never losing sight of Gregor, retreated toward the door, very gradually, as if under a secret prohibition against leaving the room. By now he was in the hallway, and, from the abrupt movement with which he finally withdrew his foot from the parlor, anyone might think he had just burnt the sole of it. But in the hallway he stretched out his right hand as

far as it could go in the direction of the stairway, as if a truly superterrestrial deliverance were awaiting him there.

Gregor realized that it simply wouldn't do to let the chief clerk depart in that frame of mind, or else his position in the firm would be seriously endangered. His parents didn't understand things like that so well: in all those long years they had gained the conviction that Gregor was set up for life in this firm, and, besides, they were now so preoccupied by the troubles of the moment that they had lost track of all foresight. But Gregor possessed that foresight. The chief clerk must be retained, pacified, persuaded and finally won over; after all, the future of Gregor and his family depended on it! If only his sister were here! She was clever; she had already started to cry while Gregor was still lying calmly on his back. And surely the chief clerk, who was an admirer of women, would have let her manage him; she would have closed the parlor door and talked him out of his fears in the hallway. But his sister *wasn't* there, Gregor had to act on his own behalf. And without stopping to think that he was still completely unfamiliar with his own present powers of locomotion, without stopping to think that once again his oration had possibly — in fact, probably — not been understood, he let go of the leaf of the door; shoved himself through the opening; tried to reach the chief clerk, who was already clutching the railing on the landing with both hands in a ridiculous manner; but immediately, while seeking a support, fell down onto his numerous legs with a brief cry. Scarcely had that occurred when, for the first time that morning, he felt a sense of bodily comfort; his little legs had solid ground below them; they obeyed perfectly, as he noticed to his joy; in fact, they were eager to carry him wherever he wanted to go; and he now believed that a definitive cure for all his sorrow was immediately due. But at that very instant, rocking back and forth as he contained his forward propulsion for a moment, he had come very close to his mother, directly opposite her on the floor. Suddenly she leaped up into the air, even though she had seemed so totally lost to the world; she stretched out her arms wide, spread her fingers and shouted: "Help, for the love of God, help!" She kept her head lowered as if she wanted to get a better look at Gregor, but in contradiction to that, she ran backwards recklessly. Forgetting that the laid table was behind her, when she reached it she hastily sat down on it, as if absentminded, and seemed not to notice that alongside her the coffee was pouring onto the carpet in a thick stream out of the big overturned pot.

"Mother, Mother," Gregor said softly, looking up at her. For a moment he had completely forgotten about the chief clerk; on the other hand, seeing the flowing coffee, he couldn't resist snapping at the air

with his jaws a few times. This made his mother scream again, dash away from the table and fall into the arms of his father, who hastened to receive her. But now Gregor had no time for his parents; the chief clerk was already on the staircase; his chin on the railing, he was still looking back for a last time. Gregor spurted forward, to be as sure as possible of catching up with him; the chief clerk must have had some foreboding, because he made a jump down several steps and disappeared; but he was still shouting "Aaaah!" — the sound filled the whole stairwell. Unfortunately this flight of the chief clerk now also seemed to confuse Gregor's father, who up to that point had been relatively composed: instead of running after the chief clerk himself or at least not obstructing Gregor in his pursuit, with his right hand he seized the chief clerk's walking stick, which the latter had left behind on a chair along with his hat and overcoat; with his left hand he gathered up a big newspaper from the table and, stamping his feet, began to drive Gregor back into his room by brandishing the walking stick and the paper. No plea of Gregor's helped; in fact, no plea was understood; no matter how humbly he turned his head, his father only stamped his feet harder. On the other side of the room his mother had torn open a window despite the cool weather, and, leaning out, was pressing her face into her hands far beyond the window frame. Between the street and the stairwell a strong draught was created, the window curtains flew up, the newspapers on the table rustled and a few sheets blew across the floor. Implacably the father urged him back, uttering hisses like a savage. Gregor, however, had no practice in walking backwards, and, to tell the truth, it was very slow going for him. If Gregor had only been able to turn around, he would have been back in his room right away, but he was afraid of making his father impatient by such a time-consuming turn, and at every moment he was threatened by a fatal blow on the back or head from the stick in his father's hand. But finally Gregor had no other choice, because he observed with horror that, when walking backwards, he wasn't even able to keep in one direction; and so, with uninterrupted, anguished sidewise glances at his father, he began to turn around as quickly as he could, but nevertheless very slowly. Perhaps his father noticed his good will, because he didn't disturb him in this procedure but from time to time even conducted the rotary movement from a distance with the tip of his stick. If only his father had stopped that unbearable hissing! It made Gregor lose his head altogether. He was almost completely turned around when, constantly on the alert for that hissing, he made a mistake and turned himself back again a little. But when at last he had happily brought his head around to the opening in the doorway, it turned out that his body was too wide to get through

without further difficulty. Naturally, in his present mood it didn't even remotely occur to his father to open the other leaf of the door in order to create an adequate passageway for Gregor. His *idée fixe* was merely that Gregor was to get into his room as quickly as possible. Nor would he ever have allowed the circumstantial preparations that were necessary for Gregor to hoist himself upright and perhaps get through the door in that way. Instead, as if there were no obstacle, he was now driving Gregor forward and making a lot of noise about it; what Gregor now heard behind him was no longer anything like the voice of merely one father; it was really no longer a joking matter, and Gregor squeezed into the doorway, no matter what the consequences. One side of his body lifted itself up; he was lying obliquely in the opening; one of his sides was completely abraded; ugly stains were left on the white door; now he was stuck tight and wouldn't have been able to stir from the spot; on one side his little legs were hanging up in the air and trembling, those on the other side were painfully crushed on the ground — then his father gave him a strong push from behind that was a truly liberating one, and, bleeding profusely, he sailed far into his room. Next, the door was slammed shut with the stick, then all was finally quiet.

## II

IT WAS ONLY at twilight that Gregor awoke from his deep, swoonlike sleep. He would surely have awakened not much later even if there had been no disturbance, because he felt sufficiently rested and refreshed by sleep, but it seemed to him as if he had been aroused by a hasty footfall and a cautious locking of the door that led to the hallway. The light of the electric street lamps lay pallidly here and there on the ceiling and on the upper parts of the furniture, but down where Gregor was, it was dark. Slowly, still feeling his way clumsily with his antennae, which he was just now beginning to appreciate, he heaved himself over to the door to see what had happened there. His left side seemed to be one long scar, with an unpleasant tightness to it, and he actually had to limp on his two rows of legs. In addition, one leg had been severely damaged during the morning's events — it was almost a miracle that only one had been damaged — and now dragged after him lifelessly.

It was only when he had reached the door that he noticed what had really lured him there; it was the aroma of something edible. For a basin stood there, filled with milk in which little slices of white bread were floating. He could almost have laughed for joy, because he was even hungrier than in the morning, and immediately he plunged his head

into the milk almost over his eyes. But soon he pulled it out again in disappointment; it was not only that eating caused him difficulties because of his tender left side — and he could eat only when his whole body participated, puffing away — on top of that, he didn't at all like the milk, which was formerly his favorite beverage and which therefore had surely been placed there by his sister for that very reason; in fact, he turned away from the basin almost with repugnance and crept back to the center of the room.

In the parlor, as Gregor saw through the crack in the door, the gas was lit, but, whereas usually at that time of day his father was accustomed to read his afternoon paper to his mother, and sometimes his sister, in a loud voice, now there was not a sound to be heard. Maybe that practice of reading aloud, which his sister always told and wrote him about, had fallen out of use recently. But it was so quiet all around, too, even though the apartment was surely not empty. "What a quiet life the family leads," Gregor said to himself, and while he stared ahead into the darkness, he felt very proud of himself for having been able to provide his parents and sister with a life like that, in such a beautiful apartment. But what if now all the peace, all the prosperity, all the contentment were to come to a fearful end? In order not to give way to such thoughts, Gregor preferred to start moving, and he crawled back and forth in the room.

Once during the long evening one of the side doors, and once the other one, was opened a tiny crack and swiftly shut again; someone had probably needed to come in but was too disinclined to do so. Now Gregor came to a halt directly in front of the parlor door, determined to bring in the hesitant visitor in some way or another, or else at least find out who it was; but the door wasn't opened again and Gregor waited in vain. That morning, when the doors were locked, they had all wanted to come into his room; now, after he had himself opened one door and the others had obviously been opened during the day, no one came any longer, and, in addition, the keys were now on the outside.

It wasn't until late at night that the light in the parlor was turned off, and now it was easy to ascertain that his parents and sister had been up all that time, because, as could clearly be heard, all three now stole away on tiptoe. Surely no one would come into Gregor's room any more before morning, and so he had plenty of time in which to think without disturbance about how he should now reorganize his life. But the high, open room, in which he was compelled to lie flat on the floor, filled him with anguish, although he couldn't discover the reason for it, because, after all, it was the room he had occupied for five years — and, making a semiconscious turn, not without a slight feeling of shame, he dashed under the couch, where, even though his back was a little squeezed and

he could no longer lift his head, he immediately felt quite comfortable, only regretting that his body was too wide to fit under the couch completely.

There he remained the whole night, which he spent partly in a half-slumber, from which he was startled awake time and again by hunger, and partly in worries and ill-defined hopes, all of which led to the conclusion that for the time being he had to stay calm and, by exercising patience and being as considerate as possible to his family, make bearable the unpleasantness that he was absolutely compelled to cause them in his present condition.

By the early morning, when the night had barely passed, Gregor had the opportunity to test the strength of his newly made resolutions, because his sister, almost fully dressed, opened the door from the hallway side and looked in uneasily. She didn't catch sight of him at once, but when she noticed him under the couch — God, he had to be somewhere, he couldn't have flown away — she received such a fright that, unable to control herself, she slammed the door again from outside. But, as if regretting her behavior, she immediately opened the door again and walked in on tiptoe as if she were visiting a seriously ill person or even a stranger. Gregor had moved his head out almost to the edge of the couch, and was observing her. Would she notice that he had left the milk standing, and by no means because he wasn't hungry, and would she bring some other food that suited him better? If she didn't do so of her own accord, he would rather starve to death than call it to her attention, even though in reality he had a tremendous urge to shoot out from under the couch, throw himself at his sister's feet and ask her for something good to eat. But his sister immediately noticed with surprise that the basin was still full, and that only a little milk had been spilled out of it all around; she picked it up at once, not with her bare hands, of course, but with a rag, and carried it out. Gregor was extremely curious to see what she would bring to replace it, and the most varied things came to mind. But he could never have guessed what his sister in her kindness actually did. In order to test his likings, she brought him a big selection, all spread out on an old newspaper. There were old, half-rotten vegetables; bones from their supper, coated with a white gravy that had solidified; a few raisins and almonds; a cheese that two days earlier Gregor would have considered inedible; a dry slice of bread, a slice of bread and butter, and a slice of salted bread and butter. In addition she set down the basin that had probably been designated permanently for Gregor; she had now poured water into it. And from a feeling of delicacy, since she knew Gregor wouldn't eat in her presence, she withdrew hastily and even turned the key in the lock so that Gregor

would see he could make himself as comfortable as he wished. Gregor's little legs whirred as he now moved toward the food. Moreover, his wounds must have completely healed by this time; he felt no more hindrance. He was amazed at that, remembering how, more than a month earlier, he had cut his finger slightly with a knife and how that cut had still hurt him considerably even the day before yesterday. "Am I less sensitive now?" he thought, and was already greedily sucking on the cheese, which had attracted him immediately and imperatively more than any of the other foods. Quickly, one after the other, tears of contentment coming to his eyes, he devoured the cheese, the vegetables and the gravy; on the other hand, he didn't like the fresh food, he couldn't even endure its smell, and he went so far as to drag away to a little distance the things he wanted to eat. He was long finished with everything and was just lying lazily on the same spot when, as a sign that he should withdraw, his sister slowly turned the key. That startled him at once, even though he was almost drowsing by that time, and he hastened back under the couch. But it took enormous self-control to stay under the couch for even the brief time his sister was in the room, because the hearty meal had swelled his body to some extent, and he could hardly breathe in that cramped space. In between brief bouts of asphyxia, with slightly protruding eyes he watched his unsuspecting sister sweep together with a broom not only the leftovers of what he had eaten, but even the foods Gregor hadn't touched at all, as if those too were no longer usable; and he saw how she hastily dropped everything into a bucket, which she closed with a wooden cover, and then carried everything out. She had scarcely turned around when Gregor moved out from under the couch, stretched and let himself expand.

In this manner Gregor received his food every day, once in the morning, while his parents and the maid were still asleep, and the second time after everyone's midday meal, because then his parents took a short nap and the maid was sent away by his sister on some errand. Surely they didn't want Gregor to starve, either, but perhaps they couldn't have endured the experience of his eating habits except through hearsay; perhaps his sister also wanted to spare them one more sorrow, though possibly only a small one, because they were really suffering enough as it was.

Gregor couldn't find out what excuses had been used on that first morning to get the doctor and the locksmith out of the apartment again, because the others, even his sister, not understanding him, had no idea that he could understand them; and so, when his sister was in his room, he had to content himself with hearing her occasional sighs and invocations of the saints. Only later, when they had gotten used to it all to some

degree — naturally, their ever getting used to it altogether was out of the question — Gregor sometimes seized on a remark that was meant to be friendly or could be so interpreted. "He really liked it today," she said when Gregor had stowed away his food heartily, whereas, when the opposite was the case, which gradually occurred more and more frequently, she used to say almost sadly: "This time he didn't touch anything again."

But even though Gregor couldn't learn any news directly, he overheard many things from the adjoining rooms, and whenever the sound of voices reached him, he would immediately run to the appropriate door and press his whole body against it. Especially in the early days there was no conversation that didn't deal with him in some way, if only in secret. At every mealtime for two days he could hear discussions about how they should now behave; but between meals, as well, they spoke on the same subject, because there were at least two family members at home at any given time, since no one apparently wanted to stay home alone and yet the apartment could in no case be deserted altogether. Besides, on the very first day the servant — it was not quite clear what or how much she knew of the incident — had asked Gregor's mother on her knees to discharge her at once, and when she said good-bye fifteen minutes later, she thanked them tearfully for letting her go, as if that were the greatest benefit they could confer upon her, and, without being asked to do so, swore a fearsome oath that she would never reveal the slightest thing to anyone.

Now Gregor's sister had to join their mother in doing the cooking; of course that didn't entail much effort because they ate practically nothing. Time and again Gregor heard them fruitlessly urge one another to eat, receiving no other answer than "Thanks, I've had enough" or the like. Maybe they didn't drink anything, either. Often his sister asked their father whether he wanted any beer, and offered lovingly to fetch it herself; then, as the father remained silent, she said, to overcome any reservations he might have, that she could also send the janitor's wife for it, but finally the father would utter a decided "No" and the matter was discussed no further.

Even in the course of the first day the father already laid their entire financial situation and prospects before both the mother and the sister. From time to time he got up from the table and took some document or some memorandum book out of his small Wertheim\* safe, which he had held onto even after the collapse of his business five years earlier. He could be heard opening the complicated lock and closing it again after

\* [An Austrian brand of safe widely used by businessmen at the time. — TRANSLATOR.]

removing what he had been looking for. In part, these declarations by his father were the first heartening things Gregor had heard since his captivity. He had believed that his father had nothing at all left from that business — at least, his father had never told him anything to the contrary — and naturally Gregor hadn't asked him about it. Gregor's concern at the time had been to do everything in his power to make his family forget as quickly as possible the commercial disaster that had reduced them all to complete hopelessness. And so, at that time he had begun to work with extreme enthusiasm and almost overnight had changed from a junior clerk into a traveling salesman; as such, he naturally had many more possibilities of earning money, and his successful efforts were immediately transformed into cash in the form of commissions, cash that could be plunked down on the table at home before the eyes of his amazed and delighted family. Those had been good times and had never been repeated later, at least not so gloriously, even though Gregor subsequently earned so much money that he was enabled to shoulder the expenses of the entire family, and did so. They had grown used to it, the family as well as Gregor; they accepted the money gratefully, he handed it over gladly, but no particularly warm feelings were generated any longer. Only his sister had still remained close to Gregor all the same, and it was his secret plan — because, unlike Gregor, she dearly loved music and could play the violin soulfully — to send her to the conservatory the following year, regardless of the great expenses which that had to entail, and which would have to be made up for in some other way. Often during Gregor's brief sojourns in the city the conservatory was referred to in his conversations with his sister, but always merely as a lovely dream, which couldn't possibly come true, and their parents disliked hearing even those innocent references; but Gregor was planning it most resolutely and intended to make a formal announcement on Christmas Eve.

Thoughts like those, completely pointless in his present state, occupied his mind while he stood upright there, pasting his legs to the door and listening. Sometimes, out of total weariness, he could no longer listen and let his head knock carelessly against the door, but immediately held it firm again, because even the slight noise he had caused by doing so had been heard in the next room and had made everyone fall silent. "How he keeps carrying on!" his father would say after a pause, obviously looking toward the door, and only then was the interrupted conversation gradually resumed.

Because his father used to repeat himself frequently in his explanations — partly because he hadn't concerned himself with these things for some time, partly also because the mother didn't understand

it all the first time—Gregor had full opportunity to ascertain that, despite all their misfortune, a sum of money, of course very small, was still left over from the old days and had grown somewhat in the interim, since the interest had never been touched. And, besides that, the money Gregor had brought home every month—he had kept only a few *gulden* for himself—had not been completely used up and amounted to a small capital. Gregor, behind his door, nodded vigorously, delighted by this unexpected foresight and thrift. To tell the truth, with that surplus money he could have further reduced his father's debt to his boss, and the day when he could get rid of that job would have been much closer, but now it was without a doubt better the way his father had arranged it.

Now, this money was by no means sufficient for the family even to think of living off the interest; it might suffice to maintain the family for one or, at the most, two years, no more than that. It was thus merely a sum that should really not be drawn upon, but only kept in reserve for an emergency; money to live on had to be earned. Now, the father was a healthy man, to be sure, but old; he hadn't done any work for five years and in any case couldn't be expected to overexert himself; in those five years, which represented his first free time in a laborious though unsuccessful life, he had put on a lot of fat and had thus become pretty slow-moving. And was Gregor's old mother perhaps supposed to earn money now, a victim of asthma, for whom an excursion across the apartment was already cause for strain, and who spent every other day on the sofa by the open window gasping for breath? And was his sister supposed to earn money, at seventeen still a child whom one could hardly begrudge the way she had always lived up to now: dressing nicely, sleeping late, helping out in the house, enjoying a few modest amusements and, most of all, playing the violin? Whenever the conversation led to this necessity of earning money, Gregor would always first let go of the door and then throw himself onto the cool leather sofa located next to the door, because he was hot all over with shame and sorrow.

Often he would lie there all through the long nights, not sleeping for a minute but only scratching on the leather for hours on end. At other times he didn't spare the exertion of shoving a chair over to the window; he would then crawl up the ledge and, supporting himself against the chair, lean against the window, obviously only through some sort of recollection of the liberating feeling he always used to experience when looking out the window. Because, in reality, with each passing day his view of things at only a slight distance was becoming increasingly blurry; the hospital opposite, the all-too-frequent sight of which he used to curse, he now could no longer see at all, and if he hadn't been perfectly

well aware that he lived on the tranquil but thoroughly urban *Charlottenstrasse*, he might have thought that what he saw from his window was a featureless solitude, in which the gray sky and the gray earth blended inseparably. His attentive sister had only needed to notice twice that the chair was standing by the window, and now, each time she had finished cleaning up the room, she shoved the chair right back to the window, and from that time on even left the inner casement open.

If Gregor had only been able to speak with his sister and thank her for all she had to do for him, he would have endured her services more easily; but, as it was, they made him suffer. Of course, his sister tried to soften the painfulness of the situation as much as possible, and as more and more time went by, she was naturally more successful at it, but with time Gregor, too, made a much keener analysis of everything. Her very entrance was terrible for him. The moment she walked in, without taking the time to close the door, even though she was otherwise most careful to spare everyone the sight of Gregor's room, she ran straight to the window and tore it open hastily, as if she were almost suffocating, and then remained a while at the window breathing deeply, no matter how cold it was. She frightened Gregor twice a day with that running and noise; during the whole time, he trembled under the couch, even though he knew perfectly well that she would surely have spared him that gladly if she had been at all capable of staying in a room containing Gregor with the window closed.

Once—probably a month had already elapsed since Gregor's transformation, and his sister should no longer have had any particular reason to be surprised at Gregor's appearance—she came a little earlier than usual and encountered Gregor while he was still looking out the window, motionless and posed there like some hideous scarecrow. It wouldn't have surprised Gregor if she hadn't stepped in, since by his location he was preventing her from opening the window at once; but not only did she not step in, she even jumped back and closed the door; a stranger might even have thought that Gregor had been lying in wait for her, intending to bite her. Naturally, Gregor immediately hid under the couch, but he had to wait until noon before his sister returned, and she seemed much more restless than usual. From this he realized that the sight of him was still unbearable for her and would surely remain unbearable for her in the future, and that she probably had to exercise terrific self-control not to run away at the sight of even the small portion of his body that protruded below the couch. To spare her even that sight, one day—he needed four hours for this task—he carried the bedsheet on his back over to the couch and draped it in such a way that he was now completely covered and his sister couldn't see him even when she

bent down. If that sheet, in her opinion, hadn't been necessary, she could have removed it, because it was clear enough that it was no pleasure for Gregor to close himself off so completely; but she left the sheet where it was, and Gregor believed he caught a grateful look when he once cautiously raised the sheet a little with his head to see how his sister reacted to the new arrangement.

In the first two weeks his parents couldn't muster the courage to come into his room, and he often heard them expressing complete satisfaction with the work his sister was now doing, whereas up to that time they had frequently been vexed with his sister because she had seemed a rather good-for-nothing girl to them. But often now, both of them, the father and the mother, waited in front of Gregor's room while his sister was cleaning up in there, and the moment she came out she had to report in detail on how the room looked, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether a slight improvement could perhaps be noticed. As it was, the mother wanted to visit Gregor relatively early on, but at first the father and the sister held her back with sensible reasons, which Gregor listened to most attentively, and which he fully concurred with. Later, however, she had to be restrained forcefully, and when she then called: "Let me in to Gregor; after all, he's my poor son! Don't you understand I must go to him?" Gregor thought it might be a good thing after all if his mother came in, not every day of course, but perhaps once a week; after all, she understood everything much better than his sister, who, despite all her spunk, was still only a child and, in the final analysis, had perhaps undertaken such a difficult task only out of childish thoughtlessness.

Gregor's wish to see his mother was soon fulfilled. During the day Gregor didn't want to show himself at the window, if only out of consideration for his parents, but he also couldn't crawl very much on the few square yards of the floor; even at night he found it difficult to lie still. Soon he no longer derived the slightest pleasure from eating either, and so for amusement he acquired the habit of crawling in all directions across the walls and ceiling. He especially enjoyed hanging up on the ceiling; it was quite different from lying on the floor; one could breathe more easily; a mild vibration passed through his body and in the almost happy forgetfulness that Gregor experienced up there it sometimes happened that to his own surprise he let go and crashed onto the floor. But now he naturally had much greater control over his body than before and even such a great fall did him no harm. Now, his sister immediately noticed this new diversion that Gregor had discovered for himself—even when crawling he left behind traces of his stick substance here and there—and then she got the notion of enabling

Gregor to crawl around as freely as possible, by removing the furniture that prevented this, especially the wardrobe and the desk. But she was unable to do this on her own; she didn't dare ask her father to help; the servant surely wouldn't have helped her, because even though this girl of about sixteen was sticking it out bravely since the previous cook had been discharged, she had nevertheless requested permission to keep the kitchen locked at all times and to open it only when specially called; thus the sister had no other choice than to fetch her mother while the father was away one day. And the mother approached with exclamations of excitement and joy, but fell silent at the door to Gregor's room. Naturally, the sister looked in first to see if everything in the room was in order; only then did she allow the mother to enter. Gregor had in extreme haste pulled the sheet even lower down, making more folds in it; the whole thing really looked like a sheet that had been thrown over the couch merely by chance. Also, this time Gregor refrained from peering out from under the sheet; he gave up the opportunity of seeing his mother this first time, in his happiness that she had finally come. "Come on, you can't see him," said the sister, and obviously she was leading the mother by the hand. Gregor now heard how the two weak women moved the old wardrobe, heavy as it was, from its place, and how the sister constantly undertook the greater part of the work, paying no heed to the warnings of the mother, who feared she would overexert herself. It took a very long time. After about a quarter-hour's work the mother said it would be better to leave the wardrobe where it was, because, for one thing, it was too heavy, they wouldn't get through before the father arrived, and, with the wardrobe in the middle of the room, they would leave Gregor no open path; and, secondly, it was not at all certain that Gregor would be pleased by the removal of the furniture. She thought the opposite was the case; the sight of the bare wall actually made her heart ache; and why shouldn't Gregor, too, feel the same way, since after all he was long accustomed to the furniture in his room and would thus feel isolated in the empty room? "And, besides, doesn't it seem," the mother concluded very quietly—throughout her speech she had been almost whispering, as if she wanted to keep Gregor, whose exact whereabouts she didn't know, from hearing even the sound of her voice (she was convinced he didn't understand the words)—"and doesn't it seem as if, by removing the furniture, we were showing that we have given up all hope for an improvement and were inconsiderately leaving him to his own resources? I think it would be best if we tried to keep the room in exactly the same condition as before, so that when Gregor comes back to us again, he'll find everything unchanged and it will be easier for him to forget what happened in between."

On hearing these words of his mother's, Gregor realized that the lack of all direct human communication, together with the monotonous life in the midst of the family, must have confused his mind in the course of these two months, because he couldn't explain to himself otherwise how he could seriously have wished for his room to be emptied out. Did he really want to have the warm room, comfortably furnished with heirloom pieces, transformed into a cave, in which he would, of course, be able to crawl about freely in all directions, but at the cost of simultaneously forgetting his human past, quickly and totally? Even now he was close to forgetting it, and only his mother's voice, which he hadn't heard for some time, had awakened him to the fact. Nothing must be removed, everything must stay; he couldn't do without the beneficent effects of the furniture on his well-being; and if the furniture prevented him from going on with that mindless crawling around, that was no disadvantage, but a great asset.

Unfortunately, however, his sister was of a different opinion; not without some justification, true, she had grown accustomed to play herself up to her parents as a special expert whenever matters affecting Gregor were discussed; and so now, too, the mother's advice was cause enough for the sister to insist on the removal of not only the wardrobe and the desk, which were all she had thought of at first, but all the furniture, except for the indispensable couch. Naturally, it was not only childish defiance and the self-confidence she had recently acquired so unexpectedly and with such great efforts, that determined her to make this demand; she had also made the real observation that Gregor needed a lot of space to crawl in, while on the other hand he didn't use the furniture in the least, from all one could see. But perhaps a further element was the romantic spirit of girls of her age, which seeks for satisfaction on every occasion, and by which Grete now let herself be tempted to make Gregor's situation even more frightful, so that she could do even more for him than hitherto — because nobody except Grete would ever dare to enter a space in which Gregor on his own dominated the bare walls.

And so she wouldn't let herself be dissuaded by her mother, who seemed unsure of herself, as well, in that room, out of sheer nervousness and who soon fell silent, helping the sister move out the wardrobe with all her might. Now, in an emergency Gregor could still do without the wardrobe, but the desk — that had to stay. And no sooner had the women left the room with the wardrobe, which they were pushing while emitting groans, than Gregor thrust out his head from under the couch to see how he could intervene cautiously and with the greatest possible consideration for them. But, as bad luck would have it, it was his mother who

came back first, while Grete in the adjoining room had her arms around the wardrobe and was swinging it back and forth unaided, naturally without being able to move it from the spot. But the mother wasn't used to the sight of Gregor, which might make her sick, so in a panic Gregor hastened backwards up to the other end of the couch but could no longer prevent the sheet from stirring a little in front. That was enough to attract his mother's attention. She stopped in her tracks, stood still a moment and then went back to Grete.

Although Gregor told himself over and over that nothing unusual was going on, just a few pieces of furniture being moved around, he soon had to admit to himself that this walking to and fro by the women, their brief calls to each other and the scraping of the furniture on the floor affected him like a tremendous uproar, sustained on all sides; and, no matter how tightly he pulled in his head and legs and pressed his body all the way to the floor, he was irresistibly compelled to tell himself that he wouldn't be able to endure all of this very long. They were emptying out his room, taking away from him everything he was fond of; they had already carried out the wardrobe, which contained his fretsaw and other tools; now they were prying loose the desk, which had long been firmly entrenched in the floor, and at which he had done his homework when he was in business college, in secondary school and even back in primary school. At this point, he really had no more time for testing the good intentions of the two women, whose existence he had almost forgotten, anyway, because in their state of exhaustion they were now working in silence, and only their heavy footfalls could be heard.

And so he broke out — at the moment, the women were leaning on the desk in the adjoining room, to catch their breath a little — he changed direction four times, not really knowing what he should rescue first; and then he saw hanging conspicuously on the now otherwise bare wall the picture of the lady dressed in nothing but furs. He crawled up to it in haste and pressed against the glass, which held him fast and felt good on his hot belly. That picture, at least, which Gregor was now completely covering, surely no one would now take away. He twisted his head around toward the door of the parlor in order to observe the women when they returned.

They hadn't allowed themselves much time to rest, and were now coming back; Grete had put her arm around her mother and was almost carrying her. "Well, what should we take now?" said Grete and looked around. Then her eyes met those of Gregor on the wall. It was probably only because her mother was there that she kept her composure; she lowered her face to her mother to keep her from looking around, and said, although tremblingly and without thinking: "Come, shouldn't we

rather go back into the parlor for another minute?" Grete's intention was clear to Gregor; she wanted to lead her mother to safety and then chase him down off the wall. Well, just let her try! He sat there on his picture and wouldn't relinquish it. He would sooner jump onto Grete's face.

But Grete's words had been just what it took to upset her mother, who stepped to one side, caught sight of the gigantic brown spot on the flowered wallpaper, and, before she was actually aware that what she saw there was Gregor, called in a hoarse shout: "Oh, God, oh, God!" She then fell across the couch with outspread arms, as if giving up everything, and lay there perfectly still. "Just wait, Gregor!" called the sister with raised fist and piercing glances. Those were the first words she had addressed to him directly since the transformation. She ran into the adjoining room to fetch some medicine to revive her mother from her faint; Gregor wanted to help, too — there was still time to rescue the picture — but he was stuck tight to the glass and had to tear himself loose by force. Then he, too, ran into the adjoining room, as if he could give his sister some advice, as in the past; but he was forced to stand behind her idly. While she was rummaging among various little bottles, she got a fright when she turned around; a bottle fell on the floor and broke; a splinter wounded Gregor in the face, and some kind of corrosive medicine poured over him. Now, without waiting there any longer, Grete picked up as many bottles as she could hold and ran in to her mother with them, slamming the door shut with her foot. Gregor was now cut off from his mother, who was perhaps close to death, all on his account. He didn't dare open the door for fear of driving away his sister, who had to remain with their mother. Now there was nothing for him to do but wait; and oppressed by self-reproaches and worry, he began to crawl; he crawled all over everything, walls, furniture and ceiling, and finally, in his desperation, when the whole room was starting to spin around him, he fell onto the middle of the big table.

A brief while passed, Gregor lay there limply, it was quiet all around; maybe that was a good sign. Then the bell rang. Naturally, the servant was locked in her kitchen, and so Grete had to go open up. Her father had arrived. "What's happened?" were his first words; Grete's appearance had probably revealed everything to him. Grete answered in a muffled voice, probably pressing her face against her father's chest: "Mother fainted, but she's feeling better now. Gregor has broken loose." "I expected it," said the father, "I always told you so, but you women won't listen." It was clear to Gregor that his father had put a bad interpretation on Grete's excessively brief communication and assumed that Gregor had been guilty of some act of violence. Therefore Gregor now had to try to pacify his father, because he had neither the time nor

the means to enlighten him. And so he sped away to the door of his room and pressed himself against it, so that when his father came in from the hallway he could immediately see that Gregor fully intended to return to his room at once, and that it was unnecessary to chase him back; instead, all they needed to do was to open the door, and he would disappear right away.

But his father was in no mood to observe such niceties; as soon as he walked in, he yelled "Ah!" in a tone that suggested he was both furious and happy at the same time. Gregor drew his head back from the door and lifted it toward his father. He hadn't really pictured his father the way he now stood there; recently, to be sure, he had been so occupied by the new sensation of crawling around that he had neglected to pay attention to events in the rest of the apartment, as he had done earlier; and he should really have been prepared to encounter altered circumstances. And yet, and yet, was this still his father? The same man who would lie wearily, buried in his bed, when Gregor used to "move out smartly" on a business trip; who had received him wearing a bathrobe and sitting in an armchair when he returned home in the evening; who hadn't been fully capable of standing up, and had merely raised his arms as a sign of joy; who, during their rare family strolls on a few Sundays of the year and on the major holidays, would walk between Gregor and his mother, who walked slowly even on their own, but would always be a little slower yet, bundled up in his old coat and working his way forward with his crook-handled stick always placed cautiously before him; who, when he wanted to say something, almost always came to a halt and gathered the rest of the group around him? Now, however, he was perfectly erect, dressed in a tight blue uniform with gold buttons, like those worn by messengers in banking houses. Above the high, stiff collar of the jacket his pronounced double chin unfurled; below his bushy eyebrows the gaze of his dark eyes shone brightly and observantly; his usually tousled white hair was combed down flat and gleaming, with a painfully exact part. He threw his hat, which was adorned by a gold monogram, probably that of some bank, in an arc across the whole room onto the couch; and, pushing back the tails of his long uniform jacket, his hands in his trousers pockets, he walked toward Gregor with a morose expression. He most likely had no idea himself of what he intended to do; nevertheless, he raised his feet unusually high, and Gregor was amazed at the gigantic size of his boot soles. But he didn't dwell on that, for he had known ever since the first day of his new life that his father considered nothing but the greatest severity appropriate where he was concerned. And so he ran in front of his father, came to a halt when his father stood still and immediately sprinted forward if his

father made any kind of move. In that way they circled the room several times, without anything decisive occurring; in fact, because of the slow tempo the whole thing didn't have the appearance of a pursuit. For that reason, as well, Gregor stayed on the floor for the time being, especially because he was afraid that his father might look upon a scurry onto the walls or ceiling as being particularly malicious. And yet Gregor had to tell himself that even the present activity would soon be too much for him, because for every step his father took he had to execute a huge number of movements. Shortness of breath was already becoming noticeable, and even in his earlier days his lungs hadn't been the most reliable. As he was now staggering along, in order to gather all his strength for running, and could barely keep his eyes open — unable, in his dazed condition, to think of any other refuge than running, and almost forgetting that the walls were open to him (although in this room they were obstructed by painstakingly carved furniture full of prongs and points) — something that had been lightly tossed flew right by him and rolled in front of him on the floor. It was an apple; another flew at him immediately afterward; Gregor stood still in fright; to continue running was pointless, because his father had decided to bombard him. He had filled his pockets from the fruit bowl on the sideboard and now, without aiming carefully for the moment, was throwing one apple after another. A weakly thrown apple grazed Gregor's back, but rolled off harmlessly. One that flew right after it actually penetrated Gregor's back; Gregor wanted to drag himself onward, as if the surprising and unbelievable pain might pass if he changed location; but he felt pinned down and he surrendered, all his senses fully bewildered. It was only with his last glance that he still saw the door of his room being torn open; he saw his mother dash out ahead of his screaming sister (the mother was in her shift, because the sister had undressed her to make it easier for her to breathe when she had fainted); he then saw the mother run over to the father, her untied petticoats slipping to the floor one after the other as she went. Tripping over the petticoats, she rushed upon the father and, embracing him, in absolute union with him — at this point all went dark for Gregor — with her hands behind the father's head, she begged him to spare Gregor's life.

### III

GREGOR'S SEVERE INJURY, from which he suffered for more than a month — since no one dared to remove the apple, it remained in his flesh as a visible reminder — seemed to have made even his father recall

that, despite his present sad and disgusting shape, Gregor was a member of the family who shouldn't be treated as an enemy, but in whose case family obligations demanded that one swallow one's repulsion and be patient, only patient.

And even if Gregor's wound had probably impaired his mobility for good, and he now, like an old invalid, needed long, long minutes to cross his room — crawling up high was out of the question — he received in exchange for this worsening of his condition something he considered a perfectly adequate replacement: as every evening approached, the parlor door, which he would begin to watch carefully an hour or two ahead of time, was opened so that, lying in the dark, invisible from the parlor, he could see the whole family at the brightly lit table and listen to their conversation, to some extent with everyone's permission, and thus quite otherwise than before.

Of course, these were no longer the lively discussions of the old days, to which Gregor's thoughts had always turned with some yearning in his tiny hotel rooms, when he had had to throw himself wearily into the damp bedclothes. Generally the talks were very quiet. Right after supper the father fell asleep in his chair; the mother and sister admonished each other to be quiet; the mother, leaning far forward under the light, sewed fine linen for a clothing store; the sister, who had taken work as a salesgirl, was learning stenography and French at night so that she might possibly get a better job some day. At times the father woke up and, as if he didn't even know he'd been sleeping, he said to the mother: "How long you've been sewing again today!" and went right back to sleep, while mother and sister smiled at each other wearily.

With a sort of obstinacy the father refused to take off his messenger's uniform even at home; and while his bathrobe hung unused on the hook, the father drowsed in his chair fully dressed, as if he were always ready to do his work and were awaiting his superior's orders even here. Consequently, despite all the mother and sister's care, the uniform, which hadn't been brand new at the outset, became less and less clean; and often for entire evenings Gregor would look at this garment, stained all over, but with constantly polished and gleaming gold buttons, in which the old man slept in great discomfort and yet peacefully.

The moment the clock struck ten, the mother tried to wake the father by addressing him softly and then tried to convince him to go to bed, because here he couldn't get any proper sleep, which the father needed very badly, since he had to begin work at six. But with the obstinacy that had taken hold of him since he had become a messenger, he constantly insisted on remaining longer at the table, although he regularly fell asleep, and then, on top of that, could only be persuaded with the

greatest difficulty to give up his chair for his bed. In this situation mother and sister might urge him over and over with little reminders, for periods of fifteen minutes at a time he would shake his head slowly, keep his eyes closed and refuse to stand up. The mother tugged at his sleeve and said sweet things in his ear, the sister would leave her task to help the mother, but this had no effect on the father. He merely sank more deeply into his chair. Only when the women seized him under his arms would he open his eyes, look now at the mother and now at the sister, and say: "This is living! This is the repose of my old age!" And, supported by the two women, he would get up, slowly and fussily, as if he were his own greatest burden, and would allow himself to be led to the door by the women; there he would wave them away and proceed on his own, while the mother hastily flung down her sewing things and the sister her pen in order to run after the father and continue to be of service to him.

In this overworked and overtired family, who had time to be concerned about Gregor beyond what was absolutely necessary? There were constant retrenchments in their way of living; they finally had to let the servant go; a gigantic, bony cleaning woman with white hair fluttering around her head now came in the morning and evening to do the heaviest chores; everything else was attended to by the mother, who also had all that sewing to do. It even came to pass that various pieces of family jewelry, which the mother and sister had formerly worn at parties and on great occasions, were sold, as Gregor learned in the evening from the family's discussion of the prices they had received. But the greatest complaint always was that they couldn't leave this apartment, which was far too big for their present means, since no one could figure out how to move Gregor. But Gregor realized that it was not only the concern for him that prevented a move, because after all he could easily have been shipped in a suitable crate with a few air holes; what principally kept the family from changing apartments was rather the complete hopelessness of the situation and the thought that they had been afflicted with a misfortune unlike any other in their entire circle of relatives and acquaintances. They were performing to the hilt all that the world demands of poor people: the father carried in breakfast for the junior bank clerks, the mother sacrificed herself for the linen of strangers, the sister ran back and forth behind her counter at the customers' command, but by this time the family's strength was taxed to the limit. And the sore on his back began to hurt Gregor all over again when, after putting his father to bed, his mother and sister came back, let their work rest, moved close together and sat cheek to cheek; when the mother, pointing to Gregor's room, now said, "Close the door there, Grete," and Gregor was

again in the dark, while in the next room the women wept together or just stared at the table with dry eyes.

Gregor spent the nights and days almost completely without sleep. Sometimes he thought that, the next time the door opened, he would once again take charge of the family's problems just as he used to; in his thoughts there reappeared, after a long interval, his boss and the chief clerk, the clerks and the apprentices, the office messenger who was so dense, two or three friends from other firms, a chambermaid in a provincial hotel (a charming, fleeting recollection), a cashier in a hat shop whom he had courted seriously but too slowly — they all appeared, mingling with strangers or people he'd forgotten, but instead of helping him and his family, they were all inaccessible, and he was glad when they disappeared. But at other times he was no longer at all in the mood to worry about his family; he was filled with nothing but rage over how badly he was looked after; and even though he couldn't imagine anything he might have had an appetite for, he laid plans for getting into the pantry so he could take what was still his by rights, even if he wasn't hungry. No longer reflecting about what might give Gregor some special pleasure, his sister now hastily shoved any old food into Gregor's room with her foot before running off to work in the morning and at noon; in the evening, not caring whether the food had perhaps been just merely tasted or — most frequently — left completely untouched, she would sweep it out with a swing of the broom. The cleaning of the room, which she now always took care of in the evening, was done at breakneck speed. Long trails of dirt lined the walls, here and there lay heaps of dust and filth. At first, when his sister arrived, Gregor would station himself at particularly glaring corners of that sort, thereby intending to reproach her to some degree. But he could have remained there for weeks on end without seeing any improvement in his sister; she saw the dirt just as well as he did, but she had simply made up her mind to leave it there. At the same time, with a touchiness that was quite new to her, and which had come over the whole family, she took care that the cleaning of Gregor's room should be reserved exclusively for her. On one occasion the mother had undertaken a thorough cleaning of Gregor's room, which she had only managed to do by using several buckets of water — the excessive dampness harmed Gregor, too, and he lay stretched out on the couch, embittered and motionless — but the mother didn't escape the penalty: the moment the sister noticed the change in Gregor's room in the evening, she ran into the parlor, highly insulted, and, despite the mother's imploringly uplifted hands, she broke into a crying jag that the parents — the father had naturally been frightened out of his chair — at first watched in amazement and helplessness until they themselves began to stir. To his

right, the father reproached the mother for not leaving the cleaning of Gregor's room to the sister; to his left, on the other hand, he yelled at the sister, saying she would never again be permitted to clean Gregor's room, while the mother tried to drag the father, who was beside himself with agitation, into the bedroom; the sister, shaken with sobs, belabored the table with her little fists; and Gregor hissed loudly with rage because it didn't occur to anyone to close the door and spare him that sight and that commotion.

But even if the sister, worn out by her job, had grown tired of caring for Gregor as before, still the mother would not have been compelled to take over for her, and Gregor wouldn't have needed to be neglected. Because the cleaning woman was now there. This elderly widow, who, thanks to her powerful frame, had probably endured the worst during her long life, had no real horror of Gregor. Without being in the least curious, she had once accidentally opened the door to Gregor's room; at the sight of Gregor, who, taken by surprise, began to run back and forth although no one was chasing him, she had stood still in amazement, her hands folded over her stomach. Since then she never failed to open the door a little for just a moment in the morning and evening and to look in at Gregor. At the beginning she even called him over with words she probably thought were friendly, such as "Come on over here, old dung beetle" or "Just look at the old dung beetle!" Gregor never responded to such calls, but remained motionless where he stood, as if the door had never been opened. But if, instead of letting this cleaning woman disturb him needlessly as the fancy took her, they had only given her orders to clean his room every day! Once, early in the morning—a heavy rain, perhaps already foretoking the coming spring, was beating on the window panes—when the cleaning woman began with her series of expressions again, Gregor was so infuriated that he turned in her direction as if to attack, but slowly and feebly. The cleaning woman, however, instead of being frightened, merely lifted high in the air a chair that was near the door, and, as she stood there with her mouth wide open, she clearly intended not to close her mouth again until the chair in her hand crashed down on Gregor's back. "So you're not advancing?" she asked as Gregor turned around again, and placed the chair back calmly in the corner.

By this time Gregor was hardly eating. Only when he accidentally passed by the spread-out food would he take a bit in his mouth playfully, hold it there for hours and then generally spit it out again. At first he thought it was his dejection over the state of his room that kept him from eating, but he was soon more reconciled to the changes in his room than to anything else. They had grown accustomed to put in his room things

there was no space for elsewhere, and there were now a lot of such things, because they had rented one room in the apartment to three lodgers. These serious gentlemen—all three had full beards, as Gregor once ascertained through a crack in the door—were sticklers for strict housekeeping, not only in their room, but also, since they were after all paying rent there, all over the apartment, and especially in the kitchen. They wouldn't stand for useless, not to mention dirty, odds and ends. Furthermore, they had for the most part brought along their own furnishings. Therefore many items had become superfluous that couldn't be sold but no one wanted to throw out. All of these were moved into Gregor's room. And so were the ash box and the garbage box from the kitchen. Whatever was unusable at the moment, the cleaning woman, who was always in a hurry, simply flung into Gregor's room; fortunately, Gregor generally saw only the object in question and the hand that held it. Perhaps the cleaning woman intended to retrieve the things when she had the time and opportunity, or to throw them all out at the same time, but in reality they remained wherever they had landed at the first toss, unless Gregor twisted through the rubbish and set it in motion, at first out of necessity, because no other space was open to crawl through, but later with increasing delight, although after such excursions, tired to death and dejected, he would again remain motionless for hours.

Since the lodgers sometimes also took their evening meal at home in the common parlor, the parlor door was closed on many evenings, but Gregor readily made do without the opening of the door, for on many earlier evenings when it was open he hadn't taken advantage of it, but instead, without the family noticing, had lain in the darkest corner of his room. But on one occasion the cleaning woman had left the door to the parlor a little open; and it remained open like that even when the lodgers entered in the evening and the light was turned on. They sat at the head of the table, where in earlier days the father, the mother and Gregor had sat; they unfolded their napkins and picked up their knives and forks. Immediately the mother appeared in the doorway with a platter of meat, and right behind her the sister with a plate piled high with potatoes. The food was steaming copiously. The lodgers bent over the plates that were placed in front of them as if wishing to examine them before eating, and, in fact, the one sitting in the middle, whom the others seemed to look up to as an authority, cut a piece of meat on the plate, obviously to ascertain whether it was tender enough and didn't perhaps need to be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied, and the mother and sister, who had watched in suspense, breathed easily and began to smile.

The family themselves ate in the kitchen. Nevertheless, before the father went into the kitchen, he entered the parlor and, with a single protracted bow, walked around the table, cap in hand. The lodgers all stood up and murmured something into their beards. Then, when they were alone, they ate with almost no conversation. It seemed odd to Gregor that, among all the multifarious noises of eating, their chewing teeth stood out again and again, as if to indicate to Gregor that teeth were indispensable for eating and that even with the finest toothless jaws nothing could be accomplished. "I do have an appetite," said Gregor uneasily to himself, "but not for those things. How these lodgers pack it away, and I'm perishing!"

On that very evening — Gregor had no recollection of having heard the violin during that whole time — it was audible from the kitchen. The lodgers had already finished their supper, the one in the middle had pulled out a newspaper, handing one sheet apiece to the two others, and now they were leaning back, reading and smoking. When the violin began to play, they noticed it, stood up and walked on tiptoe to the hallway door, remaining there in a tight group. They must have been heard in the kitchen, because the father called: "Does the playing perhaps bother you? We can stop it at once." "On the contrary," said the gentleman in the middle, "wouldn't the young lady like to come in here with us and play in this room, which is much more comfortable and cozy?" "Of course," called the father, as if *he* were the violinist. The gentlemen stepped back into the room and waited. Soon the father came with the music stand, the mother with the sheet music and the sister with the violin. The sister calmly put everything in readiness for playing; the parents, who had never rented out rooms before and therefore overdid the courtesy due to lodgers, didn't dare to sit on their own chairs; the father leaned on the door, his right hand placed between two buttons of his closed uniform jacket; but the mother was offered a chair by one of the gentlemen and, since she left the chair where the man happened to have placed it, she sat off to one side in a corner.

The sister began to play; the father and mother, each on his side, watched the motions of her hands closely. Gregor, attracted by the playing, had ventured out a little further and already had his head in the parlor. He was scarcely surprised that recently he was so little concerned about the feelings of the others; previously this considerateness had been his pride. As it was, right now he might have had even more cause to hide, because as a result of the dust that had settled all over in his room and blew around at the slightest movement, he was also completely covered with dust; he was dragging threads, hairs and crumbs of food around with him on his back and sides; his indifference to every-

thing was much too great for him to turn over on his back and scour himself on the carpet, as he used to do several times a day. But despite being in this state, he had no qualms about moving a little bit forward on the immaculate floor of the parlor.

To be sure, no one was paying attention to him. The family was completely engrossed in the violin performance; on the other hand, the lodgers, who, hands in trousers pockets, had first of all moved their chairs much too close behind the sister's music stand, so that they could all have looked at the sheet music, which assuredly had to disturb the sister, soon withdrew, with semiaudible remarks and lowered heads, to the window, where they stayed put, watched by the father with concern. It was now abundantly evident that they were disappointed in their assumption that they were going to hear some pretty or entertaining violin music; they were clearly tired of the whole performance and were permitting their peace and quiet to be disturbed merely out of courtesy. It was especially the way they all blew their cigar smoke up into the air through their noses and mouths that indicated a terrific strain on their nerves. And yet the sister was playing beautifully. Her face was inclined to one side, her eyes followed the lines of music searchingly and sorrowfully. Gregor crawled a little bit further forward, keeping his head close to the floor in hopes of making eye contact with her. Was he an animal if music stirred him that way? He felt as if he were being shown the way to the unknown nourishment he longed for. He was resolved to push his way right up to his sister and tug at her skirt, as an indication to her to come into his room with her violin, because nobody here was repaying her for her playing the way he would repay her. He intended never to let her out of his room again, at least not as long as he lived; his horrifying shape was to be beneficial to him for the first time; he would be on guard at all the doors to his room at once, and spit at his assailants like a cat; but his sister would remain with him not under compulsion but voluntarily; she was to sit next to him on the couch and incline her ear toward him, and he would then confide to her that he had had the firm intention of sending her to the conservatory, and that, if the misfortune hadn't intervened, he would have told everyone so last Christmas — Christmas was over by now, wasn't it? — without listening to any objections. After this declaration his sister would burst into tears of deep emotion, and Gregor would raise himself to the level of her shoulder and kiss her neck, which, since she had begun her job, she had left bare, without any ribbon or collar.

"Mr. Samsal!" the gentleman in the middle called to the father and, without wasting another word, pointed with his index finger to Gregor, who was moving slowly forward. The violin fell silent, the gentleman in

the middle first smiled at his friends, shaking his head, and then looked at Gregor again. The father seemed to think that, to begin with, it was more necessary to placate the lodgers than to chase away Gregor, even though the men were not at all excited and Gregor seemed to entertain them more than the violin playing. He ran over to them and, with arms outspread, he tried to make them withdraw into their room, at the same time blocking their view of Gregor with his body. Now they actually got a little sore; it was no longer possible to tell whether this was due to the father's behavior or to the realization now dawning on them that, without their knowledge, they had had a next-door neighbor like Gregor. They demanded explanations from the father, they themselves now raised their arms, they plucked uneasily at their beards, and only slowly retreated toward their room. Meanwhile the sister had gotten over the state of total absence that had come over her after the abruptly terminated performance; after she had held the violin and the bow for some time in her limply hanging hands and had continued to look at the music as if she were still playing, she had roused herself all at once; she had placed the instrument on the lap of her mother, who was still sitting on her chair gasping for breath, her lungs pumping violently, and had run into the adjoining room, which the lodgers were approaching more quickly now under pressure from the father. One could see the blankets and pillows on the beds fly up and arrange themselves neatly in the sister's skilled hands. Even before the gentlemen had reached their room, she had finished making the beds and slipped out. The father seemed once more so infected by his obstinacy that he forgot all the respect he after all owed his lodgers. All he did was crowd them and crowd them until, already in the doorway to the room, the gentleman in the middle stamped his foot resoundingly, thereby bringing the father to a halt. "I hereby announce," he said, raising his hand and looking around for the mother and sister as well, "that in view of the disgusting conditions prevailing in this apartment and family"—here he spat promptly on the floor—"I am giving up my room as of tomorrow morning. Naturally I won't pay a thing for the days that I've lived here, either; on the contrary, I'm going to think seriously about whether I shouldn't sue you—believe me, the proof wouldn't be hard to come by." He fell silent and looked straight ahead of him, as if he were expecting something. And, indeed, his two friends immediately chimed in with the words: "We're also leaving tomorrow." Thereupon he seized the door handle and slammed the door violently.

The father staggered to his chair with groping hands and let himself fall onto it; it looked as if he were stretching out for his customary evening nap, but the rapid nodding of his seemingly uncontrollable

head showed that he was by no means asleep. Gregor had lain still the whole time on the same spot where the lodgers had detected him. The disappointment over the failure of his plan, but perhaps also the weakness caused by so much fasting, made it impossible for him to move. He was afraid that, almost as a certainty, everything would come tumbling down upon him at the very next moment; and he was waiting. Not even the violin startled him when it slipped from the mother's trembling fingers, fell off her lap and emitted a resounding note.

"Dear parents," the sister said, striking the table with her hand by way of preamble, "we can't go on like this. If you perhaps don't realize it, I do. In front of this monstrous creature I refuse to pronounce my brother's name, and therefore I merely say: we have to try to get rid of it. We've tried all that's humanly possible to take care of it and put up with it; I think no one can reproach us in the slightest."

"She's perfectly right," said the father to himself. The mother, who was still too short of breath, began to cough hollowly into the hand she held before her, with a crazed look in her eyes.

The sister ran over to the mother and held her forehead. The sister's words seemed to have helped the father collect his thoughts; he had sat up straight and was playing with his messenger's cap between the dishes that were still left on the table after the lodgers' supper; and from time to time he looked over at the motionless Gregor.

"We have to try to get rid of it," the sister now said to her father only, because the mother, with her coughing, couldn't hear anything; "eventually it'll kill both of you, I can see it coming. When people already have to work as hard as all of us, they can't stand this perpetual torment at home, as well. I can't any more." And she burst into such a violent fit of weeping that her tears rained down onto her mother's face, from which she wiped them away with mechanical movements of the hand.

"My child," said the father sympathetically and with noticeable comprehension, "what are we supposed to do?"

The sister merely shrugged her shoulders to indicate the perplexity that had now taken hold of her during her crying fit, in contrast to her earlier self-confidence.

"If he understood us," said the father half-questioningly; in the midst of her tears she shook her hand violently to indicate that that was out of the question.

"If he understood us," repeated the father and, closing his eyes, absorbed in his own mind the sister's conviction of that impossibility, "then perhaps we could reach an agreement with him. But, as it is—"

"It's got to go," called the sister, "that's the only remedy, Father. All you have to do is try to shake off the idea that that's Gregor. Our real

misfortune comes from having believed it for so long. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would long since have realized that it's impossible for people to live side by side with an animal like that, and would have gone away of his own free will. Then we would have had no more brother, but we could go on living and honor his memory. But, as it is, this animal persecutes us, drives away our lodgers, and obviously wants to take over the whole apartment and make us sleep in the street. Just look, Father," she suddenly yelled, "he's starting again!" And, in a panic that Gregor couldn't understand at all, the sister even deserted her mother, literally hurling herself from her chair, as if she would rather sacrifice her mother than remain in Gregor's vicinity; she dashed behind her father, who, agitated solely by her behavior, also stood up and, as if protecting the sister, half-raised his arms in front of her.

But Gregor hadn't the slightest wish to frighten anyone, least of all his sister. He had merely started to turn around, in order to regain his room, and that was naturally conspicuous because in his ailing condition he could only execute those difficult turns with the aid of his head, raising it and bumping it on the floor many times. He stopped and looked around. His good intentions seemed to have been recognized; the panic had lasted only for a moment. Now they all looked at him in silent sorrow. The mother was slumped in her chair, her legs outstretched and pressed together; her eyes were almost closing with exhaustion; the father and sister were sitting side by side; the sister had placed her hand around the father's neck.

"Now perhaps I can turn around," thought Gregor, and resumed his labors. He was unable to suppress the heavy breathing caused by the exertion, and had to stop to rest from time to time. Otherwise, no one was rushing him, everything was left to him. When he had completed the turn, he immediately began to head back in a straight line. He was amazed at the great distance that separated him from his room, and couldn't comprehend how, feeling so weak, he had just a while before covered the same ground almost without noticing it. His mind being constantly bent on nothing but fast crawling, he scarcely paid attention to the fact that he was not being disturbed by any word or outcry from his family. Only when already in the doorway did he turn his head, not all the way, because he felt his neck growing stiff, but enough to see that nothing had changed behind him except that his sister had stood up. His last look was at his mother, who had fallen asleep completely.

Scarcely was he inside his room when the door was hastily closed, barred and locked. The sudden noise behind him scared Gregor so badly that his little legs buckled. It was his sister who had been in such a rush. She had already been standing there on her feet and waiting, then

she had leaped forward with light steps—Gregor hadn't heard her approaching—and she called "At last!" to her parents as she turned the key in the lock.

"And now?" Gregor asked himself, and looked around in the darkness. He soon made the discovery that he could no longer move at all. This didn't surprise him; in fact, he found it unnatural that up until then he had actually been able to get around on those thin little legs. Besides, he felt relatively comfortable. True, he had pains all over his body, but he felt as if they were getting gradually milder and milder and would finally pass away altogether. By now he hardly felt the rotten apple in his back and the inflamed area around it, which were completely covered with soft dust. He recalled his family with affection and love. His opinion about the necessity for him to disappear was, if possible, even firmer than his sister's. He remained in this state of vacant and peaceful contemplation until the tower clock struck the third morning hour. He was still alive when the world started to become brighter outside the window. Then his head involuntarily sank down altogether, and his last breath issued faintly from his nostrils.

When the cleaning woman arrived early in the morning—in her natural strength and haste, despite frequent requests not to do so, she slammed all the doors so loud that throughout the apartment, from the moment she came, it was impossible to sleep peacefully—she found nothing out of the ordinary at first during her customary brief visit to Gregor. She thought he was lying motionless like that on purpose, acting insulted; she gave him credit for full reasoning powers. Because by chance she was carrying the long broom, she tried to tickle Gregor with it from her position in the doorway. When this proved fruitless, she became annoyed and jabbed Gregor a little, and only when she had moved him from the spot, without any resistance on his part, did she take notice. When she soon recognized the true state of affairs, she opened her eyes wide and gave a whistle, but didn't stay there long; instead, she tore open the bedroom door and shouted into the darkness: "Come take a look, it's croaked; it's lying there, a total goner."

The Samsas sat up in bed and were hard put to overcome the fright that the cleaning woman had given them until they finally grasped her announcement. Then Mr. and Mrs. Samsa got out of bed quickly, each on his side; Mr. Samsa threw the blanket over his shoulders, Mrs. Samsa came out wearing only her nightgown; in this way they entered Gregor's room. Meanwhile the parlor door had also opened; Grete had been sleeping there since the lodgers moved in; she was fully dressed as if she hadn't slept at all; the pallor of her face seemed to indicate that, too. "Dead?" asked Mrs. Samsa, and looked up questioningly at the cleaning

woman, even though she was able to examine everything herself and could recognize it even without any examination. "I'll say!" replied the cleaning woman, and, as a proof, pushed Gregor's corpse another long way to the side with her broom. Mrs. Samsa made a motion as if to restrain the broom, but didn't do so. "Well," said Mr. Samsa, "now we can thank God." He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example. Grete, who didn't take her eyes off the corpse, said: "Just look how thin he was. Yes, he hadn't been eating anything for so long. The food came out of his room just the way it went in." Indeed, Gregor's body was completely flat and dry; actually that could be seen only now, when he was no longer lifted up on his little legs and nothing else diverted their attention.

"Come into our room for a while, Grete," said Mrs. Samsa with a melancholy smile, and, not without looking back at the corpse, Grete followed her parents into their bedroom. The cleaning woman shut the door and opened the window all the way. Despite the early morning hour, the fresh air already had a warm feeling to it. For by now it was the end of March.

The three lodgers stepped out of their room and, in amazement, looked around for their breakfast; the family had forgotten it. "Where's breakfast?!" the gentleman in the middle grumpily asked the cleaning woman. But she put her finger to her lips and then hastily and silently beckoned to the gentlemen to come into Gregor's room. They did so, and then, with their hands in the pockets of their somewhat shabby jackets, they stood around Gregor's corpse in the now completely bright room.

Then the bedroom door opened, and Mr. Samsa appeared in his uniform, with his wife on one arm and his daughter on the other. All of them had obviously been weeping; from time to time Grete pressed her face against her father's arm.

"Leave my home at once!" said Mr. Samsa, and pointed to the door, without freeing himself from the women. "What do you mean?" said the gentleman in the middle, somewhat taken aback, and put on a saccharine smile. The two others kept their hands behind their backs, rubbing them together uninterruptedly, as if in joyous anticipation of a major quarrel, which had to come out in their favor. "I mean exactly what I say," Mr. Samsa answered, and, with his two female companions, moved in a direct line toward the lodger. The latter stood still at first looking at the floor, as if all the ideas in his head were being rearranged. "In that case, we're going," he then said, looking up at Mr. Samsa, as if with a humility that was suddenly setting in, he were requesting new permission even for that decision. Mr. Samsa merely gave him a few

brief nods, his eyes glaring. Thereupon the gentleman did indeed immediately take long strides into the hallway; his two friends, who for a while now had been listening with their hands completely at rest, now practically leaped after him, as if fearing that Mr. Samsa might enter the hall before them and cut off the liaison with their leader. In the hallway, all three took their hats off the hooks, drew their walking sticks out of the walking-stick stand, bowed in silence and left the apartment. With a mistrust that proved to be totally unjustified, Mr. Samsa and the two women stepped out onto the landing; leaning against the railing, they watched the three gentlemen descend the long staircase slowly but steadily, disappear on each floor into the same bend of the stairwell, and emerge again after a few moments; the lower they got, the more the Samsa family lost interest in them, and when a butcher boy, proudly bearing his tray on his head, met up with them and then climbed the stairs far above them, Mr. Samsa and the women left the railing, and they all returned to their apartment as if they were relieved.

They decided to spend that day resting and strolling; they not only deserved that pause from work, they absolutely needed it. And so they sat down at the table and wrote three letters of excuse, Mr. Samsa to the bank directors, Mrs. Samsa to the people who gave her piecework and Grete to her employer. While they were writing, the cleaning woman came in to say she was leaving because her morning chores were done. At first the three writers merely nodded, without looking up; it was only when the cleaning woman made no signs of going that they looked up in annoyance. "Well?" asked Mr. Samsa. The cleaning woman stood in the doorway smiling, as if she had a message that would make the family tremendously happy but would only deliver it if they questioned her thoroughly. The almost vertical little ostrich feather on her hat, which had annoyed Mr. Samsa all the time she'd been working for them, was waving slightly in all directions. "Well, what is it you want?" asked Mrs. Samsa, for whom the cleaning woman still had the most respect. "Yes," answered the cleaning woman, whose friendly laughter prevented her from continuing right away, "you don't have to worry your heads about how to clear out that trash next door. It's all taken care of." Mrs. Samsa and Grete lowered their heads to their letters, as if they wanted to go on writing; Mr. Samsa, who perceived that the cleaning woman now wanted to start describing everything in detail, forbade that decisively with an upheld hand. Now that she wasn't able to deliver a narration, she recalled the big hurry she was in; shouted, obviously peeved, "So long, one and all!"; turned on her heels furiously and left the apartment, slamming every door thunderously.

"We'll discharge her tonight," said Mr. Samsa, but received no reply

from either his wife or his daughter, since the cleaning woman seemed to have once more disturbed the peace of mind they had just barely attained. They got up, went over to the window and stayed there, their arms around each other. Mr. Samsa turned around toward them on his chair and watched them silently for a while. Then he called: "Oh, come on over. Let bygones be bygones now. And have a little consideration for me, too." The women obeyed him at once, rushed over to him, caressed him and finished their letters quickly.

Then all three of them left the apartment together, something they hadn't done for months, and took the trolley out to the country on the edge of town. The car, in which they were the only passengers, was brightly lit by the warm sun. Leaning back comfortably on their seats, they discussed their prospects for the future, and it proved that, on closer examination, these were not at all bad, because the jobs that all three had, but which they hadn't really asked one another about before, were thoroughly advantageous and particularly promising for later on. Naturally the greatest immediate improvement in their situation would result easily from a change of apartment; now they would take a smaller and cheaper, but better located and in general more practical, apartment than their present one, which Gregor had found for them. While they were conversing in this way, Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, looking at their daughter, who was becoming more lively all the time, realized at almost the very same moment that recently, in spite of all the cares that had made her cheeks pale, she had blossomed out into a beautiful, well-built girl. Becoming more silent and almost unconsciously communicating with each other by looks, they thought it was now time to find a good husband for her. And they took it as a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when, at the end of their ride, their daughter stood up first and stretched her young body.