

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka

Translated by Richard Stokes

Part I

When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect. He was lying on his hard shell-like back, and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-shaped brown body, banded with reinforcing arches, on top of which the blanket, ready to slip right off, maintained its precarious hold. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in relation to the rest of his bulk, danced ineffectually before his eyes.

‘What has happened to me?’ he thought. It was not a dream. His room, a normal though rather too small human room, lay peacefully between the four familiar walls. Above the table, on which a collection of cloth samples had been unpacked and laid out - Samsa was a travelling salesman - hung the picture that he had recently cut out of a magazine and mounted in a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady in a fur hat and boa sitting up straight and holding out to the viewer a heavy fur muff into which her entire forearms had vanished.

Gregor’s eyes then focused on the window, and the gloomy weather -you could hear raindrops beating on the metal window-sill - made him feel quite melancholy. ‘Suppose I went back to sleep for a while and forgot all this nonsense,’ he thought, but that was quite, impossible, for he was used to sleeping on his right side and was unable in his present state to assume that position. No matter how vigorously he swung himself to the right, he kept rocking onto his back again. He must have tried it a hundred times, he shut his eyes to avoid looking at his flailing legs, and only gave up when he began to feel a faint dull ache in his side that he had never felt before.

‘God,’ he thought, ‘what a strenuous profession I’ve chosen! On the road, day in, day out. Such business anxieties are much worse than those back home in the office, and in addition I’m lumbered with all this wretched travelling, the worry about train connections, the bad, irregular meals, the constantly changing, never lasting and never warm human relationships. To hell with it all!’ He felt a slight itch up on his belly; pushed himself on his back slowly nearer to the bedpost in order to be able to lift his head better; located the itching spot, which was covered with a mass of tiny white dots he was unable to comprehend; and then tried to touch the spot with a leg, which he withdrew at once, however, since the contact sent an icy shiver through his body.

He slid back into his original position. ‘These early mornings,’ he thought, ‘are very bad for the brain. A man needs his sleep. Other salesmen live like harem

women. I mean, when I go back to the hotel during the morning to enter up the orders I've taken, those fellows are just sitting down to breakfast. If I tried that with my boss, I'd be sacked on the spot. Might not be a bad thing for me, after all. If it hadn't been for my parents I'd have handed in my notice long ago, I'd have gone straight to my boss and given him a piece of my mind. He'd have fallen off his desk! Funny the way he sits on his desk and talks down to his staff from on high, especially as you have to come right up close because he's hard of hearing. All well, there's still a gleam of hope; once I've got the money together to pay back what my parents owe him - it might take another five or six years - I'll definitely do it. I'll make a fresh start. Meanwhile, though, I'd better get up, my train leaves at five.'

And he looked across to the alarm clock that was ticking on the chest of drawers. 'God almighty!' he thought. It was half past six and the hands were moving steadily forwards, in fact it was after half past, it was nearly a quarter to seven. Might the alarm not have rung? He could see from the bed that it had been set correctly to go off at four; it must have rung. Yes, but was it possible to sleep calmly through that furniture-shaking racket? Well, he hadn't exactly slept calmly, but that probably meant he had slept all the more soundly. But what should he do now? The next train left at seven; to catch that would mean a frantic rush, and the samples had not yet been packed, and he wasn't exactly feeling especially fresh and mobile. And even if he did catch the train, he could expect a thundering tirade from his boss, because the office boy would have met the five o'clock train and reported his absence long ago. The boy was his boss' lackey, a spineless, mindless creature. What if he were to report sick? But that would be highly embarrassing and suspicious, for during his five years with the firm Gregor had never once been sick. The boss would be bound to bring the health-insurance doctor round, reproach his parents for having an idle son, and cut short all their protests by quoting the doctor's view that the world consisted exclusively of perfectly healthy but work-shy people. And anyway, would he have been so wholly wrong in this instance? Apart from a certain drowsiness that was really quite superfluous after his long sleep, Gregor did feel well and even had an unusually hearty appetite.

While he was considering all this in the greatest haste, without being able to make up his mind to get out of bed - the alarm clock was just striking a quarter to seven - there was a cautious tap at the door near the top of his bed. 'Gregor,' called a voice - it was his mother - 'it's a quarter to seven. Didn't you have a train to catch?' That gentle voice! Gregor gave a start when he heard his own voice answer; it was unmistakably his own, but mingling with it, as if from below, was a painful, not-to-be-suppressed squeak that uttered the words clearly only for a second, before distorting them to such an extent that you wondered whether you had heard them properly. It had been Gregor's intention to answer at length and explain everything, but in the circumstances he confined himself to saying, 'Yes, yes, thank you

mother, I'm just getting up.' Due to the wooden door, the change in Gregor's voice was presumably not noticeable from outside, for his mother, reassured by this explanation, went shuffling off. But this brief exchange had alerted the other members of the family to the fact that Gregor, contrary to expectation, was still at home, and already his father was knocking at one of the side-doors, not hard, but with his fist. 'Gregor, Gregor,' he called, 'what is it?' And after a little while he repeated the reprimand in a deeper voice: 'Gregor! Gregor!' At the door on the other side, however, came the soft plaintive voice of his sister: 'Gregor aren't you well? Do you need anything?' 'Just coming,' Gregor replied in both directions and tried, through enunciating as clearly as possible and leaving long pauses between the words, to make his voice sound as inconspicuous as possible. His father went back to his breakfast, but his sister whispered, 'Gregor, open up, *please*: But Gregor had no intention of opening the door, and congratulated himself instead on his prudent habit, adopted from his travels, of locking all the doors at night even when he was at home.

First of all he wanted to get up in peace and quiet, dress and above all have breakfast, and only then think about what to do next, for he knew that he would not reach any sensible conclusion as long as he was lying in bed. He recalled having fairly often felt some slight pain in bed, possibly as a result of lying awkwardly, which had turned out to be purely illusory once he was up, and he was curious to see how this morning's imaginings would gradually dissolve. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind that the change in his voice was simply the first symptom of a streaming cold, that occupational affliction of travelling salesmen.

Discarding the blanket was simple enough; he only needed to inflate himself a little, and it fell to the floor of its own accord. But after that things became more difficult because of his extraordinary girth. He would have needed arms and hands to lift himself up; instead he only had his numerous legs that were in constant and multifarious motion and over which he had no control. Whenever he tried to bend one, it straightened itself out, and by the time he finally managed to make this leg do his bidding, all the others were flailing around, as if liberated, in a state of most acute and painful excitement. 'Better not waste time in bed,' said Gregor to himself.

He tried at first to get the lower part of his body out of bed, but this lower part which he had incidentally not yet seen and of which he could form no really clear picture, proved too cumbersome; progress was so slow; and when at last, having become almost wild, he mustered all his strength and thrust himself recklessly forward, it turned out that he had chosen the wrong direction, he bumped violently against the bottom end of the bed, and the searing pain he felt informed him that it was precisely this lower part of his body that might for the time being be the most sensitive.

So he tried to get the upper part of his body out of bed first, twisting his head round to the edge of the bed. That was easy enough, and despite its girth and great weight, his body slowly followed the movement of his head. But when at long last he got his head out over the side of the bed, in mid-air, he became afraid of continuing in this manner, for if he were to fall like that, it would take a miracle for him not to sustain a head injury. And consciousness was the last thing he wanted to lose at the present time; he would rather stay in bed.

But when after a similar struggle he lay back panting in his original position, and saw again his little legs locked in what seemed to be even fiercer combat than before, and found no way of restoring any calm or order to such chaos, he told himself once more that there was no way he could stay in bed, and that the wisest thing would be to risk all for even the faintest hope of freeing himself from his bed. At the same time he did not forget to remind himself at intervals that the coolest of cool reflection was better by far than desperate decisions. At such moments he focused his eyes as sharply as possible on the window, but unfortunately the sight of the morning mist, which veiled even the other side of the narrow street, had little good cheer or encouragement to offer. 'Seven o'clock already,' he said to himself as the alarm clock rang once more, 'seven o'clock and still such a thick mist: And for a short while he lay still, breathing quietly, hoping perhaps that such total silence might bring about a return to normal, everyday reality.

But then he said to himself. 'Before it strikes seven fifteen, I must at all costs be right out of bed. Anyway, someone by then will have come from the office to enquire about me, as the office opens before seven: And he now set about rocking the whole length of his body evenly out of bed. If he let himself fall from the bed in this way, his head, which he intended to lift sharply as he fell, would presumably be unharmed. His back seemed to be hard; hitting the carpet would probably cause it no damage. His greatest concern was the thought of the loud noise he would inevitably make, and which would probably cause, if not alarm, then at least concern behind the various doors. But such a risk had to be taken.

When Gregor was already protruding halfway out of bed, the new method was not so much work as play, since he only needed to keep rocking in fits and starts - it occurred to him how simple everything would be if someone came to his aid. Two strong people - he had in mind his father and the maid would be quite enough; they would only have to slide their arms under his arched back, slip him out of bed, bend their knees beneath the burden and then simply exercise patience till he somersaulted onto the floor, where the little legs would, he hoped, acquire a purpose. Well, quite apart from the fact that the doors were locked, ought he really to call for help? Despite his great predicament, he was unable to suppress a smile at the thought.

He had already reached the stage where, if he rocked fairly vigorously, he could scarcely keep his balance, and he would very soon have to make up his mind once and for all, because in five minutes it would be a quarter past seven - when there was a ring at the apartment door. 'Someone from the office,' he said to himself, and almost froze, while his little legs danced even faster. For a moment all was silent. 'They're not answering,' Gregor said to himself, seized by some insane hope. But then of course, as always, the maid strode purposefully to the door and opened it. Gregor only needed to hear the visitor's first word of greeting to know at once who it was - the chief clerk himself. Why was Gregor of all people condemned to work for a firm where the slightest lapse promptly aroused the greatest suspicion? Were all the employees scoundrels, then, every single one of them? Was there not a single loyal and devoted worker among them who, having failed to turn a mere two hours one morning to the firm's advantage, was driven so crazy with remorse that he was actually no longer capable of getting out of bed? Would it not have been sufficient to send an apprentice round to enquire - assuming that all these investigations were essential in the first place? Was it necessary for the chief clerk to come in person, necessary for the whole innocent family to be shown that the investigation of this suspicious affair could be entrusted to his wisdom alone? And more as a consequence of the agitation caused by these thoughts than as a result of true resolve, Gregor swung himself out of bed with all his might. There was a loud thump, but it was not a true bang. His fall had been muffled a little by the carpet, and his back was also more elastic than Gregor had supposed, hence the ensuing dull thud that was really not very conspicuous. He had not however been sufficiently careful with his head which he had banged, and which he twisted round and rubbed on the carpet in irritation and pain.

'Something's fallen in there,' said the chief clerk in the room on the left. Gregor tried to imagine whether something similar to what had just happened to him might one day happen to the chief clerk; he had to admit the possibility. But as if in brusque reply to this question, the chief clerk now took a few determined steps in the next room, causing his patent-leather boots to creak. From the room on the right Gregor's sister informed him in a whisper: 'Gregor, the chief clerk's here.' 'I know,' said Gregor to himself, but did not dare speak loud enough for his sister to hear.

'Gregor,' his father now said from the room on the left, 'the chief clerk has come to enquire why you didn't catch the early train. We don't know what to say to him. Besides, he'd like a word with you in person. So please open up. He'll be kind enough, I'm sure, to excuse the mess in your room: 'Good morning, Herr Samsa,' came meanwhile the friendly voice of the chief clerk. 'He's not well,' Gregor's mother told the chief clerk, while his father was still talking outside the door, 'he's not well, sir, believe you me. Why else would Gregor miss a train! That boy thinks of nothing but his work. It almost makes me angry that he never goes out in the

evening; he's been in town all week but stayed at home every evening. He sits with us at table and quietly reads the newspaper or pores over timetables. Fretwork provides his only amusement. He made a little picture-frame, for example, which took him two or three evenings; you'll be amazed how pretty it is; it's hanging in his room; you'll see it in a moment when Gregor opens the door. I'm glad, by the way, that you have come, sir; we'd never have persuaded Gregor to unlock the door by ourselves; he's so stubborn, and he's certainly unwell, although he denied it this morning.' 'Just coming,' Gregor said slowly and deliberately, and kept quite still so as not to miss a word of the conversation. 'I too, madam, can think of no other explanation,' said the chief clerk. 'I hope it's nothing serious. Although I have to say that we businessmen are -unfortunately or fortunately, as you will - very often obliged for business reasons simply to shrug off minor indispositions.'

Can the chief clerk come in now?' his father asked impatiently, knocking on the door again. 'No,' said Gregor. In the room on the left, an embarrassed silence fell; in the room on the right, his sister began to sob.

Why did his sister not join the others? She had probably only just got out of bed and hadn't even begun to dress. And why was she crying? Because he was not getting up to let the chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because the boss would then start hounding his parents again about those old debts? There was surely no need to worry about such things for the time being. Gregor was still present and had not the slightest intention of deserting his family. For the moment, it was true, he was lying there on the carpet, and no one aware of his condition could seriously have expected him to let the chief clerk in. But this minor discourtesy, for which a suitable excuse could easily be found at a later stage, was surely not reason enough to dismiss Gregor on the spot. And it seemed to Gregor that it would have been much more sensible to leave him alone, instead of disturbing him with tears and entreaties. But it was, of course, the uncertainty which was distressing the others and that excused their behaviour.

'Herr Samsa,' the chief clerk now called out in a louder voice, 'what is wrong? You barricade yourself in your room, answer nothing but yes or no, cause your parents a great deal of unnecessary anxiety and, in addition - I only mention this in passing - neglect your professional duties in a frankly quite outrageous manner. On behalf of your parents and your employer I must ask you most earnestly for an immediate, an unambiguous explanation. I am astonished, astonished. I had always considered you to be a calm and reasonable individual, and now you suddenly seem inclined to flaunt these peculiar whims. Although your superior intimated to me this morning a possible explanation for your absence - concerning the cash payments that you had been trusted to collect - I virtually gave him my word of honour that there could be no truth in such an explanation. But faced here with your incomprehensible obstinacy, I find myself losing absolutely

all inclination to defend you in any way whatsoever. And your position is far from secure. My original intention was to tell you all this privately, but as you are causing me to waste my time here so aimlessly, I see no reason why your good parents should not hear it as well. So: your achievements have recently been most unsatisfactory; it is of course not the best season for doing business, we recognise that; but there is no such thing, Herr Samsa, there can be no such thing as a season for doing no business at all:

‘But sir,’ cried Gregor, distraught and forgetting everything else in his agitation, ‘I’ll open the door immediately, at once. A slight indisposition, a bout of dizziness, prevented me from getting up. I’m still in bed. But now I feel perfectly fit again. I’m just getting out of bed. Just be patient for a second! Things aren’t as good as I thought. But there’s nothing wrong with me. It’s strange how quickly something like that can hit you! I was feeling fine only last night, you can ask my parents, or, wait, I did have a feeling last night that something was wrong. It must have shown on my face. Why on earth didn’t I let the office know? But one always imagines one will shake off such things without needing to stay at home. Sir! Spare my parents! All these accusations of yours are quite unfounded; and no one has said a word about them to me. Perhaps you haven’t seen the last batch of orders I sent in. Anyway, I’ll catch the eight o’clock train, the few hours’ rest have done me good. Don’t waste another moment, sir; I’ll be at the office myself in no time, would you kindly pass that on and send my respects to the boss!’

And while Gregor was blurting all this out and hardly knew what he was saying, he had managed to reach the chest of drawers without difficulty, as a consequence perhaps of the practice he had acquired in bed, and was now trying to haul himself upright. He really did intend to open the door, really did intend to show himself and speak with the chief clerk; he was anxious to find out what the others, who were asking for him with such insistence, would say when they saw him. If they took fright, Gregor would have no further responsibility and could relax. If, on the other hand, they took it all in their stride, there would be no reason for him to get agitated, and he could, if he hurried, actually be at the station by eight. At first he kept sliding down the smooth surface of the chest of drawers, but at last he gave himself a final heave and stood upright; he no longer paid any attention to the pains in his nether regions, no matter how acute they were. He now let himself slump against the back of a nearby chair, gripping it round the edge with his little legs. Having thus gained control over himself, he fell silent, for he was now able to listen to what the chief clerk was saying.

‘Have you understood a single word?’ the chief clerk was asking his parents, ‘he isn’t trying to make fools of us, is he?’ ‘God forbid,’ cried his mother, already in tears, ‘perhaps he’s seriously ill, and we’re tormenting him. Grete! Grete!’ she then cried. ‘Mother?’ called his sister from the other side. They were

communicating through Gregor's room. 'You must go to the doctor's at once. Gregor is ill. Fetch the doctor, quick. Did you hear Gregor talking just now?' 'That was the voice of an animal,' said the chief clerk, in a tone that was strikingly soft compared to his mother's shrieking. 'Anna! Anna!' his father was shouting through the hallway into the kitchen, and he clapped his hands. 'Get a locksmith immediately!' And already the two girls were running with rustling skirts through the hall - how had his sister got dressed so quickly? - and tearing open the apartment door. There was no sound of the door slamming; they had probably left it open, as happens in homes where a great calamity has occurred.

But Gregor had become much calmer. It was true, then, that they could no longer understand his words, though they had seemed clear enough to him, clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had become attuned to them. But at least they now believed that all was not quite right with him, and were prepared to help. The confidence and assurance with which the first steps had been taken comforted him. He felt integrated once more into human society and hoped for great and startling contributions from both the doctor and the locksmith, without really making any clear distinction between them. In order to make his voice as clear as possible for the crucial discussions that were imminent, he gave a little cough, taking good care, of course, to muffle it properly, since possibly even that noise might sound different from human coughing, something that he no longer felt competent to judge. Complete silence had meanwhile fallen in the adjoining room. Perhaps his parents were sitting at the table with the chief clerk, whispering; perhaps they were all leaning against the wall, listening.

Gregor slowly dragged himself towards the door, pushing the chair in front of him, then let go of it, threw himself against the door, where he propped himself up - the pads on the bottom of his little legs were slightly adhesive - and rested there for a moment from his exertions. But then he set about turning the key in the lock with his mouth. Unfortunately it seemed that he had no proper teeth - what was he to grasp the key with? - but to compensate for that his jaws were very strong; with their help he actually got the key moving, ignoring the fact that in so doing he was undoubtedly causing himself some damage, for a brown liquid issued from his mouth, flowed over the key and dripped onto the floor. 'Listen,' said the chief clerk in the next room, 'he's turning the key.' That was a great encouragement to Gregor; but they should all have been cheering him on, his father and mother too. 'Come on, Gregor,' they should have shouted, 'stick at it, harder, work on that lock!' And imagining that they were all following his efforts with tense excitement, he bit furiously on the key with all the strength he could muster. As the key turned, he danced round the lock; he was now holding himself up by his mouth alone and, as the situation demanded, either clung to the key or pressed it down again with the full weight of his body. The sharper sound of the lock as it finally snapped back woke Gregor up once and for all. With a sigh of relief he said

to himself, 'I didn't need the locksmith after all,' and laid his head on the handle to pull the door wide open.

By opening it in this way, the door was actually wide open while he himself was still not visible. First he had to edge his way round this wing of the door, and with the utmost care, if he wasn't to fall flat on his back before entering the room. He was still preoccupied with this tricky manoeuvre, and had no time to attend to anything else, when he heard the chief clerk utter a loud 'Ugh!' - it sounded like a rush of wind - and now he could see him, standing closest to the door, pressing his hand to his open mouth, backing slowly away, as if driven out by some invisible and constantly unrelenting force. His mother - in spite of the chief clerk's presence, she was standing there with her hair all undone and tousled from the night - looked first with clasped hands at his father, then took two steps towards Gregor and slumped down, her skirts billowing in circles around her, her face completely buried in her bosom. His father looked hostile and clenched a fist, as if he intended to beat Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly round the living-room, shaded his eyes with his hands and wept until his powerful chest shook.

Gregor did not in fact enter the room at all, but leaned against the inside of the firmly bolted wing of the door, so all that could be seen was half of his body and, above it, his head tilted to one side and staring out at the others. In the meantime, it had grown much lighter; clearly visible on the other side of the street was a section of the endless, grey-black building opposite - it was a hospital - with its regular windows harshly piercing its facade; the rain was still falling, but only in huge, individually visible drops that were literally pelting the ground one by one. An excessive number of breakfast dishes lay scattered on the table, since breakfast for his father was the most important meal of the day, which he would prolong for hours by reading a variety of newspapers. Hanging on the wall opposite was a photograph of Gregor from his army days, which showed him as a lieutenant, hand on sword, a carefree smile on his lips, inviting respect for his bearing and uniform. The door to the hallway was open, and since the front door was open too, it was possible to see out onto the landing and the top of the stairs.

'Right,' said Gregor, well aware that he was the only one to have retained his composure, 'I shall now get dressed, pack my samples and be off. Are you willing, are you willing to let me go? You can see, sir, that I am not stubborn and that I like my work; travelling is wearisome, but I couldn't live without it. Where are you going, sir? To the office? Yes? Will you make a faithful report of all this? A man might for a moment be unable to work, but that's precisely the time to remember his past achievements and to consider that later on, once the obstacle has been removed, he will be sure to work with increased energy and concentration. I am deeply beholden to the head of the firm, as you are well aware. On the other hand, I have my parents and my sister to think about. I'm in a tight spot, but I'll

work my way out of it. Don't make things harder for me than they already are. Speak up for me in the firm! Travelling salesmen aren't well-liked, I know. People think they earn a fortune and live in clover. They have no particular reason to revise such a prejudice. But you, sir, you have a better view of things than the rest of the staff and, between you and me, than the head of the firm himself who, in his capacity as employer, can easily allow his judgment to err, to the disadvantage of an employee. And you know very well that the travelling salesman, who is out of the office practically all year round, can fall prey to gossip, coincidences and unfounded complaints, against which he's completely unable to defend himself, since in most cases he knows nothing at all about them, or only finds out for himself when he has just returned exhausted from a trip and hears of the repercussions at home, when it's too late to discover their cause. Sir, don't go away without telling me that you think I'm at least partly right!'

But the chief clerk had already turned away at Gregor's very first words, merely staring back at him with curled lips over his quivering shoulder. And during Gregor's speech he never stood still for a moment but, without letting Gregor out of his sight, kept moving away towards the door, only very gradually though, as if there were some secret injunction against leaving the room. He was already in the hallway, and to judge from the sudden movement with which he finally stepped from the living-room, one might have thought he had just scorched the sole of his foot. Once in the hall, however, he stretched out his right hand far in front of him towards the stairs, as if an almost supernatural deliverance were awaiting him there.

Gregor realised that he could in no circumstances allow the chief clerk to depart in this frame of mind if his position in the firm were not to be seriously endangered. His parents did not understand these things too well; in the course of many years they had formed the conviction that Gregor was set up for life in this firm; and besides, they were so preoccupied with their own immediate worries that they had completely lost the ability to look ahead. But Gregor had this ability. The chief clerk must be restrained, calmed down, convinced and finally won over; Gregor's future and that of his family depended on it! If only his sister had been there! She was clever; she had already started to cry when Gregor was still lying calmly on his back. And surely the chief clerk, this ladies' man, would have allowed himself to be swayed by her; she would have closed the front door and talked him out of his fears in the hall. But since his sister was not there, Gregor had to act on his own. And without stopping to think that he was still wholly unfamiliar with his present powers of locomotion, without stopping to think that his words had possibly, even probably, not been understood again, he let go of the wing of the door; he shoved himself through the opening; he wanted to get to the chief clerk who was by now, ridiculously, holding onto the banisters with both hands; but Gregor promptly fell, as he groped for support, onto his numerous little legs with a short cry. No sooner had this happened than, for the first time that morning, he felt

a sense of physical well-being; his little legs had firm ground beneath them; they obeyed him completely, as he noted to his joy; they were even eager to carry him wherever he wanted to go; and he already believed that an end to all his suffering was finally at hand. But at that very same moment, as he lay there on the ground rocking to and fro with repressed motion, not far from his mother and directly opposite her, she, who had seemed so utterly self-absorbed, suddenly leapt into the air, arms stretched out wide, fingers spread, crying, 'Help, for God's sake, help!', craned her neck forward as if to see Gregor better, but in self-contradiction ran frantically back instead; forgot that the table with the breakfast things was behind her; sat down on it hastily, absentmindedly, when she reached it; and seemed quite unaware that the coffee was pouring onto the carpet in a steady stream out of the big overturned pot.

'Mother, mother,' said Gregor softly, and looked up at her. For a moment he had completely forgotten about the chief clerk, though at the sight of the coffee pouring out he couldn't resist snapping at the air several times with his jaws. At this his mother let out another scream, fled from the table and fell into the arms of his father who came rushing up to her. But Gregor now had no time for his parents; the chief clerk was already on the stairs; his chin on the banister, he was taking a last look back. Gregor darted forwards to be as sure as possible of catching up with him; the chief clerk must have suspected something, for he leapt down several steps and disappeared; he was still yelling 'Ugh!', and it echoed through the whole staircase.

Unfortunately, his father, who till then had remained relatively composed, seemed quite bewildered by the chief clerk's flight, for instead of running after the chief clerk himself or at least not obstructing Gregor in his pursuit, he seized in his right hand the chief clerk's cane, which had been left behind on a chair with his hat and overcoat, picked up with his left hand a large newspaper from the table and, stamping his feet and brandishing both cane and newspaper, began to drive Gregor back in to his room. Gregor's entreaties were to no avail, none were even understood; however humbly he turned his head, his father only stamped his feet harder. On the other side of the room, his mother had thrown open a window despite the cool weather, and, leaning a long way out, was pressing her face into her hands. A strong draught was created between the street and the stairwell, the curtains billowed, the newspapers on the table rustled, several sheets blew across the floor. Relentlessly his father drove him back, hissing like a savage. Gregor, however, still had no practice in walking backwards, and was making very slow progress. If only Gregor had been allowed to turn round, he could have reached his room in no time at all, but he was frightened of making his father impatient by so time-consuming a turn, and at any moment the cane in his father's hand threatened to deal him a deadly blow on the back or the head. Finally, however, Gregor had no alternative, for he noticed with horror that in reverse he could not even keep

going in one direction; so he now began, with repeated and anguished sideways glances at his father, to turn around as quickly as he could, which was in reality very slowly. Perhaps his father was aware of his good intentions, because he did not hinder him in this, but occasionally, from a distance, even directed the operation with the tip of his stick. If only his father had not kept making those intolerable hissing noises! It threw Gregor into utter confusion. He had almost turned himself completely round when, with his mind continually on this hissing, he made an error and started turning the other way. But when he had finally succeeded in facing the doorway, it became clear that his body was too broad to pass through as it was. His father, of course, in his present state of mind, did not even consider opening the other wing of the door in order to give Gregor sufficient room to pass through. He was obsessed by the one idea of getting Gregor back to his room as quickly as possible. He would never have countenanced the elaborate preparations that would have been necessary for Gregor to assume an upright position and perhaps in that way pass through the door. Instead he drove Gregor on, as if there were no obstacle, with exceptional loudness; it no longer sounded like the voice of a single father behind Gregor; it was now beyond a joke, and Gregor thrust himself - come what may - into the doorway. One side of his body rose up, he lay lopsided in the door way, one of his flanks was rubbed quite raw, the white door was stained with ugly blotches, soon he would be stuck fast unable to move unaided, his little legs on one side hung quivering in the air, those on the other were squashed painfully against the floor - at which point his father dealt him a truly liberating blow from behind, and, bleeding profusely, he flew far into his room. The door was then slammed shut with the cane, and at last there was silence.

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka

Translated by Richard Stokes

Part II

It was not until dusk that Gregor woke from his deep, coma-like sleep. He would certainly have woken not much later even without being disturbed, for he felt sufficiently rested and refreshed, but it seemed to him that he had been roused by hurried steps and a cautious closing of the door that led into the hall. The light of the electric street lamps flickered pallidly on the ceiling and the upper parts of the furniture, but down where Gregor lay it was dark. Slowly, still groping awkwardly with his feelers, which he was only now beginning to appreciate, he dragged himself over to the door to see what had been happening there. His left side felt like one long, unpleasantly tautening scar, and he was reduced to limping on his twin rows of legs. One leg, moreover, had been seriously damaged in the course of the morning's events - it was almost a miracle that only one had been damaged - and trailed limply after him.

Only when he reached the door did he notice what had actually lured him there; it was the smell of something to eat. For there stood a bowl brimming with sweetened milk in which little slices of white bread were floating. He could almost have laughed for joy, because he was even hungrier than he had been in the morning, and he promptly dipped his head into the milk, almost up to his eyes. But he soon drew it back again in disappointment; not merely because eating caused him difficulties due to his tender left side - and he could only eat if his whole panting body participated - but because he did not care for the milk at all, despite it normally being his favourite drink, for which reason his sister had certainly put it down for him. Indeed he turned away from the bowl with repugnance and crawled back into the middle of the room.

In the living-room the gas had already been lit, as Gregor could see through the crack in the door, but whereas at this time of day his father always used to read aloud extracts from his evening paper to his mother and sometimes his sister as well, everything now was utterly silent. Maybe this custom of reading aloud, which his sister was always telling him about and mentioning in letters, had recently been discontinued. But it was just as silent in all the rooms, even though the apartment was surely not empty. 'What a quiet life the family has been leading,' Gregor said to himself, and felt so proud, as he sat there staring into the darkness, that he had been able to provide his parents and sister with a life of this sort in such a pleasant apartment. But what if all the peace, the prosperity, the contentment were now to come to a terrible end? In order not to lose himself in such thoughts, Gregor chose to move about, and crawled back and forth across the room.

During the long evening, first one of the side-doors and then the other was opened slightly and quickly shut again; somebody had presumably needed to come in, but had had too many misgivings. Gregor now stationed himself directly in front of the living-room door, determined somehow to get his hesitant visitor into the room, or at least to discover who it might be; but the door was not opened again and Gregor waited in vain. In the morning, when the doors had been locked, everyone had wanted to come in; now, when he had opened one door and the others had clearly been opened during the day, no one came any more, and the keys, moreover, were now on the outside.

It wasn't until late in the evening that the light was turned off in the living-room, and it quickly became clear that his parents and his sister had stayed up all that time, for all three of them could now be distinctly heard moving away on tiptoe. Certainly no one would now come into Gregor's room until morning; he therefore had a long time to consider in peace and quiet how best to reorganise his life. But the high ceilinged spacious room, in which he was obliged to lie flat on the floor, filled him with an anguish he could not account for, since it was, after all, the room he had lived in for the past five years - and with a half-conscious change of direction and not without a slight feeling of shame he scuttled under the couch where, although his back was a little squashed and he could not raise his head any more, he immediately felt quite comfortable and was only sorry that his body was too broad to fit completely beneath the couch.

There he stayed the whole night, either dozing and being continually jolted awake by pangs of hunger, or in worries and vague hopes, all of which, however, 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 unpleasantnesses that he was compelled to cause them in his present condition.

By early next morning - it was still almost night - Gregor had an opportunity to test the firmness of his new resolve, for his sister, almost fully dressed, opened the door from the hall and looked uneasily in. She did not see him immediately, but when she spotted him beneath the couch - good heavens, he had to be somewhere, he couldn't just have flown away - she got such a fright that she lost control of herself and slammed the door shut again from the outside. But, as if regretting her behaviour, she immediately opened the door again and tiptoed into the room, as though she were visiting someone seriously ill, or even a stranger. Gregor had stuck his head out almost to the edge of tire couch, and was observing her. Would she notice that he had left the milk standing, though not because he had no appetite, far from it, and would she bring in some other food that suited him better? If she didn't do so of her own accord, he would rather starve than bring it to her attention, although in fact he felt a tremendous urge to dart out from under the couch, throw himself at his sister's feet and beg her to bring him something good to eat. His

sister, however, noticed immediately, and with astonishment, the still-full bowl, from which only a little milk had splattered all around, picked it up, admittedly riot with her bare hands but with a cloth, and carried it out. Gregor was extremely curious to know what she would bring instead, and indulged in all manner of speculation. But never could he have guessed what his sister in the goodness of her heart actually did. In order to find out what he liked, she brought him a whole selection of things, all spread out on an old newspaper: old, half-rotten vegetables; bones left over from supper, surrounded by congealed white sauce; some raisins and almonds; some cheese that two days earlier Gregor had declared inedible; a slice of dry bread, a slice of bread and butter, and another spread with butter and salted. In addition to all this she also put down the bowl, which had probably been permanently assigned to Gregor, and into which she had poured some water. And out of a sense of delicacy, since she knew that Gregor would not eat in her presence, she hastily withdrew and even turned the key in the lock to let Gregor know that he could make himself as comfortable as he wished. Gregor's little legs whirred as he made his way to the food. His wounds, moreover, must have completely healed by now, for he felt no further impediment, which astonished him, and he remembered how more than a month earlier he had cut his finger ever so slightly with a knife and how this finger had still been hurting him only the day before yesterday. 'Might I have grown less sensitive?' he thought, already sucking greedily on the cheese which had attracted him immediately and more forcibly than all the other food. In quick succession and with tears of contentment welling in his eyes, he devoured the cheese, the vegetables and the sauce; the fresh food, on the other hand, did not appeal to him, he couldn't even stand the smell and he actually dragged the things he did not wish to eat a little further off: He had long finished 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 immediately made him start, despite the fact that he was almost dozing off, and he scuttled back beneath the couch. But it took enormous self-control to stay under the couch, even for the short time that his sister was in the room, since the copious meal had bloated his body a little and he could hardly breathe in that cramped space. In between brief bouts of suffocation he watched with slightly bulging eyes as his unsuspecting sister took a broom and swept up not only the remains of what he had eaten but even the food that Gregor had not touched, as if it too were now unusable, and then dumped everything hastily into a bucket which she covered with a wooden lid, before carrying everything out. She had hardly turned her back when Gregor came out from under the couch to stretch and distend his belly.

This was how Gregor now received his food each day, once in the morning while his parents and the maid were still asleep, and again when everyone had had lunch, for then his parents took another short nap and the maid was sent on some errand or other by his sister. They surely did not want him to starve either, but

perhaps the only way they could bear to find out about his eating habits was by hearsay, perhaps his sister even wanted to spare them what was possibly merely a minor distress, for they were really suffering enough as it was.

What pretexts had been used on that first morning to get the doctor and the locksmith out of the apartment, Gregor was quite unable to discover, for since the others could not understand what he said, it did not occur to anyone, not even his sister, that he might be able to understand other people, and so when his sister was in his room he had to content himself with hearing her intermittent sighs and invocations to the saints. It was only later, when she had begun to get used to everything - there could never of course be any question of a complete adjustment - that Gregor sometimes seized on a remark that was meant to be friendly or could be so interpreted. 'He really liked his food today,' she would say when Gregor had licked his bowl clean, and when the opposite was true, which gradually occurred more and more frequently, she would say almost sadly: 'He's left everything again.'

But although Gregor could not discover anything directly, he did overhear a fair amount from the adjoining rooms, and whenever he heard voices he would run at once to the appropriate door and press his whole body against it. Especially in the early days there was no conversation that did not in some way, if only clandestinely, refer to him. For two whole days there were consultations to be heard at every meal about how they should now proceed; but the same topic was also discussed between meals, for at least two members of the family were always at home, probably because no one wanted to be at home alone and because leaving the apartment completely empty was out of the question. Besides, the maid had on the very first day - it was not quite clear what or how much she knew of what had happened - gone to his mother and begged her on bended knees to be dismissed at once, and when she took her leave a quarter of an hour later, she thanked them in tears for her dismissal, as if it had been the greatest favour ever conferred on her, and vowed, without any prompting, a fearful oath that she would never breathe a word to anyone.

Now Gregor's sister, with her mother's help, had to do the cooking as well; although that did not of course involve much work since they ate practically nothing. Time and again Gregor heard one of them vainly exhorting the other to eat, and never getting any other answer than, 'Thank you, I've had enough,' or something similar. They didn't seem to drink anything either. His sister often asked his father if he wanted a beer, and kindly offered to fetch it herself, and when his father made no reply she said, in order to remove any misgivings he might have, that she could send the janitor's wife to fetch it, whereupon his father uttered a decisive 'No', and that was the last they heard of it.

In the course of the very first day his father explained fully the family's financial situation and prospects to both mother and sister. From time to time he rose from the table and took some receipt or notebook out of his small Wertheim safe that 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 once he had taken out what he was looking for. These explanations by his father were to some extent the first encouraging news he had heard since his imprisonment. He had always assumed that his father had been left with nothing at all from that business, at least his father had never told him anything to the contrary, and Gregor himself had never asked him. Gregor's sole concern in those days had been to do everything in his power to help his family forget as quickly as possible the commercial disaster that had plunged them all into utter despair. And so he had set to work with quite exceptional zeal and risen almost overnight from junior clerk to travelling salesman, in which capacity he naturally had many more possibilities of earning money, since his successes could be immediately translated by way of commission into ready cash that could be laid on the table at home before the astonished and delighted eyes of his family. Those had been wonderful times, which had never been repeated, at least not so gloriously, although Gregor subsequently earned so much money that he was in a position to meet the entire family's expenses and actually did so. They had simply got used to it, the family as well as Gregor; they accepted the money with gratitude, he gave it with pleasure, but no special feelings of warmth were engendered any more. Only his sister had remained close to Gregor, and it had been his secret plan that she, who, unlike him, loved music and could play the violin most movingly, should be sent next year to the conservatoire, regardless of the great expense it would entail and which he would somehow meet. During Gregor's short stays in town, the conservatoire would often crop up in conversations with his sister, but never as anything more than a beautiful dream which could not possibly be fulfilled, and their parents did not even like to hear these innocent allusions; Gregor, however, had very fixed ideas on the subject, and intended to make the solemn announcement on Christmas Eve.

Such were the thoughts, utterly futile in his present condition, that passed through his mind as he clung there upright, glued to the door, and listened. Sometimes out of general exhaustion he could not pay attention any longer and let his head bump carelessly against the door, but he immediately held it up again, for even the tiny noise this made had been heard in the next room and reduced them all to silence. 'What on earth is he up to now,' said his father after a while, obviously turning towards the door, and only then would the interrupted conversation gradually be resumed.

Gregor now became thoroughly acquainted - for his father was in the habit of repeating himself frequently in his explanations, partly because he had not

concerned himself with these matters for quite some time and partly because his mother could not always grasp things on first hearing – acquainted with the fact that, despite all their misfortune, a sum of money, admittedly very small, was still intact from the old days, which in the interim had increased a little with the untouched interest. But besides that, the money Gregor had brought home every month - he had kept only a few gulden for himself - had not all been used up and had accumulated into a modest capital. Gregor nodded vigorously behind his door, delighted at this unexpected foresight and thrift. He could in fact have used this surplus money to pay off more of his father's debts to his boss, thus bringing much closer the day when he could quit his job, but as things stood, the way his father had arranged it was undoubtedly better.

Yet this money was by no means sufficient for the family even to consider living off the interest; it might have sufficed to support them for one, or at most two years, but that was all. It was therefore merely a sum that should not actually be touched but rather put aside for an emergency; money to live on had to be earned. Now Gregor's father, though in good health, was an old man who had not worked for five years, and could not in any case be expected to take on too much; during those five years, the first holiday of his arduous yet unsuccessful life, he had put on a lot of fat and had consequently become very sluggish. And was Gregor's old mother now supposed to go out and earn money when, suffering as she did from asthma, she found it a strain even to walk round the flat and spent every other day lying on the sofa by the open window gasping for breath? And was his sister now to go out to work, who at seventeen was still a child and whose way of life no one would have begrudged her, consisting as it did of dressing prettily, sleeping late, helping in the house, enjoying a few modest amusements and above all playing the violin? Whenever the conversation turned to this need to earn money, Gregor would first let go of the door and then throw himself down on the cool leather sofa beside it, for he felt quite hot with shame and grief.

Often he would lie there all night long, not sleeping a wink but merely scratching at the leather for hours on end. Or, not shirking the huge effort of pushing a chair to the window, he would crawl up to the window-sill and, propped up in the chair, lean against the window, evidently responding to a vague memory of that sense of freedom which looking out of the window had once given him. For as the days went by he did in fact see things even a short distance away less and less distinctly; the hospital opposite, which he used to curse because he saw so much of it, he could now no longer see at all, and had he not known perfectly well that he lived in the quiet but decidedly urban Charlottenstrasse, he might have thought that what he saw from his window was a wilderness in which the grey sky and grey earth were indistinguishably mingled. His thoughtful sister only needed to see the chair by the window on two occasions before she thereafter, each time she

had finished tidying his room, pushed it carefully back beneath the window and even, from then on, left the inner casement open.

If only Gregor had been able to speak to his sister and thank her for everything that she had to do for him, he could have accepted her efforts more easily; but as it was, they caused him pain. His sister certainly tried to ease the embarrassment of the whole situation as much as she could, and as time went on she became more and more successful, but with time Gregor too saw everything much more clearly. Her very entrance was terrible for him. The moment she crossed the threshold, without pausing to shut the door, even though she was otherwise most careful to spare everyone the sight of Gregor's room, she ran straight to the window, hastily tore it open, as if she were almost suffocating, remained there a while, no matter how cold it was, breathing deeply. She terrified Gregor twice daily with all this crashing around; he spent the whole time trembling beneath the couch, even though he knew perfectly well that she would certainly have spared him this, if only she had been capable of staying in a room occupied by Gregor with the window closed.

Once, it must have been a month since Gregor's transformation, and there was no particular reason now for his sister to be astonished at his appearance, she came a little earlier than usual and caught Gregor, motionless and at his most terrifying, looking out of the window. It would not have surprised Gregor if she had not come in, because his position prevented her from opening the window at once, but not only did she not come in, she even sprang back and shut the door; a stranger might almost have thought that Gregor had been lying in wait for her, intending to bite her. Gregor of course immediately hid himself beneath the couch, but he had to wait until noon before his sister returned, and she seemed much more restless than usual. He realised from this that the sight of him was still unbearable to her and was bound to remain unbearable, and that it probably required enormous self-control on her part not to run away at the sight of even the small portion of his body that jutted out from under the couch. And in order to spare her this sight, he managed one day - the task took him four hours - to carry the bed sheet on his back over to the couch and drape it in such a way that he was now completely covered, making it impossible for his sister to see him, even if she bent down. Had she considered this sheet unnecessary, she could of course have removed it, for it was clear enough that it gave Gregor no pleasure to close himself off so completely, but she left the sheet the way it was, and Gregor even thought he detected a look of gratitude when, in order to see how his sister was taking the new arrangement, he cautiously raised the sheet a little with his head.

For the first fortnight his parents could not bring themselves to enter his room, and he often heard them whole heartedly acknowledging the work his sister was now doing, whereas before they had frequently been annoyed with her because

she seemed to them a somewhat unhelpful girl. But now both of them, his father and his mother, often waited outside Gregor's room, while his sister cleaned it out, and as soon as she emerged, she had to give them a detailed account of how the room looked, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether he had perhaps shown a slight improvement. His mother, incidentally, wanted to visit Gregor relatively early on, but his father and sister succeeded at first in dissuading her with rational arguments, to which Gregor listened most attentively and with unreserved approval. Later, though, she had to be restrained by force, and when she cried out: 'Let me see my Gregor, my own unhappy son! Don't you understand that 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; she really did understand everything so much better than his sister who, for all her courage, was still only a child and had perhaps, when all was said and done, only taken on so hard a task out of childish recklessness.

Gregor's wish to see his mother was soon fulfilled. During the day Gregor did not want to show himself at the window, if only out of consideration for his parents, but neither could he crawl very much on the few square yards of floor, even at night he found it difficult to lie still, eating soon stopped giving him the slightest pleasure, and so for amusement he acquired the habit of crawling all over the walls and ceiling. He was particularly partial to hanging from the ceiling; it was quite different from lying on the floor; one could breathe more freely; a mild vibration coursed through his body; and in the almost happy absent-mindedness which Gregor experienced up there, it sometimes happened that to his own surprise he let go and crashed to the floor. But now of course he had his body under much better control than before and even such a great fall did him no harm. His sister noticed at once the new pastime that Gregor had discovered for himself - after all, he left behind traces of his sticky substance even when crawling - and she decided to give Gregor as much crawling-space as possible by removing the furniture which stood in his way, especially the chest of drawers and the desk. But she was unable to do this on her own; she dared not ask her father to help; the maid would most certainly not have helped, for although this girl of about sixteen had been braving it out since the dismissal of the previous cook, she had asked as a favour to be allowed to keep the kitchen locked at all times and open it only when specifically called on to do so; so his sister had no alternative but to fetch his mother when her father was out. And his mother did come, uttering cries of excitement and joy, though she fell silent at the door of Gregor's room. First, of course, his sister checked whether all was well within; only then did she let her mother enter. Gregor had very hastily pulled the sheet down even lower, creating more folds - the whole thing really did look like a sheet that had been randomly thrown over the couch. Once again Gregor refrained from peering out from under the sheet; on this occasion he denied himself the sight of his mother and was simply happy that she

had come. 'Come on, you can't see him,' said his sister, evidently leading his mother by the hand. Gregor could now hear the two frail women shifting the old heavy chest of drawers from its place, with his sister continually bearing the main burden and ignoring the anxious warnings of his mother, who was afraid she might overtax herself. It took a very long time. After they had been at it for what must have been a good quarter of an hour, his mother said it would be better to leave the chest of drawers where it was, for in the first place it was simply too heavy and they would not finish before his father arrived, and with the chest in the middle of the room they would be blocking Gregor's every move, and secondly it was by no means certain that by removing the furniture they were doing Gregor a favour. It seemed to her that the opposite was the case; she found the sight of the bare wall downright depressing; and why shouldn't Gregor share the same feeling, since he had long before grown used to these pieces of furniture and would therefore feel abandoned in the empty room. 'And wouldn't it look,' his mother concluded very quietly, in fact she had been almost whispering the whole time, as if she wanted to prevent Gregor, whose precise whereabouts she was unaware of, from hearing even the sound of her voice, for she was convinced that he did not understand the words, 'and wouldn't it look as if by removing the furniture we were giving up all hope of him making a recovery and were callously leaving him to his own fate? I think it would be best if we tried to keep the room in exactly the same state as before, so that when Gregor returns to us he'll find everything the same and it will be that much easier for him to forget what has happened in the meantime:

On hearing his mother's words, Gregor realised that the lack of all direct human communication, together with a monotonous life in the midst of his family, must have confused his mind in the course of these last two months, for he could not explain to himself in any other way how he could have seriously wished to have his room cleared out. Did he really want to have his warm room, comfortably furnished with family heirlooms, transformed into a cave in which, admittedly, he would be able to crawl about freely in all directions but at the cost of swiftly and totally forgetting his human past? He was already on the verge of forgetting it, and only his mother's voice, which he had not heard for so long, had brought him to his senses. Nothing should be removed; everything had to stay; he could not do without the beneficial influence of the furniture on his state of mind; and if the furniture prevented him from carrying on with his aimless crawling around, that was no loss, but a great advantage.

But his sister unfortunately thought otherwise; not without some justification, she had grown accustomed to taking on the role, vis-a-vis her parents, of a particularly well-qualified specialist whenever Gregor's affairs were being discussed, and so her mother's advice was now sufficient reason for her to insist on the removal of not only the chest of drawers and desk, which was all she had been planning at first, but of every item of furniture, apart from the indispensable couch.

It was, of course, more than childish defiance and the self-confidence so unexpectedly and painstakingly acquired in recent weeks that determined her to make this demand; she had indeed noticed that Gregor needed plenty of room to crawl around in, and there was no sign that he made the slightest use of the furniture. But perhaps a contributory factor was the romantic spirit of girls of her age, which seeks fulfillment at every opportunity and which had now tempted Grete into making Gregor's situation even more horrific, so that she could be of even greater help to him than before. For no one but Grete would ever dare to set foot in a room in which Gregor reigned in solitary state over the bare walls.

And so she would not allow her resolve to be shaken by her mother, who out of sheer nervousness also seemed unsure of herself in that room, and soon fell silent and began doing all she could to help his sister get the chest of drawers out. Now Gregor, if need be, could manage without the chest of drawers, but the desk had to stay. And no sooner had the women left the room, groaning as they flattened themselves against the chest of drawers, than Gregor poked his head from under the couch to see how he might intervene cautiously and with as much tact as possible. But as luck would have it, his mother came back first, while Grete in the adjoining room was clasping the chest of drawers, rocking it unaided to and fro without of course moving it an inch. His mother, however, was not used to the sight of Gregor - looking at him might make her ill - so Gregor reversed in a panic to the other end of the couch, though he was too late to prevent the sheet at the front from swaying a little. That was enough to attract his mother's attention. She stopped in her tracks, stood still for a moment and then went back to Grete.

Although Gregor kept telling himself that nothing out of the ordinary was happening, that only a few pieces of furniture were being moved, he was soon forced to admit that the women's to-ing and fro-ing, their little calls to each other, the scraping of the furniture on the floor, were affecting him like some great turmoil that was being fuelled from all sides, and no matter how firmly he drew in his head and legs and pressed his body against the floor, he knew for certain that he would not be able to stand it much longer. They were clearing out his room; depriving him of everything he loved; they had already carried out the chest of drawers which contained his fretsaw and other tools; now they were prising free the desk that had embedded itself in the floor, at which as a student of commerce, and before that as a schoolboy, in fact ever since his primary school days, he had always done his homework - and he simply had no more time to verify the good intentions of the two women, whose existence he had in any case almost forgotten, for they were so exhausted that they were now working in silence, and only the heavy shuffling of their feet could be heard.

And so he broke out - in the adjoining room the women were leaning against the desk to catch their breath for a moment - changed direction four times, he really

had no idea what to salvage first, then, noticing the picture of the lady draped in nothing but furs where it hung on the otherwise bare wall, he quickly crawled up to it and pressed himself against the glass which held him fast and soothed his hot belly. This picture, at least, which Gregor was now completely covering, was certainly not going to be taken from him. He twisted his head round towards the living-room door to observe the women when they returned.

They had not given themselves much of a rest and were already coming back; Grete had put her arm around her mother and was virtually carrying her. 'So, what shall we take next?' said Grete, and looked about her. And then her eyes met Gregor's as he clung to the wall. It was probably only because her mother was there that she kept her composure, she lowered her face close to her mother's to prevent her from looking around, and said, albeit in a quavering voice and without thinking, 'Come along, hadn't we better go back to the living-room for a moment?' It was clear to Gregor what Grete was up to, she wanted to lead her mother to safety and then chase him down from the wall. Well, just let her try! He was sitting there on this picture and would not part with it. He would sooner fly into Grete's face.

But Grete's words had only served to increase her mother's anxiety; she stepped to one side, caught sight of the huge brown blotch on the flowered wallpaper, and, before it had really dawned on her that it was Gregor she was looking at, cried out in a harsh and screaming voice: 'Oh God, oh God!' and fell across the couch with outstretched arms, as if abandoning everything, and did not stir. 'You, Gregor!' cried his sister with raised fist and piercing eyes. These were the first words she had addressed to him directly since the transformation. She ran into the adjoining room to fetch some smelling-salts to revive her unconscious mother; Gregor wanted to help - he still had time to rescue the picture - but he was stuck to the glass and had to tear himself free; then he too ran into the adjoining room as though he could give his sister some advice, as in the past; but once there he had to stand idly behind her; while rummaging among various little bottles, she turned round and was startled; a bottle fell to the floor and broke; a shard of glass wounded Gregor in the face, some kind of corrosive medicine poured over him; without delaying any longer, Grete now gathered up as many bottles as she could and ran with them in to her mother; she slammed the door behind her with her foot. Gregor was now cut off from his mother, who through his fault was perhaps near to death. He could not open the door for fear of driving away his sister, who had to stay by his mother's side; all he could now do was to wait; and tormented by self-reproach and anxiety, he began to crawl, he crawled over everything, walls, furniture and ceiling, until finally, in his despair, with the whole room starting to spin around him, he fell down onto the middle of the big table.

A short time passed, Gregor lay there limply, silence reigned all around, perhaps that was a good sign. Then the doorbell rang. The maid of course was locked up in her kitchen, and so Grete had to open the door. It was Gregor's father. 'What's happened?' were his first words; Grete's appearance must have told him everything. Grete replied in a muffled voice, with her face presumably pressed against her father's chest, 'Mother fainted, but she's better now. Gregor's broken loose.' 'I knew it,' said his father, 'I kept telling you it would happen, but you women never listen.' It was clear to Gregor that his father had misinterpreted Grete's all-too-brief announcement and assumed that Gregor had been guilty of some act of violence. He now therefore had to try to calm his father down, for he had neither the time nor the means to explain the situation to him. And so he fled to the door of his room and pressed himself against it so that when his father came in from the hallway he could see at once that Gregor had every intention of returning forthwith to his room, that it was unnecessary to drive him back, that he only needed to open the door, at which point he would promptly disappear.

But his father was in no mood to notice such niceties; 'Aha!' he cried on entering, in a tone that suggested simultaneous rage and delight. Gregor drew his head back from the door and lifted it towards his father. He had really not pictured his father the way he now stood there; admittedly, Gregor had been too absorbed recently by his new - found interest in crawling to concern himself, as he used to, with what was going on in the rest of the apartment, and he ought really to have been prepared to find that circumstances had changed. Yes, yes, but could this really be his father? The same man who used to lie wearily buried in bed whenever Gregor set out on a business trip; who greeted him wearing a dressing gown and reclining in an armchair when he returned in the evening; who was actually hardly capable of getting to his feet, but merely raised his arms to indicate that he was pleased, and who on the rare occasions when the family went for a walk together, on a few Sundays each year and on the major holidays, would always struggle on between Gregor and his mother, who were slow walkers themselves, even slightly more slowly than they, wrapped in his old overcoat, with his crook-handled stick always placed cautiously in front of him, and who, when he wanted to say something, almost invariably stopped and gathered the others around him? Now, however, he held himself erect; he was dressed in a tight-fitting blue uniform with gold buttons, the kind worn by bank messengers; his heavy double chin spilling over the high stiff collar of his jacket; from under his bushy eyebrows his piercing dark eyes had a fresh, alert look; the usually disheveled white hair had been combed down flat and gleaming on either side of a meticulous parting. He threw his cap, which was adorned with a gold monogram, probably that of some bank, in an arc across the entire room on to the couch, and with the tails of his long livery jacket folded back, his hands in his trouser pockets, he advanced towards Gregor with a grim expression on his face. He himself probably had no idea of what he had

in mind; never the less, he raised his feet unusually high and Gregor was astonished at the gigantic size of the soles of his boots. But he didn't dwell on that; for he had known from the very first day of his new life that his father believed that the only way to treat him was with the utmost severity. And so he ran on in front of his father, stopping when his father came to a halt, and hurrying forwards again, as soon as his father made a move. In this manner they circled the room several times, without anything decisive occurring, in fact without the whole performance, because of the slow tempo, having the appearance of a chase. So for the time being Gregor kept to the floor, especially as he feared that his father might interpret a flight onto the walls or the ceiling as an act of particular malice on his part. Even so, Gregor had to admit that he would not be able to keep up even this kind of running for long, because for every step his father took he had to execute a whole series of movements. Signs of breathlessness were also becoming apparent, just as in his previous life his lungs had not been wholly reliable. As he now staggered on, hardly keeping his eyes open in order to concentrate entirely on running; not even, in his dazed condition, thinking of any other means of escape but running; and having almost forgotten that the walls were at his disposal, though in this room they were obstructed by elaborately carved furniture bristling with jagged edges and spikes - an object, that had been lightly thrown, suddenly flew right past him, hit the floor and rolled in front of him. It was an apple; a second one came flying right after it; Gregor stopped dead with terror; to continue running was pointless, for his father had decided to bombard him. He had filled his pockets from the fruit bowl on the side board and was now, with out for the time being taking careful aim, hurling one apple after another. These small red apples rolled about on the floor as if electrified and cannoned into each other. One apple, thrown without force, grazed Gregor's back and glanced off harmlessly. But another, that came flying after it, actually penetrated Gregor's back; Gregor tried to drag himself forward, as if the startling, unbelievable pain might pass with a change of location; but he felt nailed to the spot, and stretched out his body, with all his senses in complete blur. The last thing he saw was the door of his room being flung open and his mother rushing out ahead of his screaming sister, in her chemise, as his sister had started undressing her to help her breathe while she was unconscious, and his mother running towards his father, shedding her loosened petticoats one by one on the floor behind her and stumbling over her skirts and flinging herself on him, embracing him in absolute union with him - but now Gregor's sight was beginning to fail- begging him, with hands clasped behind his father's head, to spare Gregor's life.

The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka

Translated by Richard Stokes

Part III

Gregor's severe wound, from which he suffered for more than a month - the apple remained lodged in his flesh as a visible reminder since no one dared to remove it - seemed to have brought home even to his father that Gregor, despite his present sad and repugnant appearance, was a member of the family who should not be treated as an enemy, but that on the contrary family duty required them to swallow their disgust and endure him, simply endure him.

And even though Gregor's wound had caused him to lose for good some of his mobility, and he needed for the time being long, long minutes to traverse his room like an old invalid - crawling above the ground was out of the question - he felt fully compensated for his worsening of his condition by the fact that every day around dusk the living room door, which he was in the habit of watching closely an hour or two beforehand, was thrown open, so that as he lay in the darkness of his room, invisible from the living-room, he could see the whole family at table beneath the lamp, and listen to their conversation, by general consent as it were, and in quite different circumstances than before.

These were of course no longer the animated conversations of the old days, which Gregor had always recalled with some wistfulness in those tiny hotel rooms, when he'd had to throw himself wearily into the damp bedclothes. Things were now mostly very peaceful. Soon after supper his father would fall asleep in his chair; his mother and sister kept reminding each other to be quiet; his mother, leaning far forward under the light, sewed fine linen for a fashion store; his sister, who had taken a job as a sales girl, was learning short hand French in the evenings in the hope of securing a better position later on. Sometimes father would wake up and, as if unaware that he had been asleep at all, say to his mother: 'You've been doing a lot of sewing again today!', and go right back to sleep, while mother and sister exchanged a weary smile.

With a sort of obstinacy, his father refused to take off his official uniform even in the house; and while his dressing-gown hung idle on the peg, he slept fully clothed in his chair, as if he were permanently ready for duty and awaiting his superior's orders even here. As a result his uniform, which had not been new to start with, lost some of its smartness despite all Gregor's mother and sister could do, and Gregor would often stare all evening long at this garment, covered with stains and gleaming with its constantly polished gold buttons, in which the old man slept in great discomfort and yet at peace.

As soon as the clock struck ten, Gregor's mother tried to wake his father with a gentle word or two and urge him to go to bed, for this was no place to get proper sleep, which was essential since his father had to report for duty at six o'clock. But with some stubbornness he had acquired since becoming a bank messenger he always insisted on staying longer at table, although he regularly fell asleep and could then only with the greatest difficulty be persuaded to exchange his chair for his bed. No matter how much his mother and sister kept nagging him with mild admonishments, he would go on shaking his head slowly for a quarter of an hour, with his eyes firmly closed and refusing to get up. Gregor's mother plucked at his sleeve, whispered cajoling words in his ear, his sister dropped her homework to come and help her mother, but the effect on his father was nil. He merely sank deeper into his chair. Only when the women grasped him under the armpits would he open his eyes, look from wife to daughter and say: 'What a life. So much for a peaceful old age.' And, leaning on the two women, he would get up awkwardly as if he were the greatest burden to himself, let the women escort him to the door, where, waving them away, he would proceed on his own, while Gregor's mother abandoned her sewing, and his sister her pen in order to run after his father and offer him further assistance.

Who in this overworked and exhausted family had time to worry about Gregor any more than was absolutely necessary? They economised more and more; the maid was finally dismissed; a huge bony cleaning woman with white hair fluttering around her head came mornings and evenings to do the heaviest work; his mother took care of everything else, on top of all her sewing. It even happened that various pieces of family jewelry, which his mother and sister had once been overjoyed to wear at parties and celebrations, were sold, as Gregor discovered one evening from the general discussion about the prices they had fetched. But the chief complaint was always that they could not give up the apartment, which was far too big for their present circumstances, since it was impossible to imagine how Gregor could be moved. But Gregor realised that it was not only concern for him that prevented a move, for it would have been a simple matter to transport him in a suitable crate with a few air-holes; the main reason that prevented the family from moving was rather a feeling of utter hopelessness and the thought that they had been afflicted by a misfortune that none of their friends and relatives have ever suffered. What the world requires of impoverished people they fulfilled to the utmost; his father fetched breakfast for the minor officials at the bank; his mother sacrificed herself making underwear for strangers, his sister ran back and forth behind the counter at her customers' command, but to do any more was beyond the family's power. And the wound in Gregor's back began to hurt all over again when mother and sister, having put his father to bed, now came back, dropped their work, pulled their chairs close together and sat cheek to cheek; when his mother, indicating Gregor's room, said, 'Close that door, Grete'; and when Gregor was

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

Gregor spent the nights and days almost entirely without sleep. Sometimes he thought that the next time the door opened he would take charge of the family's affairs again just as before; after a long interval the head of the firm and the chief clerk reappeared in his thoughts, together with the other clerks and the apprentices, the exceptionally dim-witted errand-boy, two or three friends from other firms, a chambermaid in a provincial hotel, a fond, fleeting memory, a cashier in a hat shop whom he had courted earnestly but too slowly - they all appeared, intermingled with strangers or people he had already 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 in no mood to worry about his family, he was consumed by fury at how badly he was being looked after, and although he could think of nothing that he might like to eat, he nonetheless laid plans for gaining access to the larder, to take what was his by rights, even though he wasn't hungry. No longer considering how she might give Gregor a special treat, his sister would shove any old food into his room with her foot, before running off to work every morning and afternoon, and in the evening, regardless of whether the food had merely been picked at or as was most frequently the case - left completely untouched, she swept it out with a wish of her broom. The cleaning of the room, which she now always attended to in the evenings, could not have been done more speedily. Streaks of dirt lined the walls, heaps of dust and filth lay here and there on the floor. At first, whenever his sister came in, Gregor would station himself in corners of the room that were particularly filthy, implying by this position a sort of reproach. But he could probably have stayed there for weeks without his sister mending her ways; she saw the dirt just as clearly as he did, but had simply decided to leave it there. At the same time she saw to it, with a touchiness that was quite new to her and was indeed affecting the whole family, that the cleaning of Gregor's room should remain her prerogative. On one occasion his mother had undertaken a thorough cleaning of Gregor's room, which she had only managed with the help of several buckets of water - all this dampness, of course, upset Gregor, who lay stretched out on the couch, sullen and immobile - but his mother did not go unpunished. For as soon as his sister noticed the change in Gregor's room that evening, she ran into the living-room, deeply hurt, and despite her mother's imploringly uplifted hands, burst into a fit of sobbing that his parents - his father of course had been startled out of his chair - at first watched in helpless amazement, until they too got excited; his father, to his right, reproached his mother for not leaving the cleaning of Gregor's room to his sister; to his left, on the other hand, he yelled at his sister, saying that never again would she be permitted to clean Gregor's room; while his mother tried to drag his father, who was beside himself with agitation, into the bedroom; his sister, shaken with sobs, hammered the table with her small fists; and Gregor hissed loudly with

rage, because nobody thought to close the door and spare him such a spectacle and row.

But even if his sister, worn out by her job, had grown tired of caring for Gregor as she had once done, there was absolutely no need for his mother to take her place, and no reason for Gregor to be neglected. For the cleaning woman was now there. This elderly widow, whose powerful frame had no doubt helped her weather the worst in the course of her long life, had no real horror of Gregor. Without being in the least inquisitive, she had once accidentally opened the door to Gregor's room, and at the sight of Gregor, who, taken completely by surprise, began to run back and forth although no one was chasing him, had stood still in amazement, her hands folded in front of her. From that time on she never failed to open the door a little every morning and every evening to look in at Gregor. At the beginning she even called him over to her with words she probably regarded as friendly, such as, 'Come over here, you old dung-beetle!' or 'Just look at the old dung beetle!' Gregor never responded to such forms of address but remained motionless where he stood, as if the door had never been opened. If only, instead of allowing this cleaning lady to disturb him pointlessly whenever she felt like it, they had given her orders to clean his room every day! Once, early in the morning - heavy rain, perhaps a sign of approaching spring, was beating against the window-panes - Gregor felt so exasperated when the cleaning woman started prattling again that he turned on her, albeit slowly and like an invalid, as if to attack. Instead of taking fright, however, the cleaning lady merely picked up a chair that was near the door, and as she stood there with her mouth wide open, it was clear that she only intended to shut her mouth when the chair in her hand had come crashing down on Gregor's back. 'You keep your distance, understand?' she said, as Gregor turned around again, and calmly placed the chair back in the corner.

Gregor by now was eating practically nothing. Only when he accidentally went past the food laid out for him would he take a bite as a game, hold it for hours in his mouth and then generally spit it out again. At first he thought it was sadness at the state of his room that was spoiling his appetite, but he had very quickly become reconciled to precisely these changes in his room. His family had got into the habit of putting things in his room that could not be accommodated elsewhere, and there were now many such things, since they had let one room of the apartment to three lodgers. These earnest gentlemen all three wore beards, as Gregor once observed through a crack in the door - were sticklers for order, not only in their own room but also, now that they were installed as lodgers, throughout the entire apartment and especially in the kitchen. They had no time for useless junk, especially if it was dirty. Besides, they had for the most part brought their own furniture with them. As a result, many things had become superfluous, and though they couldn't be sold, no one wanted to throw them out. All these things ended up in Gregor's room. Likewise the ash bucket and rubbish bin from the kitchen.

Whatever was not for the moment being used was simply flung by the cleaning lady, who was always in a great hurry, into Gregor's room; fortunately, Gregor usually 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 throw them all out in one go, but in reality they remained wherever they had been tossed, except when Gregor pushed his way through the junk and set it in motion, at first out of necessity, since there was no other space for crawling, but later with increasing delight, although after such peregrinations he would once again remain motionless for hours on end, tired to death and sad.

As the lodgers sometimes also had their supper at home in the communal living-room, there were certain evenings on which the living-room door stayed shut, but Gregor could do very well without the door being opened, there had after all been quite a few evenings when he had taken no advantage of it being open and had lain, unnoticed by the family, in the darkest corner of his room. But on one occasion the cleaning woman had left the living-room door ajar, and it remained like that when the lodgers came home in the evening and the lamp was lit. They sat down at the head of the table, where in the old days his father, his mother and Gregor had sat, unfolded their napkins and picked up their knives and forks. Gregor's mother promptly appeared in the doorway with a dish of meat, closely followed by his sister with another dish piled high with potatoes. The food gave off thick clouds of steam. The lodgers bent over the plates that were set in front of them as if wishing to examine them before eating, and indeed the one in the middle, whom the others seemed to regard as an authority, sliced a piece of meat while it was still on the dish, obviously to ascertain whether it was tender enough or whether it should not perhaps be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied, and mother and sister, who had been watching apprehensively, began to smile with relief.

The family itself ate in the kitchen. Gregor's father, however, before going into the kitchen, entered the living-room and, bowing low, made a tour of the table, cap in hand. The lodgers all stood up and mumbled something into their beards. When they were alone again, they ate in almost complete silence. It seemed odd to Gregor that, among all the multifarious sounds of the meal, he kept picking out the noise of their champing teeth, as though he were being shown that one needed teeth to eat and that even with the finest toothless jaws nothing could be accomplished. 'I do have an appetite,' Gregor said to himself, full of worry, 'but not for those things. Look how these lodgers gorge themselves, while I waste away!'

On this same evening - Gregor could not remember having heard it once in all this time - the sound of violin-playing came from the kitchen. The lodgers had already finished their supper, the one in the middle had produced a newspaper, given each of the others a page, and now, leaning back in their chairs, they were

reading and smoking. When the violin began to play, they pricked up their ears, stood up and tiptoed to the door leading into the hall, where they stood in a huddle. Their movements must have been heard in the kitchen, for his father called out, 'Do you find the playing unpleasant, gentlemen? It can be stopped at once: 'On the contrary,' said the gentleman in the middle, 'wouldn't the young lady like to join us and play in here where it's much more cosy and comfortable?' 'With pleasure,' cried his father, as if he were the violinist. The gentlemen went back into the room and waited. Gregor's father soon came in with the music stand, his mother with the music, his sister with the violin. His sister calmly prepared herself to play; his parents, who had never previously rented out rooms and therefore treated the lodgers with excessive politeness, did not even dare sit down on their own chairs; his father leaned against the door, his right hand inserted between two buttons of his livery jacket; but his mother was offered a chair by one of the gentlemen and sat down where the gentleman had happened to place it, tucked away in a corner.

His sister began to play. Father and mother, from either side, followed attentively the movements of her hands. Gregor, attracted by the playing, had ventured out a little further and already had his head in the living-room. He was hardly surprised that he had recently shown such little consideration for others; such consideration had once been his greatest pride. And now there was even more reason for him to stay out of sight because, as a result of the dust that lay all over his room and blew around the slightest movement, he too was completely covered in dust; he dragged around with him, on his back and along his sides, lengths of thread, hair and scraps of food; his indifference to everything was much too great for him to turn over on his back and scrub himself clean on the carpet. And in spite of his condition, he was not ashamed to inch out a little further onto the spotless living-room floor.

Not that anyone noticed him. The family was completely absorbed by the violin-playing; the lodgers on the other hand, who, having stationed themselves, hands in pockets, much too close behind his sister's music stand so that they could all have read the music, which must surely have bothered his sister, soon withdrew, muttering to one another with lowered heads, to the window where they remained, anxiously watched by his father. It really did seem abundantly clear that they were disappointed in their expectation of hearing some beautiful or enjoyable violin-playing, that they were tired of the whole performance, and that it was only out of courtesy that they were permitting their peace to be further disturbed. It was in particular the way they all blew their cigar smoke into the air through the nose and mouth that suggested they were highly stressed. Yet his sister was playing so beautifully. Her face was tilted to one side, her eyes looked sad and searching as they followed the lines of the score. Gregor crawled a little further forward, keeping his head close to the floor so that their eyes might meet. Could he be an animal if music moved him so? He felt as if he were being shown the way to the

unknown nourishment that he so craved. He was determined to press forward until he had reached his sister, and suggest by tugging her skirt that she should come into his room with her violin, for no one here appreciated her playing as he would appreciate it. He would never again let her out of his room, at least not as long as he lived; his nightmarish appearance would for once serve some useful purpose; he would be at all the doors of his room at once and spit at his aggressors; his sister, however, would not be compelled to stay with him, but would do so of her own free will; she would sit beside him on the couch and incline her ear towards him, and he would then confide to her that it had been his firm intention to send her to the conservatoire, and that if the catastrophe had not intervened, he would have announced this to everyone last Christmas - Christmas had presumably been and gone? - and would not have listened to any objections. After this declaration his sister would burst into tears of emotion, and Gregor would raise himself to the level of her shoulder and kiss her on the neck which, ever since she started going out to work, she had left bare without a ribbon or collar.

‘Herr Samsa!’ the middle lodger cried, addressing Gregor’s father, and without wasting another word pointed with his index finger at the slowly advancing Gregor. The violin fell silent, the middle lodger with a shake of his head smiled first at his friends, then looked at Gregor again. His father seemed to feel that getting rid of Gregor was for the moment less urgent than reassuring the lodgers, although they were not at all agitated and seemed to derive more pleasure from Gregor than the violin-playing. He hurried over to them and tried with outstretched arms to drive them into their room, and at the same time to block their view of Gregor with his body. Now they really did get a little angry, though it was no longer possible to tell whether this was due to his father’s behaviour or because of the dawning realisation that, without their knowledge, they had had such a flat mate as Gregor. They demanded explanations from his father, they themselves now raised their arms, they plucked excitedly at their beards and only slowly retreated to their room. His sister meanwhile had overcome her bewilderment, caused by the abrupt end to her playing, and had suddenly, after holding violin and bow for a time in her limply hanging hands, while continuing to look at the music as if she were still playing, pulled herself together, placed the instrument on her mother’s lap, as she sat in her chair fighting for breath with violently pumping lungs, and had run into the adjoining room which the lodgers, driven on by his father, were now approaching more rapidly. Blankets and pillows could be seen flying into the air and falling back onto the bed, guided by his sister’s practised hands. Even before the lodgers had reached their room, she had finished making the beds and slipped out. His father seemed once more so overwhelmed by his obstinacy that he forgot every scrap of respect that he should, after all, have shown his tenants. He kept driving them on and on until, already at the bedroom door, the middle lodger stamped his foot with a sound like thunder, and so brought his father to a halt. ‘I

hereby declare,' he said, raising his hand and looking round for Gregor's mother and sister as well, 'that in view of the repellent conditions prevailing in this apartment and family here he spat with sudden resolve onto the floor - ' I intended to vacate this room as of now. I shall not of course pay a penny for the period I have already spent here; I shall on the other hand consider taking action against you with claims that - I assure you - will be very easy to substantiate.' He fell silent and looked straight ahead, as if he were expecting something. And, indeed, his two friends chimed in at once with, 'We also give notice as of now. ' Whereupon he seized the door handle and slammed the door.

Gregor's father staggered groped his way to his chair and slumped on to it; he might have been stretching himself out for his customary evening nap, but the heavy nodding of his head, as if it had lost all support, showed that he was by no means asleep. All this time Gregor had been lying motionless where the lodgers first discovered him. Disappointment at the failure of his plan, but perhaps also the weakness caused by so much fasting, made it impossible for him to move. He feared, with some degree of certainty, that any moment now he was about to suffer a general breakdown, and waited. Not even the violin startled him when it slipped from his mother's trembling fingers, fell off her lap and hit the floor with a resounding clang.

'Dear parents,' said his sister, hitting the table with her hand by way of introduction, 'things cannot go on like this. Maybe you don't realise it, but I do. I will not utter my brother's name in front of this monster, and so all I say is: we must try to get rid of it. We've done everything humanly possible to take care of it, to put up with it, no one can reproach us in the slightest.'

'She's absolutely right,' said his father to himself. His mother, who still could not catch her breath, began to cough into her hand with a hollow sound, and a crazed look came in her eyes.

His sister hurried over to her and put a hand on her forehead. His father, whose thoughts seemed to have crystallized as a result of his sister's words, had sat up straight and was playing with his messenger's cap among the plates that still lay on the table from the lodgers' supper, casting occasional glances at Gregor's motionless form.

'We must try to get rid of it,' his sister now said, addressing only her father, since her mother couldn't hear a word because of her coughing, 'or it will be the death of both of you, I can see it coming. Anyone who works as hard as we all do cannot take this constant torture at home as well. I can't stand it anymore.' And she burst into such a violent fit of weeping that her tears flowed onto her mother's face from where she wiped them away with mechanical movements of her hand.

‘My child,’ said her father sympathetically and with noticeable understanding, ‘but what should we do?’

Gregor’s sister who was normally so assured, merely shrugged her shoulders to indicate the helplessness that had come over her during her fit of weeping.

‘If he could understand us,’ said his father half questioningly, but his sister, still weeping, waved her hand violently to show that this was unthinkable.

‘If he could understand us,’ his father repeated, and by closing his eyes comprehended his daughter’s conviction that this was impossible, ‘then maybe we could come to an agreement with him. But as things are -’

‘It has to go,’ his sister cried, ‘it’s the only way, Father. You must try to forget that it’s Gregor. Our real downfall is that we’ve believed it for so long. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have realised long ago that it isn’t possible for humans to live side by side with an animal like that, and would have gone away of his own free will. Then we wouldn’t have a brother but would be able to go on living and honour his memory. But as it is, this animal persecutes us, drives away our lodgers, clearly wants to take over the whole apartment and have us sleep in the street. Look, Father,’ she suddenly screamed, ‘he’s at it again!’ And in a fit of terror that Gregor found quite incomprehensible, she even abandoned her mother, literally pushing herself off from the chair, as if she would rather sacrifice her mother than remain in Gregor’s vicinity, and dashed behind her father who, alarmed solely by her behaviour, also stood up and half- raised his arms in front of her, as if to protect her.

But Gregor hadn’t the slightest wish to frighten anyone, especially not his sister. He had merely begun to turn round in order to go back to his room, and that was naturally conspicuous because in his ailing condition he could only execute the difficult manoeuvre with the help of his head, raising and banging it many times against the floor. He stopped in his tracks and looked round. They must have recognised his good intentions; the terror had only been temporary. Now they all looked at him sadly and in silence. His mother was slumped in her chair, her legs stretched out and pressed together, her eyes almost closing from exhaustion; his father and sister sat side by side, his sister had put her arm around their father’s neck.

‘Perhaps they’ll let me turn round now,’ Gregor thought, and resumed his labours. He could not help panting with the effort and had to rest from time to time. Not that anyone was harassing him; everything was left to him. When he had completed the turn, he began to crawl back at once in a straight line. He was astonished at the great distance that separated him from his room, and utterly failed to understand how, feeling so weak, he had recently covered the same ground

almost without realising it. Concentrating entirely on crawling fast, he hardly noticed that not a single exclamation or word disturbed his progress. Only when he was in the doorway did he turn his head, not all the way, for he felt his neck growing stiff, enough to see that nothing had changed behind him except that his sister had risen to her feet. His last glimpse was of his mother who had fallen fast asleep.

Hardly was he inside his room than the door was hastily closed, bolted 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 hurry. She had been standing there, upright and waiting, then she had leapt forward nimbly - Gregor had not even heard her coming - and she cried, '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 discovered that he could no longer move at all. That did not surprise him, in fact he found it unnatural that up until then he had been able to get about on such thin little legs. Otherwise, he felt relatively comfortable. True, he had pains all over his body, but he had the impression that they were gradually growing fainter and fainter and would eventually vanish altogether. By now he could hardly feel the rotten apple in his back and the inflamed area around it, completely covered with soft dust. He recalled his family with tenderness and love. His conviction that he would have to disappear was, if possible, even firmer than his sister's. He remained in this state of vacant and peaceful reflection until the clock tower struck three in the morning. He was still conscious as everything grew brighter outside the window. Then, involuntarily, his head sank right down, and his last breath flowed feebly from his nostrils.

When the cleaning woman came early in the morning - out of sheer energy and impatience, despite frequent requests not to do so, she would slam all the doors with such force that peaceful sleep, once she had arrived, was an impossibility throughout the apartment - she did not at first find anything out of the ordinary as she paid Gregor her usual brief visit. She thought that he was lying there motionless on purpose, pretending that his feelings were hurt; she credited him with boundless intelligence. Because she happened to be holding the long broom, she tried to tickle Gregor with it from the safety of the door. When even this proved unsuccessful she lost patience and gave Gregor a little prod, and it was only when she had shifted him from his place without encountering any resistance that she began to take notice. Having soon become aware of the true state of affairs, she reacted with amazement, whistled softly to herself, did not delay but tore open the bedroom door and yelled into the darkness: 'Take a look at this; it's dead; it's lying there as dead as dead can be!'

The Samsas sat bolt upright in their double bed and took a while to get over the fright the cleaning woman had given them before they finally grasped what she was saying. Then, however, Herr and Fran Samsa got hastily out of bed, each on their own side; Herr Samsa threw the blanket round his shoulders, Fran Samsa emerged in nothing but her nightdress; in this way they entered Gregor's room. Meanwhile the door of the living-room, where Grete had been sleeping since the lodgers moved in, had also opened; she was fully dressed, as if she had not slept at all, an impression that her pale face seemed to confirm. 'Dead?' asked Fran Samsa and looked up enquiringly at the cleaning woman, although she could verify everything for herself and see that it was so without verification. 'I'll say,' said the cleaning woman, and to prove it she gave Gregor's corpse another huge shove to the side with her broom. Fran Samsa made as if to put a restraining hand on the broom but did not do so. 'Well,' said Herr Samsa, 'may God be thanked.' He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example. Grete, without taking her eyes off the corpse, said, 'Just look how thin he was. But then it's ages since he ate anything. The food used to come out again just as it was taken in.' And Gregor's body was indeed completely flat and dry, which could actually only now be observed, since the body was no longer held up by his little legs and there was nothing else to distract the eye.

'Come into our room for a while, Grete,' said Fran Samsa with a wistful smile, and Grete, not without looking back at the corpse, followed her parents into their bedroom. The cleaning woman closed the door and opened the window wide. Despite the early hour the fresh air already had a touch of mildness to it. It was, after all, the end of March.

The three lodgers emerged from their room and stared about them in astonishment for their breakfast; they had been forgotten. 'Where's our breakfast?' the middle lodger sullenly asked the cleaning woman. But she put her finger to her lips and then hastily and silently beckoned the lodgers to follow her 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 sunlit room.

Then the bedroom door opened, and Herr Samsa appeared in his uniform, with his wife on one arm, his daughter on the other. They all looked as though they had been crying; from time to time Grete pressed her face against her father's arm.

'Get out of my apartment this instant!' said Herr Samsa and pointed to the door, without letting go of the women. 'How do you mean?' said the middle lodger, somewhat taken aback, and smiled a sickly smile. The other two had their hands behind their backs and kept rubbing them together, as if in joyful anticipation of a major quarrel that was bound to end in their favour. 'I mean precisely what I say,' replied Herr Samsa, and, escorted by the two women, marched in a straight line

towards the lodger. The latter stood still at first and looked at the floor, as if the thoughts in his head were being rearranged. 'We'll be going, then,' he concluded, and looked up at Herr Samsa as though, in a sudden onset of humility, he were seeking fresh approval for even this decision. Herr Samsa merely gave him several brief nods and glared at him. Whereupon the gentleman did indeed stride immediately into the hallway; his two friends, who for some time had been listening intently and had stopped rubbing their hands, now practically skipped after him, as if afraid that Herr Samsa might reach the hall before them and cut them off from their leader. In the hall all three of them took their hats from the coat rack, pulled their canes from the umbrella stand, bowed silently and left the apartment. With a mistrust that proved totally unfounded, Herr Samsa stepped out onto the landing with the two women; leaning against the banister, they watched the three gentlemen slowly but steadily descend the long flight of stairs, disappear on each landing at the same bend of the stairwell, then reemerge a few moments later; the further down they got, the more the Samsa family's interest in them dwindled, and when a butcher's boy, proudly bearing his basket on his head, passed them coming up and then climbed high above them, Herr Samsa and the women soon left the landing, and they all went back, as if relieved, into their apartment.

They decided to spend the day resting and going for a walk; not only had they earned this break from work, they positively needed it. And so they sat down at the table and wrote three letters of apology - Herr Samsa to his superiors at the bank, Frau Samsa to her employers, and Grete to the proprietor of the shop where she worked. While they were writing, the cleaning woman came in to say that she was going because she had finished her morning's work. The three letter-writers merely nodded at first without looking up, but when the cleaning woman still gave no sign of leaving, they looked up in annoyance. 'What is it then?' asked Herr Samsa. The cleaning woman stood smiling in the doorway, as though she had some great good news for the family which, however, she would only disclose if thoroughly quizzed. The almost vertical little ostrich feather in her hat, which had irritated Herr Samsa all the time she had been working for them, swayed gently in all directions. 'Well, what is it you want?' asked Frau Samsa, for whom the cleaning lady still had the most respect. 'It's like this,' answered the cleaning woman and couldn't continue immediately for so much good-natured laughter, 'I mean you mustn't worry about how to clear out that thing in there. It's already taken care of.' Frau Samsa and Grete bent over their letters, as if to continue writing; Herr Samsa, perceiving that the cleaning woman now wished to describe everything in detail, checked her firmly with an upheld hand. But since she was not permitted to tell her story, she remembered she was in a great hurry, called out, obviously insulted: 'Good riddance to all of you,' turned furiously on her heels and left the apartment with a terrible slamming of doors.

‘She’ll get her notice this evening,’ said Herr Samsa, but he received no answer from either wife or his daughter, for the cleaning woman seemed to have shattered once more their barely regained peace of mind. They got up, went over to the window and stayed there, clasping each other tightly. Herr Samsa turned his chair round to face them, and watched them in silence for a while. Then he called out, ‘Come over here, stop brooding over the past. And have a little consideration for me.’ The women obeyed him at once, hurried over to him, caressed him and quickly finished their letters.

Then all three of them left the apartment together, something they had not done for months, and took the tram into the country just outside the town. The carriage, in which they were the only passengers, was brightly lit by the warm sun. Leaning back comfortably in their seats, they discussed their prospects for the future, which on closer examination appeared to be far from bad, for all three of them had jobs which, though they had never really discussed it, were entirely satisfactory and boded very well for the future. The greatest immediate improvement in their situation could of course be expected from a simple change of accommodation; they would now take a smaller and cheaper apartment, but better situated and in every way simpler to manage than their present one, which Gregor had found. While they were talking in this way, Herr and Frau Samsa realized at almost the same moment, as they watched their daughter becoming increasingly animated, that recently, despite all the troubles that had turned her cheeks pale, she had blossomed into a beautiful and voluptuous girl. Growing quieter and communicating almost unconsciously through glances, they reflected that it would soon be time to find her a good husband. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when at the end of the ride their daughter stood up first and stretched her young body.