

THE METAMORPHOSIS

FRANZ KAFKA



TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
STANLEY CORNGOLD

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

The Translator and Editor

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THE METAMORPHOSIS

TRANSLATION

BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS

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Franz Kafka



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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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43

Contents

Preface

IX

The Text of The Metamorphosis

KAFKA'S MANUSCRIPT REVISIONS

Backgrounds and Contexts

Franz Kafka • From Wedding Preparations in the Country

61

Letters and Diaries

61

Gustav Janouch • From Conversations with Kafka

7-f

Criticism

Stanley Corngold • Kafka's The Metamorphosis:

Metamorphosis of the Metaphor

79

Iris Bruce • Elements of Jewish Folklore in Kafka's

The Metamorphosis

107

Nina Pelikan Straus • Transforming Franz Kafka's

1\letamorphosis

1 26

Ke\in \\. S\\eeuey • Competing Theories of Identity

in Kafka's The ,\ letamorphosis

HO

!mark \1. Anderson • Slid ing Do\\n the Evolutionary

Ladder? Aesthetic Autonomy in The ,\letamorphosis

1 5-f

Hartmut Binder • The Metamorphosis: The Long Journey

into Print

172

Eric Santner • Kafka's Metamorphosis and the Writing of

Abjection

1 9 5

Franz Kafka: A Chronology

2 1 1

Selected Bibliography

2 1 5

vii

Preface

Franz Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis* is perfect, even as it incessantly provokes criticism. Its perfection was noted by the Nobel Prize-winning author Elias Canetti: "In *The Metamorphosis* Kafka

reached the height of his mastery: he wrote something which he could never surpass, because there is nothing which *The Metamorphosis* could be surpassed by - one of the few great, perfect poetic works of this century." But what is distinctive about such literary perfection is that it does not leave the reader's mind settled, satisfied, at peace with itself.

Its perfection is not aesthetic. Instead, it never stops irritating the reader to produce a kind of brother or sister work in the mind that will be simpler, plainer, and altogether better-behaved, intellectually speaking, than the story itself. For this stem, if Kafka is to be trusted, is not only

about a monster; rather, it comes into the world trailing clouds of misery. "What is literature?" Kafka declared. "Where does it come from? What use is it? What questionable things! Add to this questionableness the further questionableness of what you say, and what you get is a monstrosity." The monstrous aspect of the story is clear, no

doubt, but where, then, is its perfection? It must be, first, in the perfection of the hopelessness that settles on Gregor Samsa and his family in the face of a nightmare they have never before seen or heard of.

And it must also lie in the supreme irony with which this hopelessness is depicted, as if from the standpoint of an unnamed god who has

arranged it all for his amusement.

The Metamorphosis raises such questions, certainly, but it also states facts as hard, concrete, and undeniable as the armorlike shell in which Gregor Samsa is born again one rainy morning. This disparity between the underlying structure of impossibility and the wealth of atrociously detailed facts makes for the uncanny disturbance at the center of the story. Everything is in place in the family to deny the arrival of this monster in its midst. All the explanations are at hand, especially in the morning, everyday awareness of Gregor himself, who thinks at various times that his metamorphosis is only a fantasy, a bad cold, a hindrance, or - as his mother puts it - a momentary absence of the real Gregor, „who will surely "come back to us again." But the vermin refuses to be any of these things. It is what it materially is and does not let itself be denied so long as Gregor is alive: it is his wildly waving legs, his snap-

IX

X

PRE FACE

ping jaws, his obscene craving for decaying vegetables and dark crevices, and . . . yes . . . for fiddle playing too. It is the "little red apple"

flung by his father deep into his back and left to rot and kill his son,

but it is also the acrobatic bliss that Gregor feels hanging and falling from the ceiling when he finally lets his body do what it wants. "A little horrible," Kafka called his story, writing to his fiancée Felice Bauer, perhaps understating the case, and then, the next day (perhaps overstating it), "infinitely repulsive." But while Kafka's judgment here repeats the verdict of the Samsa family, the judgment of literary history has been a different one. Readers have been drawn again and again to this monstrosity by the desire to get it under control - to interpret it in place of understanding it, for no one yet has so fully understood it that it might "go away."

The fascination continues. Literally millions have read this story, so to begin to read it now is to enter with a thrill into a community of those who have struggled to master something that has struck them as the critic Theodor Adorno says - with the force of an onrushing locomotive. Kafka collapses aesthetic distance between text and reader:

"Interpret me!" it declares. "Interpret me! . . . or be overwhelmed."

This is as it should be. "A real book," Kafka wrote, "must be the axe for the frozen sea in us," stressing the redemptive opportunity the shock might finally provide. It is to be hoped that the present translation of *The Metamorphosis*, which tries to follow Kafka's actual idiom more closely than previous translations, produces something of this effect.

The translation is based on Franz Kafka, "Die Verwandlung," in

Er=ahlungen, S. Fischer Verlag Lizenzausgabe (:\'ew York: Schocken, 1946) 71-142. A new edition of Kafka's complete works, the so-called Manuscript Version, is nearing completion at the Research Center for German [Exile] Literature at the University of Wuppertal in Germany. The director of this project, Dr. Hans-Gerd Koch, has kindly made a portion of his critical apparatus for *The Metamorphosis* available before its appearance in print. In the section of the Norton Critical Edition entitled "Kafka's Manuscript Revisions," I have indicated, and attempted to explain, the most significant of these changes.

The critical essays collected in this volume are meant to illustrate some of the most interesting currents of criticism now flowing in this lively age of literary theory. They include several post-structuralist readings, including a post-Freudian psychoanalytic study written by Professor Eric Santner of Princeton University especially for this edition.

Other essays connect *The Metamorphosis* to feminist theories and to the concerns of cultural studies, which define the novella against Kafka's sexual and Jewish-religious background, highlighting questions of Kafka's cultural identity. This section also contains a historical study of the revealing details of *The Metamorphosis*'s "long journey into print."

The latter essay has been prepared by Professor Hartmut Binder, the

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PREFACE

XI

eminent German Kafka scholar, who was interested enough to contribute his text to this edition even before its appearance in print in Germany.

This selection of critical materials is designed to stimulate and guide the reader to a creative encounter with *The Metamorphosis*, and more:

it aims to suggest the richness of the modern attempt to grasp the

Schriftstellersein, the being-literature, to which Kafka sacrificed his personal existence.



The Text of

THE METAMORPHOSIS


The theme of metamorphosis is found in classical literature, most famously in the *Metamorphoses*

of Ovid (43 B.C.-A.D. 17 or 18), which traces through mythology the development of the human

race to its culmination in the Roman order. See below, pp. 107-8. Kafka's word for "metamorphosis"-*Verwandlung*-also means a scene change in a stage play. The English word "metamorphosis" is slightly more elevated in tone than the German, which could also arguably be translated as "The Transformation."

I

When Gregor Samsa¹ woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.² He was lying on his back as hard as armor plate, and when he lifted his head a little, he saw his vaulted brown belly, sectioned by arch-shaped ribs, to whose dome the cover, about to slide off completely, could barely cling. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, were waving helplessly before his eyes.

"What's happened to me?" he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human room,  only a little on the small side, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Over the table, on which an unpacked line of fabric samples was all spread out-Samsa was a tra·eling

salesman-hung the picture which he had recently cut out of a glossy magazine and lodged in a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady done up in a fur hat and a fur boa,⁴ sitting upright and raising up against the viewer a hea\y fur muff in which her whole forearm had disappeared.

Gregor's eyes then turned to the window, and the m·ercast weather

-he could hear raindrops hitting against the metal window ledgecompletely depressed him. "How about going back to sleep for a few minutes and forgetting all this nonsense," he thought, but that was

completely impracticable, since he was used to sleeping on his right

side and in his present state could not get into that position. No matter how hard he threw himself onto his right side, he always rocked onto his back again. He must have tried it a hundred times, closing his eyes so as not to have to see his squirming legs, and stopped only when he began to feel a slight, dull pain in his side, which he had never felt before.

"Oh God," he thought, "what a grueling job I've picked! Day in,

I. The name "Gregor Samsa" appears to derive partly from literary works Kafka had read. The

hero of The Story of Young Renate Fuchs, the German-Jewish novelist Jakob Wassermann

(1876 - 1919), is a certain Gregor Samassa. The Viennese author Leopold von Sacher-Masoch

(1836-1895), whose sexual imagination gave rise to the idea of masochism, is also an influence. Sacher-Masoch (note the initials Sa-Mas) wrote Venus in Furs (1870), a novel whose hero is named Gregor. A "Venus in furs" literally recurs in The Metamorphosis in the picture

that Gregor Samsa has hung on his bedroom wall. See below, n. 165, and p. 165. The name

Samsa also resembles Kafka in its play of vowels and consonants. See below. "Backgrounds

and Contexts," p. 75.

Z. Kafka uses the words unruhige Träume (literally, "restless dreams"), an odd expression combining the more usual phrases "restless sleep" and "had

dreams." For a discussion of "monstrous \Crmin." see below, pp. 87- 88 and pp. 1 85- 90.

◆ . "An unusual expression, roughly analogous to 'children's room.' Gregor's nt·art·st surroundings

(in the story Gregor is doing the ohser\ing and reflecting) appear to him as something matterof-fact and humanly normal, whilt· this expression itsdf implies his 11!1naturalnt·ss as a mt•tamorphosed animal" (Peter Beicken, Erliiuterungen und Dokumente. Franz Kafka: Die

\envandlung [Clarifications and documents. Franz Kafka: The Metamorphosis] [Stuttgart:

Rcclam, 1 98◆] 8).

-.+. An ornamental scarf, l)pically of fur or feathers. draped snakelike around a woman's neck. It

could c\Okc an image of E\c before the Fall. For further discussion of this image, sec below,

pp. 205-6.

3

4

FRANZ KAFKA

day out-on the road. The upset of doing business is much worse than the actual business in the home office, and, besides, I've got the torture of traveling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or get more intimate. To the devil with it all !" He felt a slight itching up on

top of his belly; shimmied himself slowly on his back closer to the bedpost, so as to be able to lift his head better; found the itchy spot, studded with small white dots which he had no idea what to make of; and wanted to touch the spot with one of his legs but immediately pulled it back, for the contact sent a cold shiver through him.

He slid back again into his original position. "This getting up so early," he thought, "makes anyone a complete idiot. Human beings have to have their sleep. Other traveling salesmen live like harem women. For instance, when I go back to the hotel before lunch to write up the business I've done, these gentlemen are just having breakfast. That's all I'd have to try with my boss; I'd be fired on the spot. Anyway, who knows if that wouldn't be a very good thing for me. If I didn't hold back for my parents' sake, I would have quit long ago, I would have marched up to the boss and spoken my piece from the bottom of my heart. He would have fallen off the desk! It is funny, too, the way he sits on the desk and talks down from the heights to the employees, especially when they have to come right up close on account of the boss's being hard of hearing. Well, I haven't given up hope completely; once I've gotten the money together to pay off my parents' debt to him-that will probably take another five or six years- I'm going to do

it without fail. Then I'm going to make the big break. But for the time being I'd better get up, since my train leaves at five."

And he looked over at the alarm clock, which was ticking on the chest of drawers. "Cod Almighty!"⁵ he thought. It was six-thirty, the hands were quietly moving forward, it was actually past the half-hour, it was already nearly a quarter to. Could it be that the alarm hadn't gone off? You could see from the bed that it was set correctly for four o'clock; it certainly should have gone off, too. Yes, but was it possible to sleep quietly through a ringing that made the furniture shake? Well, he certainly hadn't slept quietly, but probably all the more soundly for that.

But what should he do now? The next train left at seven o'clock; to make it, he would have to hurry like a madman, and the line of samples wasn't packed yet, and he himself didn't feel especially fresh and ready to march around. And even if he did make the train, he could not avoid getting it from the boss, because the messenger boy had been waiting at the five o'clock train and would have long ago reported his
;. In Kafka's German literally "Illegally Father," indicating that the Samsa family is Christian

and almost certainly Catholic. See below, p. 19, n. 4, and p. 40, n. 9.

he sick? would

THE METAMORPHOSIS

5

not showing up. He was a tool of the boss, without brains or backbone.

What if he were to say

was

But that

be extremely embarrassing and suspicious because during his five years with the firm

Gregor had not been sick even once. The boss would be sure to come with the health-insurance doctor, blame his parents for their lazy son, and cut off all excuses by quoting the health-insurance doctor, for whom the world consisted of people who were completely healthy but afraid to work. And, besides, in this case would he be so very wrong?

In fact, Gregor felt fine, with the exception of his drowsiness, which was really unnecessary after sleeping so late, and he even had a ravenous appetite.

Just as he was thinking all this over at top speed, without being able to decide to get out of bed-the alarm clock had just struck a quarter to seven-he heard a cautious knocking at the door next to the head of his bed. "Gregor," someone called-it was his mother-"it's a quarter to seven. Didn't you want to catch the train?" At a soft mice! Gregor

was shocked to hear his own mice answering, unmistakably his own

voice, true, but in which, as if from helm, an insistent distressed chirping intruded, which left the clarity of his words intact only for a moment really, before so badly garbling them as they carried that no one could

be sure if he had heard right. Gregor had wanted to answer in detail

and to explain everything, but, given the circumstances, confined himself to saying, "Yes, yes, thanks, ;!other, I'm just getting up." The wooden door must have prevented the change in Gregor's mice from

being noticed outside, because his mother was satisfied with this explanation and shuffled off. But their little exchange had made the rest of the family aware that, contrary to expectations, Gregor was still in the

house, and already his father was knocking on one of the side doors,

feebly but with his fist.- "Gregor, Gregor," he called, "what's going on?"

And after a little while he called again in a deeper, warning mice,

"Gregor! Gregor!" At the other side door, however, his sister moaned

gently, "Gregor? Is something the matter with you? Do you want anything?" Toward both sides Gregor answered: "I'm all ready," and made an effort, by meticulous pronunciation and by inserting long pauses

between individual words, to eliminate everything from his mice that

might betray him. His father went back to his breakfast, but his sister

whispered, "Gregor, open up, I'm pleading with you." But Gregor had

absolutely no intention of opening the door and complimented himself

instead on the precaution he had adopted from his business trips, of

locking all the doors during the night even at home.

First of all he wanted to get up quietly, without any excitement; get

6. Kafka literally writes "It [Es]" was a "tool," using for "tool" the German word *Kreatur* [creature]. Both German words introduce an atmosphere of animality-of displaced animality, for it is Gregor, after all, who is the animal.

7. See below, p. 197.

6

FRA: 'Z Ko\FKA

dressed; and, the main thing, have breakfast, and only then think about what to do next, for he saw clearly that in bed he would never think things through to a rational conclusion. He remembered how even in the past he had often felt some kind of slight pain, possibly caused by lying in an uncomfortable position, which, when he got up, turned out to be purely imaginary, and he was eager to see how today's fantasy would gradually fade away. That the change in his 'Dice was nothing more than the first sign of a bad cold, an occupational ailment of the traveling salesman, he had no doubt in the least.

It was very easy to throw off the cover; all he had to do was puff himself up a little, and it fell off by itself. But after this, things got difficult, especially since he was so unusually broad. He would have needed hands and arms to lift himself up, but instead of that he had

only his numerous little legs, which were in a different kind of perpetual motion and which, besides, he could not control. If he wanted to bend one, the first thing that happened was that it stretched itself out; and if he finally succeeded in getting this leg to do what he wanted, all the others in the meantime, as if set free, began to work in the most intensely painful agitation. "Just don't stay in bed being useless," Gregor said to himself.

First he tried to get out of bed with the lower part of his body, but this lower part—which by the way he had not seen yet and which he could not form a clear picture of—proved too difficult to budge; it was taking so long; and when finally, almost out of his mind, he lunged forward with all his force, without caring, he had picked the wrong direction and slammed himself violently against the lower bedpost, and the scaring pain he felt taught him that exactly the lower part of his body was, for the moment anyway, the most sensitive.

He therefore tried to get the upper part of his body out of bed first and warily turned his head toward the edge of the bed. This worked easily, and in spite of its width and weight, the mass of his body finally followed, slowly, the movement of his head. But when at last he stuck his head over the edge of the bed into the air, he got too scared to continue any further, since if he finally let himself fall in this position,

it would be a miracle if he didn't injure his head. And just now he had better not for the life of him lose consciousness; he would rather stay in bed.

But when, once again, after the same exertion, he lay in his original position, sighing, and again watched his little legs struggling, if possible more fiercely, with each other and saw no way of bringing peace and order into this mindless motion, he again told himself that it was impossible for him to stay in bed and that the most rational thing was to make any sacrifice for even the smallest hope of freeing himself from the bed. But at the same time he did not forget to remind himself occasionally that thinking things over calmly-indeed, as calmly as

.

THE METAMORPHOSIS

7

possible-was much better than jumping to desperate decisions. At such moments he fixed his eyes as sharply as possible on the window, but unfortunately there was little confidence and cheer to be gotten from the view of the morning fog, which shrouded even the other side of the narrow street. "Seven o'clock already," he said to himself as the alarm clock struck again, "seven o'clock already and still such a fog." And for a little while he lay quietly, breathing shallowly, as if expecting,

perhaps, from the complete silence the return of things to the way they really and naturally were.

But then he said to himself, "Before it strikes a quarter past seven, I must be completely out of bed without fail. Anyway, by that time someone from the firm will be here to find out where I am, since the office opens before seven." And now he started rocking the complete length

of his body out of the bed with a smooth rhythm. If he let himself topple out of bed in this way, his head, which on falling he planned to lift up sharply, would presumably remain unharmed. His back seemed to be hard; nothing was likely to happen to it when it fell onto the rug. His biggest misgiving came from his concern about the loud crash that was bound to occur and would probably create, if not terror, at least anxiety behind all the doors. But that would have to be risked.

When Gregor's body already projected halfway out of bed-the new method was more of a game than a struggle, he only had to keep on rocking and jerking himself along-he thought how simple everything would be if he could get some help. Two strong persons-he thought of his father and the maid-would have been completely sufficient; they would only have had to shove their arms under his arched back, in this way scoop him off the bed, bend down with their burden, and then just be careful and patient while he managed to swing himself down

onto the floor, where his little legs would hopefully acquire some purpose. Well, leaving out the fact that the doors were locked, should he really call for help? In spite of all his miseries, he could not repress a

smile at this thought.

He was already so far along that when he rocked more strongly he

could hardly keep his balance, and very soon he would have to commit

himself, because in five minutes it would be a quarter past seven when the doorbell rang. "It's someone from the firm," he said to himself and almost froze, while his little legs only danced more quickly.

For a moment everything remained quiet. "They're not going to answer," Gregor said to himself, captivated by some senseless hope. But then, of course, the maid went to the door as usual with her firm stride

and opened up. Gregor only had to hear the visitor's first word of greeting to know who it was-the office manager himself. Why was only Gregor condemned to work for a firm where at the slightest omission

they immediately suspected the worst? Were all employees louts without exception, wasn't there a single loyal, dedicated worker among them

8

FRA:>IZ KAFKA

who, when he had not fully utilized a few hours of the morning for

the firm, was driven half-mad by pangs of conscience and was actually

unable to get out of bed? Really, wouldn't it have been enough to send

one of the apprentices to find out-if this prying were absolutely

necessary-did the manager himself have to come, and did the whole

innocent family have to be shown in this way that the investigation of this suspicious affair could be entrusted only to the intellect of the manager? And more as a result of the excitement produced in Gregor by these thoughts than as a result of any real decision, he swung himself out of bed with all his might. There was a loud thump, but it was not a real crash. The fall was broken a little by the rug, and Gregor's back was more elastic than he had thought, which explained the not very noticeable muffled sound. Only he had not held his head carefully enough and hit it; he turned it and rubbed it on the rug in anger and pain.

"Something fell in there," said the manager in the room on the left. Gregor tried to imagine whether something like what had happened to him today could one day happen even to the manager; you really had to grant the possibility. But, as if in rude reply to this question, the manager took a few decisive steps in the next room and made his patent leather boots creak. From the room on the right his sister whispered, to inform Gregor, "Gregor, the manager is here." "I know," Gregor said to himself; but he did not dare raise his voice enough for his sister to hear.

"Gregor," his father now said from the room on the left, "the manager has come and wants to be informed why you didn't catch the early train. We

don't know what we should say to him. Besides, he wants to speak to you personally. So please open the door. He will certainly be so kind as to excuse the disorder of the room." "Good morning, I'ver. Samsa," the manager called in a friendly voice. "There's something the matter with him," his mother said to the manager while his father was still at the door, talking. "Believe me, sir, there's something the matter with him. Otherwise how would Gregor have missed a train? That boy has nothing on his mind but the business. It's almost begun to rile me that he never goes out nights. He's been back in the city for eight days now, but every night he's been home. He sits there with us at the table, quietly reading the paper or studying train schedules. It's already a distraction for him when he's busy working with his fretsaw.⁸ For instance, in the span of two or three evenings he carved a little frame. You'll be amazed how pretty it is; it's hanging inside his room. You'll see it right away when Gregor opens the door. You know, I'm glad that you've come, sir. We would never have gotten Gregor to open the door by ourselves; he's so stubborn. And there's certainly something wrong

8. A saw with a long, narrow, fine-toothed blade used for cutting thin wooden boards into patterns.

THE METAMORPHOSIS

with him, even though he said this morning there wasn't." "I'm coming right away," said Gregor slowly and deliberately, not minding in order not to miss a word of the conversation. "I haven't any other explanation myself," said the manager. "I hope it's nothing serious. On the other hand, I must say that we businessmen-fortunately or unfortunately, whichever you prefer-very often simply have to overcome a slight indisposition for business reasons." "So can the manager come in now?" asked his father, impatient, and knocked on the door again. "No," said Gregor. In the room on the left there was an embarrassing silence; in the room on the right his sister began to sob.

Why didn't his sister go in to the others? She had probably just got out of bed and not even started to get dressed. Then what was she crying about? Because he didn't get up and didn't let the manager in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because then the boss would start hounding his parents about the old debts? For the time being, certainly, her worries were unnecessary. Gregor was still here and hadn't the slightest intention of letting the family down. True. at the moment he was lying on the rug, and no one knowing his condition could seriously have expected him to let the manager in. But just because of this slight discourtesy. for which an appropriate excuse would easily be

found later 011, Gregor could not simply be dismissed. Ami to
Gregor it seemed much more sensible to leave him alone now than to
bother him with crying and persuasion. But it was just the uncertainty
that was tormenting the others and excused their behavior.

"Mr. Samsa," the manager now called, raising his voice. "What's the
matter? You barricade yourself in your room. answer honestly - 'yes' and 'no.'

cause your parents serious, unnecessary hurry. and you neglect- I
mention this only in passing-your duties to the firm in a really shocking
manner. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and of your

employer and ask you in all seriousness for an immediate, clear
explanation. I'm amazed, amazed. I thought I knew you to be a quiet,
reasonable person, and now you suddenly seem to want to start strutting
about, indulging strange whims. The head of the firm did suggest to

me this morning a possible explanation for your tardiness-it concerned
the cash payments recently entrusted to you-but really. I practically

give my word of honor that this explanation could not be right. But

now, seeing your incomprehensible obstinacy, I am about to lose even

the slightest desire to stick up for you in any way at all. And your job

is not the most secure. Originally I intended to tell you all this in

private, but since you make me waste my time here for nothing, I don't

see why your parents shouldn't hear too. Your performance of late has

been very unsatisfactory; I know it is not the best season for doing

business, we all recognize that; but a season for not doing any business, there is no such thing. Mr. Samsa, such a thing cannot be tolerated."

"But, sir," cried Gregor, beside himself, in his excitement forgetting

10

FRANZ KAFKA

everything else, "I'm just opening up, in a minute. A slight indisposition, a dizzy spell, prevented me from getting up. I'm still in bed. But I already feel fine again. I'm just getting out of bed. Just be patient for

a minute! I'm not as well as I thought yet. But really I'm fine. How

something like this could just take a person by surprise! Only last night

I was fine, my parents can tell you, or wait, last night I already had a

slight premonition. They must have been able to tell by looking at me.

Why didn't I report it to the office! But you always think that you'll get

over a sickness without staying home. Sir! Spare my parents! There's

no basis for any of the accusations that you're making against me now;

no one has ever said a word to me about them. Perhaps you haven't

seen the last orders I sent in. Anyway, I'm still going on the road with

the eight o'clock train; these few hours of rest have done me good.

Don't let me keep you, sir. I'll be at the office I'll myself right away, and

be so kind as to tell them this, and give my respects to the head of the

firn1."

And while Gregor hastily blurted all this out, hardly knowing what he was saying, he had easily approached the chest of drawers, probably as a result of the practice he had already gotten in bed, and now he tried to raise himself up against it. He actually intended to open the door, actually present himself and speak to the manager; he was eager to find out what the others, who were now so anxious to see him, would say at the sight of him. If they were shocked, then Gregor had no further responsibility and could be calm. But if they took everything calmly, then he, too, had no reason to get excited and could, if he hurried, actually be at the station by eight o'clock. At first he slid off the polished chest of drawers a few times, but at last, giving himself a final push, he stood upright; he no longer paid any attention to the pains in his abdomen, no matter how much they were burning. Now he let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair, clinging to its slats with his little legs. But by doing this he had gotten control of himself and fell silent, since he could now listen to what the manager was saying.

"Did you understand a word?" the manager was asking his parents.

"He isn't trying to make fools of us, is he?" "My Cod," cried his mother, already in tears, "maybe he's seriously ill, and here we are, torturing him. Crete! Crete!" she then cried. "Mother?" called his sister from the other side. They communicated by way of Gregor's room. "Go to

the doctor's immediately. Gregor is sick. Hurry, get the doctor. Did you just hear Gregor talking?" "That was the voice of an animal," said the manager, in a tone conspicuously soft compared with the mother's yelling. "Anna!" "Anna!"⁹ the father called through the foyer into the kitchen, clapping his hands, "get a locksmith right away!" And already

the two girls were running with rustling skirts through the foyer-how

9. Anna is presumably the name of the maid who also does the cooking; hence she is later

referred to as "the pre-ious cook." See below, p. 24, n. 5.

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THE METAMORPHOSIS

II

could his sister ha\c gotten dressed so quickly?-and tearing open the door to the apartment. The door could not be heard slamming; they had probably left it open, as is the custom in homes where a great misfortune has occurred.¹

But Gregor had become much calmer. It was true that they no longer understood his words, though they had seemed clear enough to him, clearer than before, probably because his ear had grown accustomed to them. But still, the others now belie\ed that there was something

the matter with him and were ready to help him. The assurance and confidence with which the first measures had been taken did him good.

He felt integrated into human society once again and hoped for marvelous, amazing feats from both the doctor and the locksmith, without really distinguishing sharply between them. In order to make his voice as clear as possible for the crucial discussions that were approaching, he cleared his throat a little-taking pains, of course, to do so in a very muffled manner, since this noise, too, might sound different from human coughing, a thing he no longer trusted himself to decide. In the next room, meanwhile, everything had become completely still. Perhaps his parents were sitting at the table with the manager, whispering; perhaps they were all leaning against the door and listening.

Gregor slowly lugged himself toward the door, pushing the chair in front of him, then let go of it, threw himself against the door, held himself upright against it-the pads on the bottom of his little legs exuded a little sticky substance-and for a moment rested there from the exertion. But then he got started turning the key in the lock with his mouth. Unfortunate!- it seemed that he had no real teeth-what was he supposed to grip the key with?-but in compensation his jaws, of course, were very strong; with their help he actually got the key moving and paid no attention to the fact that he was undoubtedly hurting himself in some way, for a brown liquid came out of his mouth, flowed over the key, and dripped onto the floor. "Listen," said the

manager in the next room, "he's turning the key." This was great encouragement to Gregor; but C\cryonc should ha\c cheered him on, his father and mother too. "Co, Gregor," they should ha\c called, "keep going, at that lock, harder, harder!" And in the delusion that they were all following his efforts with suspense, he clamped his jaws madly on the key with all the strength he could muster. Depending on the progress of the key, he danced around the lock; holding himself upright only by his mouth, he clung to the key, as the situation demanded, or pressed it down again with the whole weight of his body. The clearer click of the lock as it finally snapped back positi\cly woke Gregor up. With a sigh of relief he said to himself, "So I didn't need the locksmith

I. :\ belief found among Jewish mystics, as well as in m;my older European cultures, holds that

the doors or windows of a hotL,<' in which there has been a recent death must be left open

to facilitate the exit of the :\ngcl of Death.

12

FRANZ KAFKA

after all," and laid his head clown on the handle in order to open wide [one \ving of the double cloors].²

Since he had to usc this method of opening the door, it was really opened \cry \ide \hile he himself \was still im·isible. He first had to

cd!;c slo\\ly around the one \\ing of the door, and do so \\ery carefully if he ,as not to fall flat on his back just before entering. He was still busy with this difficult mancm·er and had no time to pay attention to anything else \\hen he heard the manager burst out \\ith a loud "Oh!" -it sounded like a rush of \\ind-and now he could see him, standing closest to the door, his hand pressed m·er his open mouth, slowly backing away, as if repulsed by an im·isible, unrelenting force. His mother-in spite of the manager's presence she stood with her hair still unbraided from the night, sticking out in all dtrections-first looked at his father with her hands clasped, then took two steps toward Gregor, and sank down in the midst of her skirts spreading out around her, her face completely hidden on her breast. \\ith a hostile expression his father clenched his fist, as if to dri\\c Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly around the li\\ing room, shielded his eyes with his hands, and sobbed with hem·es of his powerful chest.

No\\ Gregor did not enter the room after all but leaned against the inside of the firmly bolted wing of the door, so that only half his body was \\isible and his head abm·e it, cocked to one side and peeping out at the others. In the meantime it had grown much lighter; across the street one could see clearly a section of the endless, grayish-black building opposite-it was a hospital-with its regular \\indows starkly piercing the

fast; the rain was still coming down, but only in large, separately visible drops that were also pelting the ground literally one

at a time. The breakfast dishes were laid out lavishly on the table, since for his father breakfast was the most important meal of the day, which he would prolong for hours while reading various newspapers. On the wall directly opposite hung a photograph of Gregor from his army days, in a lieutenant's uniform, his hand on his sword, a carefree smile on his lips, demanding respect for his bearing and his rank. The door to the foyer 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 going down.

"Well," said Gregor-and he was thoroughly aware of being the only one who had kept calm-'Til get dressed right away, pack up my samples, and go. Will you, will you please let me go? No, sir, you see, I'm not stubborn and I'm willing to work; traveling is a hardship, but

without it I couldn't live. Where are you going, sir? To the office? Yes?

Will you give an honest report of everything? A man might find for a moment that he was unable to work, but that's exactly the right time

2. Literally. "the door."

THE METAMORPHOSIS

to remember his past accomplishments and to consider that later on, when the obstacle has been removed, he's bound to work all the harder and more efficiently. I'm under so many obligations to the head of the firm, as you know very well. Besides, I also have my parents and my sister to worry about. I'm in a tight spot, but I'll also work my way out again. Don't make things harder for me than they already are. Stick up for me in the office, please. Trading salesmen aren't well liked there, I know. People think they make a fortune leading the gay life. No one has any particular reason to rectify this prejudice. But you, sir, you have a better perspective on things than the rest of the office, and a better perspective, just between the two of us, than the head of the firm himself, who in his capacity as owner easily lets his judgment be swayed against an employee. And you also know very well that the trading salesman, who is out of the office practically the whole year round, can so easily become the victim of gossip, contingencies, and unfounded accusations, against which he's completely unable to defend himself, since in most cases he knows nothing at all about them except when he returns exhausted from a trip, and back home gets to suffer on his own person the grim consequences, which can no longer be traced back to their causes. Sir, don't go away without a moment to tell me you think I'm at least partly right!"

But at Gregor's first words the manager had already turned away and with curled lips looked back at Gregor only over his twitching shoulder. And during Gregor's speech he did not stand still for a minute but, without letting Gregor out of his sight, backed toward the door, yet nearly gradually, as if there were some secret prohibition against leaving the room. He was already in the foyer, and from the sudden movement with which he took his last step from the living room, one might have thought he had just burned the sole of his foot. In the foyer, however, he stretched his right hand far out toward the staircase, as if nothing less than an unearthly deliverance were awaiting him there.

Gregor realized that he must on no account let the manager go away in this mood if his position in the firm were not to be jeopardized in the extreme. His parents did not understand this too well; in the course of the years they had formed the conviction that Gregor was set for life in this firm; and furthermore, they were so preoccupied with their immediate troubles that they had lost all consideration for the future. But Gregor had this forethought. The manager must be detained, calmed down, convinced, and finally won over; Gregor's and the family's future depended on it! If only his sister had been there! She was perceptive; she had already begun to cry when Gregor was still lying calmly on his back. And certainly the manager, this ladies' man, would have listened

to her; she would have shut the front door and in the foyer talked him out of his scare. But his sister was not there; Gregor had to handle the situation himself. And without stopping to realize that he had no idea

14

FRANZ KAFKA

what his new faculties of movement were, and without stopping to realize either that his speech had possibly-indeed, probably-not been understood again, he let go of the wing of the door; he shoved himself through the opening, intending to go to the manager, who was already on the landing, ridiculously holding onto the banisters with both hands; but groping for support, Gregor immediately fell down with a little cry onto his numerous little legs. This had hardly happened when for the first time that morning he had a feeling of physical well-being; his little legs were on firm ground; they obeyed him completely, as he noted to his joy; they even strained to carry him away wherever he wanted to go; and he already believed that final recovery from all his sufferings was imminent. But at that very moment, as he lay on the floor rocking with repressed motion, not far from his mother and just opposite her, she, who had seemed so completely self-absorbed, all at once jumped up, her arms stretched wide, her fingers spread, crying, "Help, for God's

sake, help!" held her head bent as if to see Gregor better, but inconsistently darted madly backward instead; had forgotten that the table laden with the breakfast dishes stood behind her; sat down on it hastily,

as if her thoughts were elsewhere, when she reached it; and did not seem to notice at all that near her the big coffeepot had been knocked over and coffee was pouring in a steady stream onto the rug.

"Mother, Mother," said Gregor softly and looked up at her. For a minute the manager had completely slipped his mind; on the other hand at the sight of the spilling coffee he could not resist snapping his jaws several times in the air. At this his mother screamed once more,

fled from the table, and fell into the arms of his father, who came rushing up to her. But Gregor had no time now for his parents; the manager was already on the stairs; with his chin on the banister, he

was taking a last look back. Gregor was off to a running start, to be as

sure as possible of catching up with him; the manager must have suspected something like this, for he leaped down several steps and disappeared; but still he shouted "Agh," and the sound carried through the whole staircase. Unfortunately the manager's flight now seemed to

confuse his father completely, who had been relatively calm until now,

for instead of running after the manager himself, or at least not hindering Gregor in his pursuit, he seized in his right hand the manager's cane, which had been left behind on a chair with his hat and overcoat,

picked up in his left hand a heavy newspaper from the table, and stamping his feet, started brandishing the cane and the newspaper to drive Gregor