

Franz Kafka

The Metamorphosis

1

“So,” said Gregor who was perfectly aware that he was the only one who managed to retain his composure, “I will get dressed, take the samples and leave. And you want me to leave, don’t you? Well, Mr. Executive, you see that I am not a stubborn man and I take pleasure in my work; travelling is exhausting, but I would not be able to survive without it. Where are you going, Mr. Executive? To the bureau? Is that correct? Are you going to report everything? There can be a time in a man’s life when he finds himself unable to work, yet that it is a perfect occasion to recall the man’s prior achievements, hoping that it would become an incentive for him to work even harder in the future, once this nuisance dissolves. As you know, I am greatly obliged to the director. On the other hand, I have to take care of my parents and my sister. Do not make the situation worse for me. I am aware that people do not think fondly of the salesmen. They assume they [the salesmen] earn absurd amounts of money and live indulging in all kinds of pleasures. This is a prejudice no one ever questions. But you, Mr Executive, you know what it is actually like better than the rest of the

staff, better, I dare say, than even our director, who, as an entrepreneur is prone to make a wrong assumption about an employee. You know also that, spending most of the year away from the firm, a salesman can fall prey to gossip and random and ungrounded accusations against which he cannot even protect himself, since he only becomes aware of them once, exhausted, he returns from a trip and faces their repercussions. Mr Executive, do not leave without letting me know, if only through a single word, that at least partly you acknowledge that I am right!”

Yet the moment Gregor started speaking, the Executive turned aside and, frowning, glanced at him over his shoulder that kept twitching. During Gregor’s speech, he did not stand still for a mere second, and, instead, without taking his eyes off, attempted to retreat from the room to the door; he moved slowly, however, as if some mystical power was keeping him inside. He already reached the hallway and, upon noticing how abruptly he was moving one last step away from the living room, one could assume he got his foot burned. Once he was in the anteroom, he reached out his hand to the stairs, as if some heavenly bliss was awaiting him there.

Gregor realized that he by no means should let the executive leave the house in this mood unless he wanted to put his position at the firm on the line. The parents were not fully aware of this; over the years,

they grew accustomed to the fact that Gregor worked in the firm and assumed that he would work there forever, and these new troubles they had to endure only deprived them further of the true perception. Yet Gregor was perceptive. The executive has to be delayed, calmed down, convinced, and, eventually, prompted to side with Gregor, since both Gregor's and his family's future depended on this! Oh, if only his sister had not left! She is clever: she began to cry back when Gregor was calmly lying on his back. And, of course, the Executive – a ladies' man – would have obeyed her; she would have closed the door and made all of his fears go away with a persuasive speech. Yet since it was the sister who had left, Gregor had to do everything himself. Without considering either the fact that he did not get a tight grasp of his ability to move or the fact that his speech, perhaps, had stayed incoherent, he went through the doors. He was about to reach the Executive – who, upon coming out, clung to the stair rails in a funny manner – when, after an unsuccessful attempt to find anything he could lean on, he fell down on all of his legs. As soon as it happened, his body felt comfortable for the first time this morning; his legs stood on a solid ground and, as he cheerfully noticed, obeyed him without a hitch. While they were trying to evenly carry him to the exact spot he was moving towards, Gregor began to think that his tortures were at last about to be over. Yet as he was rocking back and

forth, lying not far from his mother, she suddenly jumped on her feet and spread her hands and fingers, screaming, "Help! For God's sake, help!" She tilted her head, as if trying to take a closer look at Gregor; however, instead she ran backwards, forgetting about the coffee table behind her. As she reached the table, she absentmindedly sat down on it, apparently unaware that, next to her, a stream of coffee was pouring from a knocked-over coffee pot straight on the rug.

"Mother, mother", quietly uttered Gregor and raised his eyes on her.

For a moment, he completely lost the executive out of his mind; however, as he noticed the coffee, he could not help himself and spasmodically gasped for air. Upon seeing this, the mother screamed, jumped off the table and fell down on the father who rushed to help her. Yet Gregor had no time to take care of his parents; the executive already reached the stairs. Resting his chin on the stair rail, he cast the last, farewell look at what was now behind him. Gregor was about to run to catch up with him, yet, apparently, the executive had predicted that intention, since, after jumping over a few stairs, he vanished. The only thing he exclaimed was:

"Ew!", and this sound scattered across the hallway. Unfortunately, the executive's retreat must have finally upset the father, who had been holding up relatively well until that moment, since, instead of chasing the executive himself or, at least, letting Gregor

do that without any obstructions, he grabbed the cane that the executive left on a chair, along with his coat and hat, with his right hand, and with his left hand he took a large newspaper, and, stomping and waving, began to force Gregor to crawl back towards his room. All of Gregor's appeals proved futile, besides, his father did not even understand those appeals. Regardless of how humbly Gregor nodded, the father only kept stomping more energetically. Despite the cold weather outside, Gregor's mother opened a window and, leaning out of it, she hid her face in her hands. A strong wind blew through a space between the window and the staircase, the curtains flew up, the newspapers rustled on the table, and a couple of pages scattered across the floor. The father was advancing relentlessly, releasing – like a wild man – hissing sounds on his way. Gregor, who did not yet master walking backwards, was moving very slowly. If only Gregor had turned, he would have immediately got to his room, yet he was afraid of provoking his father by his slow motions since the father's cane could at any moment bring a fatal blow on his back or head. Eventually, however, there was nothing else for Gregor to do, since, to his horror, he noticed that while walking backwards he was unable to even move in one direction; so, not taking his fearful eyes off his father even for a second, he began – as fast as he could, which was nevertheless slow – to turn around. Apparently, the father approved

of his good intentions: in addition to not prevent him from turning around, he even assisted Gregor to move forward by pushing him with the end of the cane. If only he stopped this obnoxious hissing! It was exasperating for Gregor. He was about to finish his turn, when, distracted by the hissing, he made a mistake and moved in the opposite direction. Yet as he finally put his head through the door, he became aware of the fact that his body was too wide to fit into it. The father, in his current state, would of course never realize that he had to open another part of the door to let Gregor inside. He had one recurring thought: to force Gregor into his room as soon as possible. By no means would he tolerate the amount of time it would take Gregor to prepare to stand straight and, possibly, try to get past the door in that manner. As if there were no obstructions, Gregor's father was now pushing Gregor with a peculiar noise; it appeared as if the sounds behind Gregor were produced not only by his father. This was becoming serious, so Gregor – come what may – pushed himself through the door. One side of his body was raised as he was lying diagonally in the passageway; a part of his body was badly injured and there were appalling blood marks on the white door. Soon, he was stuck and unable to move by himself. On one side, his legs were helplessly hanging and trembling, while on the other side they were painfully pressed to the floor. And then, forcefully, his father

gave him a truly salvatory kick by virtue of which Gregor, now smeared in blood, flew into his room. The door was closed with the cane with a following long-awaited silence.

2

By the time Gregor recovered from a troublesome dream that resembled fainting, the twilight had already fallen. Even if he had not been disturbed, he would have woken up not much later, as he felt rested enough; yet it seemed to him that he was awakened by someone's light steps and by the sound of a carefully locking door leading to the front room. The ceiling and the upper parts of the furniture were illuminated by the light coming from a lamppost outside, yet down there, in Gregor's part of the room, it was dark. Slowly and clumsily fumbling with the testicles which he just began to appreciate, Gregor crawled his way to the door to see what had happened. The left side of his body seemed to him as one long unpleasantly painful wound and he was limping both rows of his legs. Over the course of his morning adventures, one leg – miraculously, it was just that one – was heavily injured and now sluggishly dragged across the floor. Only as he reached the door did Gregor understand what it was that had lured him there: it was the smell of something edible. A bowl of milk with pieces of bread floating

inside was standing over there. He felt so happy he almost laughed; he was hungrier than he was in the morning, so he almost dipped his head into the bowl. Yet soon enough, disappointed, he took it out. In addition to the fact that the injured side of his body made eating difficult – and he could only eat with his mouth wide open and his entire body working, the milk, that had always been his favorite drink, which was of course why his sister brought it, now felt unsavoury. Almost disgustedly, he turned away from the bowl and crawled back, towards the center of the room.

In the living room, as Gregor could see through a crack in the door, someone set the lights on. Yet, ordinarily, at this time his father would emphatically read the newspaper to the mother, and, sometimes, to the sister, now not a single sound could be detected. Perhaps, this reading, his sister always had told and wrote him about, lately stopped to be a part of everyday life. Yet it was quiet all around, although, obviously, there were people in the room. “What a quiet life my family leads”, said Gregor and, staring at the ceiling, filled with pride for being able to create such a life for his family in this wonderful apartment. What if this contentment and serenity came to a horrible end? In order to escape from these thoughts, Gregor decided to warm his body up and crawled around the room.

Once over the course of that long evening one of

the side doors was slightly opened but abruptly closed again; same happened to another door. It appeared as if someone wanted to come in, yet was overtaken by fear. Gregor stopped directly in front of the door leading to the living room, in order to somehow lure in the indecisive visitor, or, at least, to find out who it was; however, the door was never opened again, and Gregor's anticipation proved fruitless. In the morning, when all of the doors were locked, everyone wanted to visit him. Now, however, when he opened one door by himself, and the others were, undoubtedly, open during an entire day, no one entered, while the keys stuck out on the outside.

Only late at night, the light in the living room was switched off, and then it was clear that his parents, as well as his sister, were still not asleep, since, as it was easy to hear, they were walking away on tiptoes. Of course, no one was going enter Gregor's room till morning, so he had enough time to ponder over how he should reconstruct his life. Yet the large spacious room where he had to lie flatly on the floor scared him, though he could not even see the root of this fear since he had been living in that room for five years. Almost unconsciously turning away, he rushed – not without a sense of shame – under the sofa, where, although he could not raise his head and his back had to be pressed down, he felt quite comfortable and was only upset by the fact that his body was too wide to fully fit under the

sofa.

He spent the entire night there, partly in a slumber which was occasionally disturbed by the feeling of hunger, and partly in worries and faded hopes, which inevitably led him to resolve that he had to act calmly and use his patience and tactfulness to ease his family's burdens that he brought upon them with his current state.

It was early in the morning – almost night time – when Gregor already had the chance to test the firmness of his new resolution, as his sister who was almost fully dressed, opened the door and cautiously peeked in his room. She did not notice Gregor immediately, yet, upon seeing him under the sofa – since, for God's sake, he had to be somewhere and he could not have just flown away! – got so scared that, unable to handle herself, she shut the door from the outside. Yet, as if repenting her own behavior, she immediately opened the door again and, tiptoeing, as if she was approaching a sick man or even a stranger, walked into the room. Gregor pushed his head to the edge of the sofa and watched her. Will she notice that he left the milk – not because he was not hungry – and bring something else, something that would suit him more? If she did not, he would sooner die from hunger than direct her attention to it, although he had an impulse to jump out, fall to her feet and ask her for something nice to eat. However, immediately after