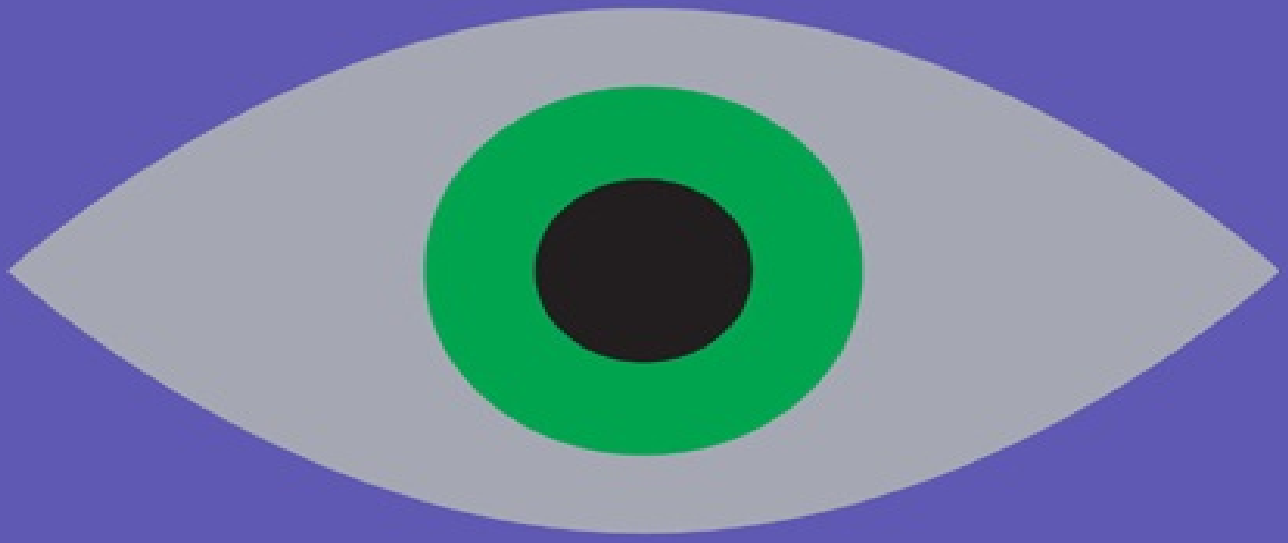


F. Kafka

The Sons



FRANZ KAFKA

The Sons

THE JUDGMENT, THE STOKER,
THE METAMORPHOSIS, AND
LETTER TO HIS FATHER

Introduction by
MARK ANDERSON

Schocken Books
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The Shocken Kafka Library

“The Judgment,” “The Stoker,” and “The Metamorphosis”
translated by Willa and Edwin Muir.

“Letter to His Father”
translated by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins.

All translations revised and updated by Arthur S. Wensinger.

INTRODUCTION

"I HAVE ONLY one request," Kafka wrote to his publisher Kurt Wolff in 1913. " 'The Stoker,' 'The Metamorphosis' … and 'The Judgment' belong together, both inwardly and outwardly. There is an obvious connection between the three and, even more important, a secret one, for which reason I would be reluctant to forego the chance of having them published together in a book, which might be called *The Sons*." The project was never realized. Kafka was almost completely unknown at the time, his books promised scant literary success or financial return, and, upon reflection, a "secret connection" between the stories must have struck Wolff as little more than a young author's whim, certainly not sufficient justification for republishing works that were about to be published separately. In any case the proposal disappears from their correspondence, a year later Wolff was sent to the front, and Kafka became embroiled in a personal crisis that threatened to invalidate the very "secret connection" he had wished to make public.

Now, more than seventy-five years later, *The Sons* have been brought together in newly revised translations under the title Kafka originally intended. Among all his writings, these three stories had for him unusual literary and personal significance. After years of unsuccessful attempts at writing, they came to him in a burst of inspiration in the fall and winter of 1912. He was never quite as happy with anything he ever wrote, for the stories seemed to him all of a piece—dramatic fictional narratives with their own powerful if somewhat bizarre logic. "The Judgment," which he wrote at a single sitting during the night of September 22, especially struck Kafka as an example of true literary accomplishment. As he wrote to his fiancée, Felice Bauer (to whom the story is dedicated), "The Judgment" had an "inner truth," an "indubitability" that brought tears to his eyes when he read it aloud to his sisters and a small group of friends. "The Metamorphosis," of course, has become Kafka's best-known story, Gregor Samsa's transformation into a gigantic bug now generally considered one of the most noteworthy if unlikely events in modern

fiction. Organized like a three-act play with a controlled narrative rise and fall, the story is perhaps Kafka's most classical, finished work. While less famous than the other two, "The Stoker" is a masterful short work that Kafka was quite attached to; he called it a "fragment" and had Wolff publish it in 1913 as an independent piece, although it is also the first chapter of his Chaplinesque first novel *Amerika*.*

The title Kafka proposed emphasizes the "obvious connection" between the stories: the theme of sons singled out for cruel and unusual punishment. But to focus attention on the sons is also to imply the fathers and the problem of generational conflict common to an entire epoch. A note in Kafka's diary, in reference to "The Judgment," reads: "Thoughts about Freud, naturally." And indeed, Freud's own essay on the primal struggle between fathers and sons, *Totem and Taboo*, was published the same year. The theme is also basic to the literary movement Kafka is most often associated with: German Expressionism. In 1914 the young Expressionist poet Walter Hasenclever, without any knowledge of Kafka's project, offered Kurt Wolff a play entitled *The Son*, which Wolff published in *Die Weissen Blätter*, the same literary journal in which he would print "The Metamorphosis" a year later. Banned during the war for its "anarchic" assault on patriarchal authority, Hasenclever's play became a rallying point for the young writers of his generation.

Yet Kafka's title strangely underscores the juvenile, dependent nature of his protagonists. Unlike Freud's narratives of *Vatermord*, these stories are about the banishment and death of children. And unlike the heroes of Expressionist scenarios, Kafka's literary progeny refuse to take up arms against their fathers. His sons accept their bizarre fate—they die or are banished without polemical fanfare, without resentment for their persecutors, and apparently without regret. Thus the oddest (and funniest) feature of "The Metamorphosis" is not Gregor's transformation into a monstrous vermin but his straight-faced acceptance of his fate. He never once reflects on the possible cause of his transformation or how he might reverse it, and just before death, while lost in a state of "empty and peaceful meditation," he thinks of his family "with tenderness and love." Karl Rossmann in "The Stoker" also remembers his parents fondly although, as his uncle remarks, they shipped him off to America after he had been molested by a family servant, "just as you throw a cat out of the house when it annoys you." Georg Bendemann in "The Judgment" is

the most astonishingly obedient son of all. When his father suddenly and inexplicably sentences him to death by drowning, he rushes from the room without another thought, and jumps off the nearest bridge, proclaiming his undying love for his parents as he drops into the river.

Despite its deadpan humor, this filial devotion has an extreme, even pathological quality that prevents us from reading Kafka's stories in conventional psychological and realist terms. Whereas a traditional nineteenth-century narrative of familial conflict might have focused on the son's emotional growth or heightened consciousness, Kafka depicts his protagonists as mentally vacant, enigmatic figures lacking in introspection and self-awareness. The sons remain sons, profoundly unaware of their past mistakes and incapable of being changed by them. Indeed, the trauma of their punishment seems to shock these semi-adults back into an emotional and intellectual state of early childhood. In "The Judgment" the shock comes midway through the story when the father stands up in bed, "radiant" with transcendent insight, while his grown son cowers in the corner like a little boy, his senses confused and his memory dulled. In "The Metamorphosis" the shock comes with the first sentence like a hammer-blow, thrusting Gregor Samsa—and the reader—into a radically new and foreign world. After his transformation Gregor leads a child's existence, excused from his hated employment as a traveling salesman and granted the illicit pleasure of playing alone in his room, free to discover and experiment with his new-found body. If he develops at all, it is in reverse, back to a lost innocence and purity. In "The Stoker" the shock actually occurs before the story's opening, when Karl Rossmann is "seduced" and banished to a foreign continent. But despite this initiation into adult experience—Karl is actually the father of a child—he retains his innocent naïveté and must be led about by the hand, alternately protected and abused by the grown-ups around him.

This lack of inner emotional development (or, at least, the lack of any tangible evidence of such development) makes Kafka's "sons" extremely difficult to interpret. In the classical sense, they lack the critical self-awareness to be truly tragic. But this "lack" is an emblem of their modernity: to remain a son is also to remain this side of transcendence, completion, and unity, a fragment of the full man or traditional, realist character. At the same time this static, "frozen" quality shifts the story's emphasis away from the realm of individual psychology and places it

squarely on the social *relations* between characters. This claim may seem odd in light of the prevailing tendency to read Kafka as the poet of modern, individual anxiety, divorced from social or historical realities. Yet Kafka's title *The Sons* defines his protagonists in terms of their families, as children still largely controlled by familial and social relations. In fact, one might say that the true subject of these stories is not the individual subject at all but the family—that social and even "animal" organism, as Kafka once called it, through which the child first learns to define its own identity.

This is the point where the "secret connection" mentioned in the letter to Wolff begins to emerge. While writing these stories, Kafka was for the first time contemplating leaving his family to marry a woman from Berlin, Felice Bauer, whom he had met in August 1912 and with whom he was conducting a clandestine correspondence. (Then twenty-nine, Kafka was still living with his parents in a room he characterized as a "connecting street" between the living room and the other bedrooms; hence his instructions to Felice to write to him at his office.) The letters and diaries from this period are filled with bitterness toward his family's intrusion on his free time, which he wanted to devote to his writing. In early October 1912, Hermann Kafka's insistence that his son help manage the family asbestos factory brought him to the verge of suicide. In November Kafka's mother found a letter from Felice in one of his coat pockets and secretly enlisted her support in controlling Franz's eating and sleeping habits. Kafka discovered the theft and, furious at this invasion of his privacy (which occurred while he was busy with "The Metamorphosis"), wrote a "wild" letter to Felice that gives us a revealing portrait of the state of his family relations:

> Everything had been so good; I was looking forward to enjoying in peace the happiness you give me … when along comes my mother and wrecks it all. I have always looked upon my parents as persecutors; until about a year ago I was indifferent to them and perhaps to the world at large, as some kind of lifeless thing, but I see now it was only suppressed fear, worry, and unhappiness. All parents want to do is drag one down to them, back to the old days from which one longs to free oneself and escape; they do it out of

love, of course, and that's what makes it so horrible.

Impelled by this antagonism for what he considered the humiliating conditions of his own dependence, Kafka undertook one of the most perceptive, rigorous, and devastating analyses of the modern family that exists in literature. This is the thematic significance of *The Sons*: the story of children whose parents attempt to "raise" them into adults yet, at the same time, "drag" them back to the "old days" of childhood dependence. Both in his literary and his personal writings, Kafka is a harsh critic of what he saw as the contradictory pedagogy of his period. As Gerhard Neumann has pointed out, this pedagogy (which goes back to the Enlightenment precept of compulsory education as a basis for individual freedom, or what the Germans call *Erziehung zur Freiheit*) presents the child with an impossible dilemma:

> The demand for action, which issues from the father in the form of educational maxims, is inherently contradictory and brings about the child's total disorientation: "Emancipate yourselves by following my example and become grown-ups" runs the one maxim: "yield through gratitude and remain children" runs the opposite one. The educational discourse coagulates into an order which cannot be obeyed: "I order you not to be so obedient!" (*Das Urteil. Text, Materialien, Kommentar*. Munich, 1981)

"The Judgment" provides a dramatic example of this dilemma. Georg Bendemann has been a model son, caring for his aging father and running the family business. His impending marriage will complete the generational shift from father to son, allowing him to continue the family name by starting a family of his own. But instead of letting his son replace him, Herr Bendemann rebels, reclaims his paternal authority, and reproaches his son for his "devilish" intentions. The almost-adult Georg is driven back into the submissiveness of childhood, finally flinging himself from the bridge into death "like the accomplished gymnast he had been in his youth, to his parents' pride."

"The Metamorphosis" and "The Stoker" also depict the impossibility of becoming an adult. As a grown-up traveling salesman, Gregor Samsa is

still the perfect son, living at home, paying off the family's debts, sacrificing himself in unacknowledged devotion to his dependent parents and sister. Whether self-willed or not, his metamorphosis turns the tables, reversing the parasitic relationship in his favor and forcing his family to find work and support his leisure. Like the early grotesque drawings of Alfred Kubin, a Prague contemporary and acquaintance whose work meant much to Kafka, Gregor's monstrous form is meant to scandalize and disempower the conformist, petty bourgeois world around him, represented not only by the Samsas and the chief clerk, but especially by the three uncannily indentical boarders. In the quiet second movement of the story, Gregor's attempt at self-liberation and self-definition acquires some reality: the memory of his prior human enslavement recedes into the distance, his body grows lighter and freer, he hangs from the ceiling in "blissful absorption" while a gentle, musical vibration—the harmony of existence before the Fall—rocks him back and forth. But of course the metamorphosis also increases his childlike dependence and vulnerability: the model son transformed into a happy bug simply becomes the outcast son, is bombarded with apples by the father, and in the end is literally thrown out of the house by the cleaning woman.

In "The Stoker" Karl Rossmann has also been banished from the family, but fails to take any positive steps toward adulthood. The ship's stoker, a childlike, inarticulate but physically massive figure whose relation to Karl is animated by a strong homoerotic undercurrent, seems to represent a kind of anti-father, at once victim and protector. But Karl's family returns in the guise of his Uncle Jacob, a wealthy and powerful senator who puts a quick end to the relationship with the stoker. The uncle promises protection, but (as we know from subsequent chapters in the novel) Karl will be repeatedly cast out of any secure, stable environment where he might settle, establish roots, and raise a family. In Kafka's vision, in fact, America becomes a largely uninterrupted landscape of homeless and dispossessed persons, ersatz families forming and dissolving in an endless and futile process.

And yet, and yet—Kafka's account of the sons' destruction within the modern family sounds an unmistakable note of triumph. However terrible the content of these stories, their form remains sublimely self-assured, even jubilant. This discrepancy arises from Kafka's own

ambiguous relation—both indentification and repudiation—to the protagonists of his fictions. Like Georg Bendemann, Gregor Samsa, and Karl Rossmann (whose names are all coded versions of his own), Kafka is still a son living at home, exposed to the whim and caprice of his family. Yet in writing down their stories of suicide, grotesque metamorphosis, and banishment to America, Kafka rises above their fate, can control it with the sovereign hand of the author, can dispose of their lives like an almighty father.

As author, Kafka is the father of his literary protagonists. Thus the moment in which he writes the final sentence of "The Judgment" in his diary—the sentence narrating Georg's death—signals his own birth as a writer. Kafka told his friend Max Brod that the story's final image of "traffic" (*Verkehr*, a word with sexual connotations) streaming across the bridge had reminded him of a "giant orgasm." Similarly, in his diary entry for February 11, 1913, he notes that the story came out of him "like a real birth, covered with filth and slime." In this sense *The Sons* are Kafka's literary offspring, his children, as he frequently points out to Felice. "Today I am sending you 'The Stoker,' " he writes in June 1913 when the story was first published. "Receive the little lad kindly, sit him down beside you and praise him, as he longs for you to do."

Kafka clearly understood these stories as part of his own effort to liberate himself from his parents' grip. Marriage to Felice was part of his plan, but more important, indeed vital to the possibility of marriage, was his own literary paternity. Every finished story (every fictional death) marked his growing independence and literary adulthood, and brought him closer to his future fiancée. Without *The Sons,* he once confided to Felice, he would never have dared to approach her with the idea of marriage. This explains his unusual insistence to Kurt Wolff on having the stories published as quickly and as often as possible: he needed the social legitimation that only a published work would confer, in his parents' and Felice's eyes. Stories thus had to be written, given his name, printed, and sent out into the world as his children, his "sons."

Eventually, however, literary paternity posed an obstacle to an actual marriage and real children. The dilemma is already evident in the long, tormented marriage proposal Kafka wrote in June 1913, a few days after the publication of "The Judgment" and "The Stoker." A model of ambiguity and counterstatement, the proposal relates directly to the

conflict between literary and biological paternity:

> Now consider, Felice, the change that marriage would bring about for us, what each would lose and each would gain.… You would lose Berlin, the office you enjoy, your girl friends, the small pleasures of life, the prospect of marrying a decent, cheerful, healthy man, of having beautiful, healthy children for whom, if you think about it, you clearly long.… Instead of sacrificing yourself for real children, which would be in accordance with your nature as a healthy girl, you would have to sacrifice yourself for this man who is childish, but childish in the worst sense, and who at best might learn from you, letter by letter, the ways of human speech.

During the five years of their correspondence, ostensibly to frighten Felice away from him, Kafka paints a grim portrait of the monastic solitude his writing requires, an everlasting "night" during which Felice would bring him his meals in a dark, subterranean writing chamber. In August 1917, four years after his first proposal, Kafka coughed blood; his tuberculosis was diagnosed the following month, the engagement with Felice broken off definitively in December for reasons of "health." In fact, Kafka saw his illness as merely the physical symptom of a wound that had been opened the night he wrote his first son story, "The Judgment," and entered into direct conflict with his father.

Increasingly, writing became a means of doing battle with his father, and patriarchal authority in general. It is in this period that Kafka considered collaborating on an anti-patriarchal journal with Otto Gross, a disciple of Freud who, in a *cause célèbre* of the Expressionist movement, had been arrested, at the request of his father, and interned in a psychiatric clinic. In 1917, Kafka published a collection of somber, violent stories called *A Country Doctor*, which he dedicated to Hermann Kafka in a combative spirit. Here again, literary paternity is opposed to biological procreation. One of the stories is entitled "Eleven Sons"; when asked about the significance of this title, Kafka replied that the sons were "simply eleven stories" he was working on at the time. In another story, "A Dream," he relates a vision of his own literary immortality: as Joseph K. sinks into an open grave, his name in gold letters writes itself

across the tombstone with mighty flourishes.

The meaning of such literary gestures, no matter how aggressive, was no doubt lost on Hermann Kafka who, when presented with a copy of the book dedicated to him, instructed his son to "put it on my bedside table," where it remained, unread. Two years later, in November 1919, still smarting from his father's refusal to let him marry Julie Wohryzek, the daughter of a synagogue custodian, on the grounds that it would have "dishonored" the family name, Kafka sat down to write a one-hundred-page "lawyer's letter" indicting his father for the tangle of aborted literary projects and frustrated marriage attempts that had left him, at the age of thirty-six, still a son. In many ways the "Letter to His Father" formulates explicitly the same critique of the bourgeois family that Kafka had put into literary terms seven years earlier in *The Sons*. The very first pages of the letter begin to play with titles, dialogue, and images from the earlier stories. Kafka speaks of his father's "judgment" of him and compares their fight to that of bedbugs, which not only bite but suck their enemy's blood. Not surprisingly, the bulk of the letter details the contradictory education he received as a child and that also thwarts his literary progeny:

> What was brought to the table had to be eaten, the quality of the food was not to be discussed—but you yourself often found the food inedible, called it "this swill," said "that cow" (the cook) had ruined it.… Bones mustn't be cracked with the teeth, but you could. Vinegar must not be sipped noisily, but you could. The main thing was that the bread should be cut straight. But it didn't matter that you did it with a knife dripping with gravy.… In themselves these would have been utterly insignificant details, they only became depressing for me because you, so tremendously the authoritative man, did not keep the commandments you imposed on me.

What takes place at the dinner table is repeated in Hermann Kafka's numerous stories of his difficult childhood with which he would reproach his children for their comfortable, middle-class existence. Under other conditions, Kafka writes, such stories might have been educational, might have encouraged him to endure similar torments and

become like his father. “But that wasn’t what you wanted at all,” he maintains; such efforts to “distinguish oneself in the world” were labeled ingratitude, disobedience, treachery, and madness. “And so, while on the one hand you tempted me to [imitate you] by means of example, story, and humiliation, on the other hand you forbade it with the utmost severity.” This contradictory pedagogy finally culminates in the impossibility of establishing an independent domestic life, a state Kafka longingly describes as an unattainable Eden. “Marrying, founding a family, accepting all the children that come,” Kafka writes in the “Letter to His Father,” “is, I am convinced, the utmost a human being can succeed in doing.” Yet Hermann Kafka’s nature blocked him from this realm:

> Sometimes I imagine the map of the world spread out and you stretched diagonally across it. And I feel as if I could consider living in only those regions that either are not covered by you or are not within your reach. And, in keeping with the conception I have of your magnitude, these are not many and not very comforting regions—and marriage is not among them.

Reading the “Letter to His Father” together with *The Sons*, one understands that the early stories are also a form of personal correspondence. For a writer who once declared that he was “made of literature,” the distinction between fiction and autobiography must have seemed irrelevant. Thus Kafka often used his novels and stories to negotiate problems in his personal life. To Felice he once declared that his novel *The Man Who Disappeared* would give her “a clearer idea of the good in me than the mere hints in the longest letters of the longest lifetime.” Later in their correspondence, when the relationship had reached an impasse, he asked Felice if her father was familiar with “The Judgment.” “If not, please give it to him to read,” he requested. And in the “Letter to His Father” he also admits the inherently epistolary origin of his literary texts: “My writing was all about you; all I did there, after all, was to bemoan what I could not bemoan upon your breast. It was an intentionally long and drawn-out leave-taking from you.…”

It is no coincidence that *The Sons* abound in letters and scenes of

letter-writing. Letters mark turning points in the stories, written means of mediating effectively in human relations. After Gregor Samsa's death, the family sits down to write letters of resignation to their employers—a new life is beginning. In "The Stoker" Karl's true identity is suddenly established by his Uncle Jacob with a letter written by the family servant. But the best example is "The Judgment," whose sudden composition seems to have been triggered by Kafka's first letter to Felice Bauer. The story begins with Georg playing dreamily with a letter he has just finished to a friend in Russia, takes a decisive turn when Herr Bendemann announces that *he too* has been corresponding with the friend, and concludes with what is in essence Georg's suicide letter: "Dear Parents, I have always loved you."

This is not the place to enter into the intricate and persistent relations between Kafka's writing and his personal biography. It is enough to note that the "secret connection" between the literary portrayal of sons also links the stories to Kafka's own poignant letter to his father. Taking Kafka's lead, we might consider *The Sons* as extended, indeed infinite letters, more revealing in their own indirect, literary way than "the longest letters of the longest lifetime." By the same token, his extended letter to Hermann Kafka (which he showed to his mother but never sent to his father) can be read on a par with the other literary works. It tells the most moving "son story" of all, the story of a writer whose very literary identity and vision depended on his condition as a son.

Only in the last year of his life did Kafka manage to break away from his parents and Prague, to live in Berlin with a young Jewish woman from Poland named Dora Dymant. Despite the advanced state of Kafka's tuberculosis, they planned to marry; but Dora's father, an Orthodox rabbi, objected. Thus Kafka stayed a son all his life, and after his death, in June 1924, was brought back to Prague to be buried in the family plot, where his parents were placed a few years later. Today his name is inscribed on the single family tombstone, just above his father's name.

MARK ANDERSON

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*This is the title chosen by Max Brod when he published the novel after Kafka's death. Kafka's title was actually *Der Verschollene*, or The Man Who Disappeared.

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATIONS

AMONG THE COUNTLESS examples of translation of modern European literature into English there are few critically influential and truly potent texts. The Muirs' translations of Kafka are surely among them. It is no exaggeration to say that the English Kafka—from the 1930s through the 1950s especially—was at least as well known, at least as much read, and subjected to at least as much interpretation as the German Kafka. One does not idly tamper with such texts; in a sense, they have become a kind of holy writ, for better or worse. And taken all in all, it has been for the better, we are bound to say. It would be neither fair nor, indeed, well informed to call them inadequate or to dismiss them out of hand as outdated. They contain passages of great brilliance and solutions that still cannot be improved upon.

But there are problems with them. The English texts do contain mistakes, awkward passages, evasions, lapses in cadence and rhythm, avoidances of deliberate humor, and a few hopelessly snarled sentences. And there are, as well, a number of brutal, self-perpetuating typographical errors; they have dug themselves in and will not be budged from printing to printing.

For our present purposes, however, quite modest guidelines have been set down: to get rid of the few outright errors in the translation of these four texts; to untangle some of the more congested locutions; to expunge archaisms; and to replace with more suitable renderings what by now are correctly seen, in this country at least, as somewhat quirky Briticisms. Instead of retranslations, we have made adjustments.

A line-by-line comparison of the Muir (and Kaiser-Wilkins) versions with the present "adjusted" versions will reveal a great many small changes, but nothing that will cause alarm. The reader will discover, for instance, that Georg Bendemann, that upwardly mobile young businessman, and his father no longer live in a "ramshackle" house (that never did make any sense). Mother Samsa, collapsed in her chair toward the end of the story, a symbol of the utter and final rejection of the

insect son, is "*now* sound asleep," no longer "*not* quite overcome by sleep" (a tiny but appalling typo that for years has left open the unlikely possibility that she still acknowledges her son, is still with him on his third and final crawl back into his bedroom—thus can the substitution of a *t* for a *w* lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of a key moment). No longer do the "wards" of the stoker's little sea-chest "snap home"; it is simpler, if less picturesque, for the bolt to snap shut. And so on. Such changes, and there are many of them here, have been made toward the ultimate goal of getting the flow and sound of Kafka in English to approximate the astonishing style of the German.

Still, such changes do not diminish the marvellous work done decades ago by the Muirs and others. The present texts are still theirs in nearly every sense.

Arthur S. Wensinger

The Judgment

THE JUDGMENT

For Fräulein Felice B.

IT WAS A Sunday morning at the very height of spring. Georg Bendemann, a young merchant, was sitting in his own room on the second floor of one of a long row of low, graceful houses stretching along the bank of the river, distinguishable from one another only in height and color. He had just finished a letter to an old friend who was now living abroad, had sealed it in its envelope with slow and dreamy deliberateness, and with one elbow propped on his desk was looking out the window at the river, the bridge, and the hills on the farther bank with their tender green.

He was thinking about this friend, who years before had simply run off to Russia, dissatisfied with his prospects at home. Now he was running a business in St. Petersburg, which at first had flourished but more recently seemed to be going downhill, as the friend always complained on his increasingly rare visits. So there he was, wearing himself out to no purpose in a foreign country; the exotic-looking beard he wore did not quite conceal the face Georg had known so well since childhood, and the jaundice color his skin had begun to take on seemed to signal the onset of some disease. By his own account he had no real contact with the colony of his fellow countrymen there and almost no social connection with Russian families, so that he was resigning himself to life as a confirmed bachelor.

What could one write to such a man, who had obviously gone badly astray, a man one could be sorry for but not help? Should one perhaps advise him to come home, to reestablish himself here and take up his old friendships again—there was certainly nothing to stand in the way of that—and in general to rely on the help of his friends? But that was as good as telling him—and the more kindly it was done the more he would take offense—that all his previous efforts had miscarried, that he should finally give up, come back home, and be gaped at by everyone as

a returned prodigal, that only his friends knew what was what, and that he himself was nothing more than a big child and should follow the example of his friends who had stayed at home and become successful. And besides, was it certain that all the pain they would necessarily inflict on him would serve any purpose? Perhaps it would not even be possible to get him to come home at all—he said himself that he was now out of touch with business conditions in his native country—and then he would still be left an alien in an alien land, embittered by his friends' advice and more than ever estranged from them. But if he did follow their advice and even then didn't fit in at home—not because of the malice of others, of course, but through sheer force of circumstances—if he couldn't get on with his friends or without them, felt humiliated, couldn't really be said to have either friends or a country of his own any longer, wouldn't it be better for him to go on living abroad just as he was? Taking all this into account, how could one expect that he would make a success of life back here?

For such reasons, assuming one wanted to keep up any correspondence with him at all, one could not send him the sort of real news one could frankly tell the most casual acquaintances. It had been more than three years since his last visit, and for this he offered the lame excuse that the political situation in Russia was too uncertain and apparently would not permit even the briefest absence of a small businessman, though it allowed hundreds of thousands of Russians to travel the globe in perfect safety. But during these same three years Georg's own position in life had changed considerably. Two years ago his mother had died and since then he and his father had shared the household together; and his friend had, of course, been informed of that and had expressed his sympathy in a letter phrased so dryly that the grief normally caused by such an event, one had to conclude, could not be comprehended so far away from home. Since that time, however, Georg had applied himself with greater determination to his business as well as to everything else. Perhaps it was his father's insistence on having everything his own way in the business that had prevented him, during his mother's lifetime, from pursuing any real projects of his own; perhaps since her death his father had become less aggressive, although he was still active in the business; perhaps it was mostly due to an accidental run of good fortune—that was very probable indeed—but, at

any rate, during those two years the business had prospered most unexpectedly, the staff had to be doubled, the volume was five times as great; no doubt about it, further progress lay just ahead.

But Georg's friend had no inkling of these changes. In earlier years, perhaps for the last time in that letter of condolence, he had tried to persuade Georg to emigrate to Russia and had enlarged upon the prospects of success in St. Petersburg for precisely Georg's line of business. The figures quoted were microscopic by comparison with Georg's present operations. Yet he shrank from letting his friend know about his business success, and if he were to do so now—retrospectively—that certainly would look peculiar.

So Georg confined himself to giving his friend unimportant items of gossip such as rise at random in the memory when one is idly thinking things over on a quiet Sunday. All he desired was to leave undisturbed the image of the hometown which his friend had most likely built up and accepted during his long absence. And thus it happened that three times in three fairly widely separated letters Georg had told his friend about the engagement of some insignificant man to an equally insignificant girl, until, quite contrary to Georg's intentions, his friend actually began to show some interest in this notable event.

Yet Georg much preferred to write about things like these rather than to confess that he himself had become engaged a month ago to a Fräulein Frieda Brandenfeld, a girl from a well-to-do family. He often spoke to his fiancée about this friend of his and the peculiar relationship that had developed between them in their correspondence. "Then he won't be coming to our wedding," she said, "and yet I have a right to get to know all your friends." "I don't want to trouble him," answered Georg, "don't misunderstand, he would probably come, at least I think so, but he would feel that his hand had been forced and he would be hurt, perhaps he would even envy me and certainly he'd be discontented, and without ever being able to do anything about his discontent he'd have to go away again alone. Alone—do you know what that means?" "Yes, but what if he hears about our marriage from some other source?" "I can't prevent that, of course, but it's unlikely, considering the way he lives." "If you have friends like that, Georg, you shouldn't ever have gotten engaged at all." "Well, we're both to blame for that; but I wouldn't have it any other way now." And when,

breathing heavily under his kisses, she was still able to add, “All the same, it does upset me,” he thought it would not really do any harm if he were to send the news to his friend. “That’s the kind of man I am and he’ll just have to accept me or not,” he said to himself, “I can’t cut myself to another pattern that might make a more suitable friend for him.”

And, in fact, he did inform his friend about his engagement, in the long letter he had been writing that Sunday morning, with the following words: “I have saved up my best news for last. I am now engaged to a Fräulein Frieda Brandenfeld, a girl from a well-to-do family that settled here a long time after you went away, so that it’s very unlikely you’ll know her. There will be ample opportunity to tell you more about my fiancée later, but for today let me just say that I am quite happy, and as far as our relationship is concerned, the only change will be that instead of a quite ordinary friend you will now have in me a happy friend. Besides that, you will acquire in my fiancée, who sends you her warm regards and who will soon be writing you herself, a genuine friend of the opposite sex, which is not without importance to a bachelor. I know that there are many reasons why you can’t come to pay us a visit, but wouldn’t my wedding be just the perfect occasion to put aside everything that might stand in the way? Still, however that may be, do just as seems good to you without regarding any interests but your own.”

With this letter in his hand, Georg had been sitting a long time at his desk, his face turned toward the window. He had barely acknowledged, with an absent smile, a greeting waved to him from the street below by a passing acquaintance.

At last he put the letter in his pocket and went out of his room across a small hallway into his father’s room, which he had not entered for months. There was, in fact, no particular need for him to enter it, since he saw his father daily at work and they took their midday meal together at a restaurant; in the evening, it was true, each did as he pleased, yet even then, unless Georg—as was usually the case—went out with friends or, more recently, visited his fiancée, they always sat for a while, each with his newspaper, in their common sitting room.

Georg was startled at how dark his father’s room was, even on this sunny morning. He had not remembered that it was so overshadowed by the high wall on the other side of the narrow courtyard. His father was

sitting by the window in a corner decorated with various mementos of Georg's late mother, reading a newspaper which he held tilted to one side before his eyes in an attempt to compensate for some defect in his vision. On the table stood the remains of his breakfast, little of which seemed to have been consumed.

"Ah, Georg," said his father, rising at once to meet him. His heavy dressing gown swung open as he walked, and its skirts fluttered around him.—My father is still a giant of a man, Georg said to himself.

"It's unbearably dark in here," he said aloud.

"Yes, it is dark," answered his father.

"And you've shut the window, too?"

"I prefer it like that."

"Well, it's quite warm outside," said Georg, as if continuing his previous remark, and sat down.

His father cleared away the breakfast dishes and set them on a chest.

"I really only wanted to tell you," Georg went on, following the old man's movements as if transfixed, "that I have just announced the news of my engagement to St. Petersburg." He drew the letter a little way from his pocket and let it drop back again.

"To St. Petersburg?" asked his father.

"To my friend, of course," said Georg, trying to meet his father's eye. —In business hours he's quite different, he was thinking, how solidly he sits here and folds his arms over his chest.

"Ah, yes. To your friend," said his father emphatically.

"Well, you know, Father, that I didn't want to tell him about my engagement at first. Out of consideration for him—that was the only reason. You yourself know how difficult a man he is. I said to myself that someone else might tell him about my engagement, although he's such a solitary creature that that was hardly likely, but I wasn't ever going to tell him myself."

"And now you've changed your mind, have you?" asked his father, laying his enormous newspaper on the window sill and on top of it his eyeglasses, which he covered with one hand.

"Yes, now I've changed my mind. If he's a good friend of mine, I said to myself, then my being happily engaged should make him happy too. And that's why I haven't put off telling him any longer. But before I mailed the letter I wanted to let you know."

“Georg,” said his father, stretching his toothless mouth wide, “listen to me! You’ve come to me about this business, to talk it over and get my advice. No doubt that does you honor. But it’s nothing, it’s worse than nothing, if you don’t tell me the whole truth. I don’t want to stir up matters that shouldn’t be mentioned here. Since the death of our dear mother certain things have happened that aren’t very pretty. Maybe the time will come for mentioning them, and maybe sooner than we think. There are a number of things at the shop that escape my notice, maybe they’re not done behind my back—I’m not going to say that they’re done behind my back—I’m not strong enough any more, my memory’s slipping, I haven’t an eye for all those details any longer. In the first place that’s in the nature of things, and in the second place the death of our dear little mother hit me harder than it did you.—But since we’re talking about it, about this letter, I beg you, Georg, don’t deceive me. It’s a trivial thing, it’s hardly worth mentioning, so don’t deceive me. Do you really have this friend in St. Petersburg?”

Georg rose in embarrassment. “Never mind my friends. A thousand friends could never replace my father for me. Do you know what I think? You’re not taking enough care of yourself. But old age has its own rightful demands. I can’t do without you in the business, you know that very well, but if the business is going to undermine your health, I’m ready to close it down tomorrow for good. This won’t do. We’ll have to make a change in the way you live; a radical change. You sit here in the dark, and in the sitting room you would have plenty of light. You just take a bite of breakfast instead of keeping up your strength properly. You sit by a closed window, and the air would be so good for you. No, Father! I’ll get the doctor to come, and we’ll follow his orders. We’ll change rooms, you can move into the front room and I’ll move in here. You won’t notice the change, all your things will be moved across the hall with you. But there’s time for all that later, go to bed now for a little, you must have some rest. Come, I’ll help you to take off your things, you’ll see I can do it. Or if you would rather go into the front room at once, you can lie down in my bed for the present. That would actually be the most sensible thing.”

Georg stood close beside his father, who had let his head with its shaggy white hair sink to his chest.

“Georg,” said his father in a low voice, without moving.

Georg knelt down at once beside his father. In the old man's weary face he saw the abnormally large pupils staring at him fixedly from the corners of the eyes.

"You have no friend in St. Petersburg. You've always been one for pulling people's legs and you haven't hesitated even when it comes to me. How could you have a friend there, of all places! I can't believe it."

"Just think back a bit, Father," said Georg, lifting his father from the chair and slipping off his dressing gown as he stood there, now quite feebly, "soon it'll be three years since my friend came to see us last. I remember you didn't like him very much. At least twice I even told you he wasn't there when he was actually sitting with me in my room. I could quite well understand your dislike of him, my friend does have his peculiarities. But then later you had a good talk with him after all. I was so proud because you listened to him and nodded and asked him questions. If you think back you're bound to remember. He told us the most incredible stories of the Russian Revolution. For instance, the time he was on a business trip to Kiev and ran into a riot, and saw a priest on a balcony who cut a broad cross in blood into the palm of his hand and held the hand up and appealed to the crowd. You've told that very story yourself once or twice since."

Meanwhile Georg had succeeded in lowering his father into the chair again and carefully taking off the knitted drawers he wore over his linen undershorts and his socks. The not particularly clean appearance of his underwear made Georg reproach himself for having been so neglectful. It should certainly have been his duty to see that his father had clean changes of underwear. He had not yet explicitly discussed with his fiancée what arrangements should be made for his father in the future, for they had both silently taken it for granted that he would remain alone in the old apartment. But now he made a quick, firm decision to take him into his own future home. It almost looked, on closer inspection, as if the care he meant to devote to his father there might come too late.

He carried his father over to the bed in his arms. It gave him a dreadful feeling to observe that while he was taking the few steps toward the bed, the old man cradled against his chest was playing with his watch chain. For a moment he could not put him down on the bed, so firmly did he hang on to the watch chain.

But as soon as he was laid in bed, all seemed well. He covered himself up and even drew the blanket higher than usual over his shoulders. He looked up at Georg with a not unfriendly expression.

“You’re beginning to remember my friend, aren’t you?” asked Georg, giving him an encouraging nod.

“Am I well covered up now?” asked his father, as if he couldn’t see whether his feet were properly tucked in or not.

“So you like it in bed, don’t you?” said Georg, and tucked the blanket more closely around him.

“Am I well covered up?” the father asked once more, seeming to be peculiarly intent upon the answer.

“Don’t worry, you’re well covered up.”

“No!” cried his father, so that the answer collided with the question, and flinging the blanket back so violently that for a moment it hovered unfolded in the air, he stood upright in bed. With one hand he lightly touched the ceiling to steady himself. “You wanted to cover me up, I know, my little puppy, but I’m far from being covered up yet. And even if this is the last bit of strength I have, it’s enough for you, more than enough. Of course I know your friend. He would have been a son after my own heart. That’s why you’ve been betraying him all these years. Why else? Do you think I haven’t wept for him? And that’s why you’ve had to lock yourself up in the office—the boss is busy, mustn’t be disturbed—just so that you could write your lying little letters to Russia. But fortunately a father doesn’t need to be taught how to see through his own son. And now that you thought you’d pinned him down, so far down that you could plant your rear end on him so he couldn’t move, then my fine son decides to up and get married!”

Georg looked up at the terrifying image of his father. His friend in St. Petersburg, whom his father suddenly knew so well, seized hold of his imagination as never before. He saw him lost in the vastness of Russia; at the door of his empty, plundered warehouse he saw him. Amid the wreckage of his storage shelves, the slashed remnants of his wares, the falling gas brackets, he barely stood upright. Why did he have to go so far away!

“Pay attention to me!” cried his father, and Georg, almost absentmindedly, ran toward the bed to take everything in, but froze halfway there.

“Because she lifted up her skirts,” his father began to flute, “because she lifted her skirts like this, the revolting creature”—and mimicking her, he lifted his shirt so high that one could see the scar on his thigh from his war wound—“because she lifted her skirts like this and this and this you went after her, and in order to have your way with her undisturbed you have disgraced our mother’s memory, betrayed your friend, and stuck your father into bed so that he can’t move. But can he move, or can’t he?”

And he stood up quite unsupported and kicked his legs about. He shone with insight.

Georg shrank into a corner, as far away from his father as possible. A long time ago he had firmly made up his mind to watch everything with the greatest attention so that he would not be surprised by any indirect attack, a pounce from behind or above. At this moment he recalled this long-forgotten resolve and then forgot it again, like someone drawing a short thread through the eye of a needle.

“But your friend hasn’t been betrayed after all!” cried his father, emphasizing the point with stabs of his forefinger. “I’ve been representing him here on the spot.”

“You comedian!” Georg could not resist shouting, realized at once the harm done, and, his eyes bulging in his head, bit his tongue—though too late—until the pain made his knees buckle.

“Yes, of course I’ve been playing a comedy! A comedy! That’s the perfect word for it! What other consolation was left for your poor old widowed father? Tell me—and while you’re answering me may you still be my loving son—what else was left to me, in my back room, plagued by a disloyal staff, old to the very marrow of my bones? And my son strutting through the world, closing deals that I had prepared for him, turning somersaults in his glee, and striding away from his father with the composed face of a man of honor! Do you think I didn’t love you, I, from whose loins you sprang?”

Now he’s going to lean forward, thought Georg; if only he would topple over and smash to pieces! These words went hissing through his brain.

His father leaned forward but did not topple. Since Georg didn’t come any closer, as he had expected, he straightened himself up again.

“Stay where you are, then, I don’t need you! You think you have the

strength to get yourself over here and that you're only hanging back because you want to? Don't be too sure! I am still much the stronger. All by myself I might have had to give in, but your mother has given me her strength, I have established a fine connection with your friend, and I have your customers in my pocket!"

"He has pockets even in his undershirt!" said Georg to himself, and thought that with this observation he could expose him for a fool for all the world to see. He was able to cling to that thought for no more than a moment, for in his distraction he kept on forgetting everything.

"Just try linking arms with your bride and getting in my way! I'll sweep her from your side, you don't know how!"

Georg grimaced in disbelief. His father only nodded in the direction of Georg's corner, affirming the truth of his words.

"How you amused me today, coming in here to ask if you should tell your friend about your engagement. He knows all about it already, you stupid boy, he knows it all! I've been writing to him, for you forgot to take my writing things from me. That's why he hasn't been here for years, he knows everything a hundred times better than you do yourself, with his left hand he crumples up your letters unopened while with his right he holds mine and reads them through!"

In his exhilaration he waved his arm over his head. "He knows everything a thousand times better!" he cried.

"Ten thousand times!" said Georg, to make fun of his father, but in his very mouth the words turned deadly earnest.

"For years I've been waiting for you to come with this question! Do you think I've concerned myself with anything else? Do you think I've been reading my newspapers? Look!" and he threw Georg a page from a newspaper that had somehow found its way into the bed with him. An old newspaper, with a name entirely unknown to Georg.

"How long it's taken you to grow up! Your mother had to die—she couldn't live to see the happy day—your friend is going to pieces in Russia, even three years ago he was yellow enough to be thrown away, and as for me, you can see what condition I'm in. You have eyes in your head for that!"

"So you've been lying in wait for me!" cried Georg.

His father said pityingly, in an offhand manner: "I suppose you wanted to say that earlier. But now it is no longer appropriate."

And in a louder voice: “So now you know there is more in the world than just you. Till now you’ve known only about yourself! An innocent child, yes, that you were, truly, but still more truly have you been a devilish human being!—And therefore take note: I sentence you now to death by drowning!”

Georg felt himself driven from the room, the crash with which his father collapsed onto the bed behind him still rang in his ears as he fled. On the staircase, which he rushed down as if its steps were an inclined plane, he ran into the cleaning woman on her way up to do the morning tidying of the apartment. “Jesus!” she cried, and covered her face with her apron, but he was already gone. Out the front door he bolted, across the roadway, driven toward the water. Already he was clutching at the railing as a starving man clutches for food. He swung himself over, like the accomplished gymnast he had been in his youth, to his parents’ pride. With weakening grip he was still holding on when he spied between the railings an approaching bus that would easily cover the sound of his fall, called out in a faint voice, “Dear parents, I have always loved you,” and let himself drop.

At that moment an almost endless line of traffic streamed over the bridge.

The Stoker

THE STOKER

AS KARL ROSSMANN, a boy of sixteen who had been packed off to America by his poor parents because a servant girl had seduced him and got herself a child by him, stood on the liner slowly entering the harbor of New York, a sudden burst of sunshine seemed to illumine the Statue of Liberty, so that he saw it in a new light, although he had sighted it long before. Her arm with its sword rose up as if newly stretched aloft, and around her figure blew the free winds of heaven.

"So high!" he said to himself, and since he was not thinking at all of getting off the ship, was gradually pushed to the railing by the swelling throng of porters shoving past.

A young man with whom he had struck up a slight acquaintance on the voyage called out in passing: "Not very eager to go ashore, are you?"—"Oh, I'm quite ready," said Karl with a laugh, and being both strong and in high spirits he heaved his trunk onto his shoulder. But as his eye followed his acquaintance, who was already moving on with the others, casually swinging a cane, he realized with dismay that he had forgotten his umbrella down below. He hastily begged his acquaintance, who did not seem particularly pleased, to do him the favor of keeping an eye on the trunk for a minute, made a quick survey of the situation to be sure he could find his way back, and hurried away. Below decks he was distressed to find that a gangway that would have made a handy shortcut had been barred for the first time in his experience, probably to facilitate the disembarkation of so many passengers, and he had to find his way painfully down an endless series of little stairways, through corridors with countless turnings, through an empty room with a deserted writing table, until in the end, since he had taken this route no more than once or twice and always among a crowd of other people, he got completely lost. In his bewilderment, meeting no one and hearing nothing but the ceaseless shuffling of thousands of feet above him and in the distance, like faint breathing, the last throbbings of the engines, which had already been shut down, he began without any hesitation to

pound on a little door before which he had chanced to stop in his wanderings.

“It isn’t locked,” a voice shouted from inside, and Karl opened the door with genuine relief. “What are you hammering at the door for, like a madman?” asked a huge man, scarcely even glancing at Karl. Through an opening of some kind in the ceiling a feeble glimmer of daylight, all that was left after the upper decks had used most of it up, fell into the wretched cubbyhole in which a bunk, a cupboard, a chair, and the man stood packed together, as if they had been stored there. “I’ve lost my way,” said Karl. “I never noticed it during the voyage, but this is a terribly big ship.”—“Yes, you’re right there,” said the man with a certain pride, fiddling all the time with the lock of a little sea chest and pressing down its lid with both hands in the hope of hearing the bolt snap shut. “But come inside,” he went on, “what do you want to stand out there for!”—“I’m not disturbing you?” asked Karl. “Now, how could you disturb me?”—“Are you a German?” Karl asked to reassure himself further, for he had heard a great deal about the perils that threatened newcomers to America, particularly from the Irish. “That’s what I am, all right,” said the man. Karl still hesitated. Then the man suddenly seized the door handle, and, pulling the door shut with a swift movement, swept Karl into the cabin.

“I can’t stand being stared at from the passage,” he said, beginning to fiddle with his chest again, “people keep passing and staring in, it’s more than a man can stand.”—“But there’s no one out there,” said Karl, who was standing squeezed uncomfortably against the end of the bunk. “Yes, not now,” said the man. “But it’s now we’re speaking about,” thought Karl, “it’s hard work talking to this man.”—“Lie down on the bunk, you’ll have more room there,” said the man. Karl scrambled in as well as he could, and laughed aloud at his first unsuccessful attempt to swing himself over. But scarcely was he in the bunk when he cried: “Oh, my God, I’ve completely forgotten about my trunk!”—“Well, where is it?”—“Up on deck. Someone I know is looking after it. What’s his name again?” And he fished a calling card from a secret pocket that his mother had made in the lining of his jacket for the voyage. “Butterbaum, Franz Butterbaum.”—“Is your trunk really all that important?”—“Of course it is.”—“Well then, why did you leave it in the hands of a stranger?”—“I forgot my umbrella down below and ran off to get it; I didn’t want to

drag my trunk with me. Then on top of that I got lost."—"You're all alone? Without anyone to look after you?"—"Yes, all alone."—"Maybe I should join up with this man," the thought came into Karl's head, "where am I likely to find a better friend?"—"And now you've lost your trunk as well. Not to mention the umbrella." And the man sat down on the chair as if Karl's situation had at last acquired some interest for him. "But I don't think my trunk is lost yet."—"You can think whatever you like," said the man, vigorously scratching his dark, short, thick hair. "But morals change every time you come to a new port. Maybe in Hamburg your friend Butterbaum might have looked after your trunk; here it's almost a sure thing that they've both disappeared."—"Then I have to go up and see about it right away," said Karl, looking around for the way out. "You just stay where you are," said the man, shoving him quite roughly with one hand against his chest, so that he fell back on the bunk again. "Why should I?" asked Karl in exasperation. "Because there's no point in it," said the man, "I'm leaving very soon myself, and we can go together. Either your trunk has been stolen and there's nothing you can do about it, or else the man has left it standing where it was, and then we'll find it all the more easily when the ship is empty. And the same with your umbrella."—"Do you know your way around the ship?" asked Karl suspiciously, and it seemed to him that the idea, otherwise plausible, that his things would be easier to find when the ship was unloaded must have a catch to it somewhere. "Well, I'm the ship's stoker," said the man. "You're the stoker!" cried Karl overjoyed, as if this revelation surpassed all his expectations, and he rose up on his elbow to look at the man more closely. "Just outside the cabin I shared with the Slovak there was a little window through which we could see into the engine-room."—"Yes, that's where I worked," said the stoker. "I've always been so interested in machinery," said Karl, following his own train of thought, "and I would have become an engineer in time, that's certain, if I hadn't had to go to America."—"Well, why did you have to go?"—"Oh, that!" said Karl, dismissing the whole story with a wave of the hand. He looked with a smile at the stoker, as if begging his indulgence even for what he was not ready to admit. "There was some reason for it, I'm sure," said the stoker, and it was hard to tell whether in saying that he wanted to encourage or discourage Karl to tell him about it. "I could become a stoker now too," said Karl, "it doesn't matter to my

father and mother what happens to me now."—"My job's going to be free," said the stoker, and, as if to emphasize the point, he stuck both hands into his trouser pockets and flung his legs in their wrinkled, leathery, iron-gray trousers on the bunk to stretch them. Karl had to move closer to the wall. "Are you leaving the ship?"—"Yes, we're packing up today."—"But why? Don't you like it?"—"Oh, that's just the way things are; it doesn't always depend on whether a man likes it or not. But you're quite right, I don't like it. I don't suppose you're thinking seriously of being a stoker, are you, because that's just the time you can most easily turn into one. I strongly advise you against it. If you wanted to study engineering in Europe, why don't you study it here? The American universities are really a lot better than the European ones."—"That's possible," said Karl, "but I have hardly any money to study on. I once read about someone who worked all day in a shop and studied at night until he got his doctorate, and became a mayor, too, I think, but that calls for a lot of perseverance, doesn't it? I'm afraid I haven't got that in me. Besides, I wasn't a particularly good student; it really didn't bother me to leave school. And maybe the schools here are even more difficult. I can hardly speak any English at all. Anyhow, people here have a prejudice against foreigners, I think."—"So you've learned about that already, too, have you? Well, that's all to the good. You're the man for me, then. Listen here, this is a German ship we're on, it belongs to the Hamburg-American Line; so why aren't the crew all Germans, I ask you? Why is the Chief Engineer a Rumanian? A man called Schubal. It's hard to believe it. A measly dog like that slave-driving us Germans on a German ship! You mustn't think"—here he ran out of breath and he gesticulated with one hand—"that I'm complaining just for the sake of complaining. I know you have no influence and that you're only a poor young kid yourself. But it's too much!" And he slammed the table several times with his fist, never once taking his eyes from it. "I've served on so many ships already"—and he reeled off twenty names one after the other as if they were one word, it made Karl's head spin—"and I've done great work on all of them, I've been praised, I've pleased every captain I ever had, actually stuck to the same cargo-boat for several years, I did"—he rose to his feet as if that had been the high point of his life—"and here on this tub, where everything's done by rule and you don't need any brains at all, here I'm no good, here

I'm just in Schubal's way, they say I'm a slacker who doesn't begin to earn his pay and should be kicked out. Can you understand that? I can't."—"You shouldn't put up with it!" said Karl excitedly. He had almost lost the feeling that he was on the uncertain boards of a ship, beside the coast of an unknown continent, so much at home did he feel here in the stoker's bunk. "Have you seen the Captain about it? Have you asked him to give you your rights?"—"Oh, go on, get out of here, I don't want you here. You don't listen to what I say, and then you give me advice. How am I supposed to get to see the Captain?" Wearily the stoker sat down again and hid his face in his hands.

"I can't give him any better advice," Karl told himself. And he realized that it would have been better all along for him to go and get his trunk instead of handing out advice that was only regarded as stupid. When his father had given him the trunk for good he had said in jest: "How long will you hang on to it?" and now that faithful trunk had perhaps really been lost after all. His only consolation was that his father could hardly learn of his present situation, even if he were to make inquiries. All that the shipping company could tell him was that he had safely reached New York. But Karl felt sorry to think that he had hardly begun to use the things in the trunk, although, to take just one example, he should long since have changed his shirt. So his economies had started at the wrong point, it seemed; now, at the very beginning of his career, when it would be essential to present himself in clean clothes, he would have to appear in a dirty shirt. Otherwise the loss of the trunk would not have been so serious, for the suit he was now wearing was actually better than the one still packed away, which was in fact merely an emergency suit that his mother had hastily mended just before he left. Then he remembered that in the trunk there was a piece of Verona salami that his mother had packed as an extra tid-bit, only he had not been able to eat more than a bite of it, for during the voyage he had been quite without any appetite, and the soup that was dished out in steerage had been more than sufficient for him. But now he would have liked to have the salami on hand, so he could present it to the stoker. For such people were easily won over by the gift of some trifle or other; Karl had learned that from his father, who slipped cigars into the pockets of the subordinate functionaries with whom he did business, and so won them over. Yet all that Karl now had in the way of possible gifts was his

money, and he did not want to touch that for the time being, in the event that he really had lost his trunk. Again his thoughts turned back to the trunk, and he simply could not understand why he should have watched it so vigilantly during the voyage that he had practically lost sleep over it, only to let that same trunk be filched from him so easily now. He remembered the five nights during which he had kept a suspicious eye on a little Slovak, whose bunk was two places away from him on the left, and who had designs, he was sure, on the trunk. This Slovak was merely waiting for Karl to be overcome by sleep and doze off for a minute, so that he could maneuver the box away with a long, pointed stick which he was always playing or practicing with during the day. By day the Slovak looked innocent enough, but hardly did night come on than he kept rising up from his bunk to cast melancholy glances at Karl's trunk. Karl had seen this quite clearly, for every now and then someone would light a little candle, though it was forbidden by the ship's regulations, and with the anxiety of the emigrant would strain to decipher the incomprehensible prospectus of some emigration agency or other. If one of these candles was burning near him, Karl could doze off for a little, but if it was farther away or if the place was quite dark, he had to keep his eyes open. The strain of this task had quite exhausted him, and now perhaps it had all been in vain. Oh, that Butterbaum, if ever he met him again!

At that moment the unbroken silence was disturbed by a series of small, short taps in the distance, like the tapping of children's feet; they came nearer, growing louder, until they sounded like the tread of quietly marching men. They were evidently proceeding in single file, as was natural in the narrow passage; and a clatter, as of weapons, could be heard. Karl, who had been on the point of relaxing into a sleep free of all worries about trunks and Slovaks, started up and nudged the stoker to draw his attention, for the head of the procession seemed just to have reached the door. "That's the ship's band," said the stoker, "they've been playing up above and have come back to pack up. All's clear now, and we can go. Come on!" He took Karl by the hand, at the last moment snatched a framed picture of the Madonna from the wall above his bed, stuck it into his breast pocket, grabbed his sea chest, and hastily left the cabin with Karl.

"I'm going up to the office now to give them a piece of my mind. All

the passengers are gone; I don't have to worry about what I do." The stoker kept repeating this theme with variations, and as he walked he kicked out sideways at a rat that crossed his path, but only succeeded in driving it more quickly into its hole, which it reached just in time. He was slow in all his movements, for though his legs were long they were massive.

They went through part of the kitchen where some girls in dirty aprons—which they seemed to splash deliberately—were washing dishes in large tubs. The stoker hailed a girl called Lina, put his arm around her waist, and, as she snuggled up against him coquettishly, led her part of the way with him. "It's pay day; aren't you coming along?" he asked. "Why bother; you can bring me the money here," she replied, squirming out from under his arm and running away. "Where did you pick up that pretty boy?" she cried after him, but without waiting for an answer. They could hear the laughter of the other girls, who had all stopped working.

But they went on and came to a door above which there was a little pediment, supported by small, gilded caryatids. For a ship's fitting it looked extravagantly sumptuous. Karl realized that he had never been in this part of the ship, which during the voyage had probably been reserved for passengers of the first and second class; but the doors that cut it off had now been thrown open to prepare for the cleaning of the ship. Indeed, they had already met some men with brooms on their shoulders, who had greeted the stoker. Karl was amazed at the extent of activity on the ship; as a steerage passenger he had seen very little of it. Along the corridors ran electrical wires, and a little bell kept ringing continuously.

The stoker knocked respectfully at the door, and when someone cried "Come in!" he urged Karl with a wave of his hand to enter boldly. Karl stepped in, but remained standing just inside the door. The three windows of this room framed a view of the sea, and gazing at the cheerful motion of the waves his heart beat faster, as if he had not been looking at the sea without interruption for five long days. Great ships crossed each other's courses in all directions, yielding to the assault of the waves only as far as their ponderous weight permitted. If one squinted, these ships seemed to be staggering under their own weight. From their masts flew long, narrow pennants which, though kept taut by

the speed of their going, at the same time fluttered a little. Salvos could be heard, probably from some battleship, and a warship of some kind passed at no great distance; the barrels of its guns, gleaming with the reflection of sunlight on steel, seemed to be nursed along by the sure, smooth, not quite even-keeled motion. Only a distant view of the smaller ships and boats could be had, at least from the door, as they darted about in swarms through the gaps between the great ships. And behind them all rose New York, and its skyscrapers stared at Karl with their hundred thousand eyes. Yes, in this room one realized where one was.

At a round table three gentlemen were sitting, one a ship's officer in the blue ship's uniform, the two others harbor officials in black American uniforms. On the table lay piles of various papers, which the officer first glanced over, pen in hand, and then handed to the two others, who read them, made excerpts, and filed them away in portfolios, except when one of them, who was constantly making an odd little noise with his teeth, dictated something or other to his colleague.

By the first window a little man was sitting at a desk with his back to the door; he was busy with some huge ledgers lined up on a sturdy book-shelf on a level with his head. Beside him stood an open safe which, at first glance at least, seemed to be empty.

The second window was not obscured and offered the best view. But near the third, two gentlemen were standing conversing in low tones. One of them was leaning against the window; he also wore the ship's uniform and was playing with the hilt of his sword. The man to whom he was speaking faced the window, and now and then a movement of his disclosed part of a row of decorations on the chest of his interlocutor. He was in civilian clothes and carried a thin bamboo cane which, as both his hands were resting on his hips, also stood out like a sword.

Karl did not have much time to study all this, for almost at once an attendant came up to them and asked the stoker, with a glance that seemed to indicate that he had no business here, what he wanted. The stoker replied as softly as he had been asked that he wished to speak to the Head Purser. The attendant made a gesture of refusal with his hand, but all the same tiptoed toward the man with the ledgers, avoiding the round table by a wide detour. The ledger official—this could clearly be seen—stiffened immediately at the words of the attendant, but at last turned toward this man who wished to speak to him and waved him

away violently, repudiating the attendant too, just in order to make everything quite plain. The attendant then sidled back to the stoker and said in a confidential tone, “Clear out of here at once!”

At this reply the stoker turned his eyes to Karl, as if Karl were his heart, to which he was silently imparting his woe. Without stopping to think, Karl launched himself straight across the room, actually brushing against one of the officers’ chairs, while the attendant chased after him, swooping with wide-spread arms as if to catch an insect; but Karl was the first to reach the Head Purser’s desk, which he gripped firmly in case the attendant should try to drag him away.

The whole room naturally sprang to life at once. The ship’s officer at the table leapt to his feet; the harbor officials looked on calmly but attentively; the two gentlemen by the window moved closer to each other; the attendant, who thought it was no longer his place to interfere since his masters were now involved, stepped back. The stoker waited tensely by the door for the moment when his intervention should be required. And the Head Purser at last made a complete rightabout turn in his chair.

From his secret pocket, which he was perfectly willing to reveal to these people, Karl pulled out his passport, which he opened and laid on the desk in lieu of further introduction. The Head Purser seemed to consider the passport irrelevant, for he flicked it aside with two fingers, whereupon Karl, as if that formality were satisfactorily settled, put it back in his pocket again.

“May I be allowed to say,” he then began, “that in my opinion an injustice has been done to the stoker? There’s a certain Schubal aboard who is giving him a hard time. He has a long record of satisfactory service on many ships, all of whose names he can give you, he is diligent, takes an interest in his work, and it’s really hard to see why on this particular ship, where the work isn’t as heavy as on cargo boats, for instance, he should get so little credit. It can only be sheer slander that keeps him back and robs him of the recognition that should certainly be his. I have confined myself, as you can see, to generalities; he can lay his specific complaints before you himself.” Karl had addressed this speech to all the gentlemen present, because in fact they were all listening to him, and because it seemed much more likely that among so many at least one just man might be found, than that the one just man should

happen to be the Head Purser. Karl also cleverly concealed the fact that he had known the stoker for such a short time. But he would have made a much better speech had he not been distracted by the red face of the man with the bamboo cane, which was now in his line of vision for the first time.

"It's all true, every word of it," said the stoker before anyone even asked him, indeed before anyone so much as looked at him. This overeagerness on his part might have proved a great mistake if the man with the decorations—who, it now dawned on Karl, was of course the Captain—had not clearly made up his mind to hear the case. For he stretched out his hand and called to the stoker, "Come here!" in a voice as hard as an anvil. Everything now depended on the stoker's behavior, for about the justice of his case Karl had no doubt whatever.

Luckily it appeared at this point that the stoker was a man of some worldly experience. With exemplary composure he drew out of his sea chest, at the first attempt, a little bundle of papers and a notebook, walked over with them to the Captain as if that were a matter of course, entirely ignoring the Head Purser, and spread out his evidence on the window-ledge. There was nothing for the Head Purser to do but also to come forward. "The man is a notorious grumbler," he said in explanation, "he spends more time in the pay-room than in the engine-room. He has driven Schubal, who's a quiet fellow, to absolute desperation. Now you listen to me!" here he turned to the stoker. "You're really much too persistent in pushing yourself forward. How often have you had to be booted out of the pay-room already—and it serves you right too—for your impudence in demanding things to which you have absolutely no right? How often have you gone running from the pay-room to the Purser's office? How often has it been patiently explained to you that Schubal is your immediate superior, and that it's him you have to deal with, and him alone? And now you actually come here, when the Captain himself is present, and dare to pester him with your impudence, and as if that weren't enough you bring along a trained mouthpiece to reel off the stupid grievances you've drilled into him, a young boy I've never even seen on this ship before!"

Karl had to restrain himself from springing forward. But the Captain had already intervened with the remark: "Better hear what the man has to say for himself. Schubal's getting a good deal too big for his boots

these days. But that doesn't mean I think you're right." The last words were addressed to the stoker; it was only natural that the Captain should not take his side at once, yet everything seemed to be going the right way. The stoker began to state his case and from the very beginning controlled himself to the point where he even referred to Schubal as "Mr. Schubal." Standing beside the Head Purser's vacant desk, Karl felt so pleased that in his delight he kept pressing the letter-scales down with his finger.—Mr. Schubal was unfair! Mr. Schubal was prejudiced in favor of foreigners! Mr. Schubal ordered the stoker out of the engine-room and made him clean toilets, which was not a stoker's job at all!—At one point even the competence of Mr. Schubal was called into question, as being more apparent than real. At this point Karl fixed his eyes on the Captain and stared at him with earnest deference, as if they had been colleagues, to keep him from being influenced against the stoker by the man's awkward way of expressing himself. All the same, nothing definite emerged from the stoker's outpourings, and although the Captain still listened thoughtfully, his eyes expressing his resolve to hear the stoker out this one time to the very end, the other gentlemen were growing impatient and soon the stoker's voice no longer dominated the room, a bad sign. The gentleman in civilian clothes was the first to show his impatience by toying with his bamboo cane and tapping it, though only softly, on the floor. The others still looked up now and then; but the two harbor officials, who were clearly pressed for time, snatched up their papers again and began, though somewhat distractedly, to glance over them; the ship's officer turned back to his desk, and the Head Purser, who now thought he had won the day, heaved a loud ironic sigh. The only one who seemed to be exempt from the general dispersion of interest was the attendant, who sympathized to some extent with this poor fellow confronting these great men, and gravely nodded to Karl as though trying to explain something.

Meanwhile outside the windows the life of the harbor went on; a flat barge laden with a mountain of barrels, which must have been wonderfully well secured to keep them from rolling around, went past, almost completely obscuring the daylight in the room; little motor-boats, which Karl would have liked to examine closely if he had had time, shot straight past in obedience to the slightest touch of the man standing erect at the wheel. Here and there curious objects bobbed independently

out of the restless water, were immediately submerged again and sank before his astonished eyes; boats belonging to the ocean liners were rowed past by sweating sailors; they were filled with passengers sitting silent and expectant as if they had been stowed there like freight, except that some of them could not refrain from turning their heads to gaze at the changing scene. Activity without end, restlessness transmitted from the restless element to helpless human beings and their works!

But everything demanded haste, clarity, precision; and what was the stoker doing? He was talking himself into a sweat; his hands were trembling so much that he could no longer hold the papers he had laid on the window-ledge; from all points of the compass complaints about Schubal streamed into his head, any one of which, it seemed to him, should have been sufficient to dispose of Schubal for good; but all he could produce for the Captain was a pathetic hodgepodge in which everything was jumbled together. For a long time the man with the bamboo cane had been staring at the ceiling and whistling to himself; the harbor officials now detained the ship's officer at their table and showed no sign of ever letting him go again; the Head Purser was clearly restrained from letting fly only by the Captain's composure; the attendant stood at attention, waiting every moment for the Captain to give an order concerning the stoker.

Karl could no longer remain inactive. So he advanced slowly toward the group, running over in his mind the more rapidly all the ways in which he could most adroitly handle the situation. It was certainly high time; just a little longer, and both of them might well be kicked out of the office. The Captain might indeed be a good man and might also, or so it seemed to Karl, have some particular reason at the moment to show that he was a just master; but he was not, after all, a mere instrument to be recklessly played on, and that was exactly how the stoker was treating him in the boundless indignation of his heart.

So Karl said to the stoker: "You must put things more simply, more clearly; the Captain can't do justice to what you are trying to tell him. How can he know all the mechanics and errand-boys by name, let alone by their first names, so when you mention so-and-so, how can he understand who you're talking about? Take your grievances in order, tell the most important ones first and the lesser ones afterward; maybe it won't even be necessary to mention most of them. You always explained

them clearly enough to me!" If trunks can be stolen in America, one can surely tell a lie now and then as well, he thought in self-justification.

But was his advice of any use? Might it not already be too late? To be sure, the stoker stopped speaking at once when he heard the familiar voice, but his eyes were so blinded with tears of wounded dignity, of dreadful recollections, of extreme grief, that he could hardly even recognize Karl. How could he at this point—Karl silently realized this, facing the now silent stoker—how could he at this point suddenly change his style of argument, when it seemed plain to him that he had already said all there was to say without evoking the slightest sympathy, and at the same time that he had said nothing at all, and could hardly expect these gentlemen to listen to the whole rigmarole all over again? And at such a moment Karl, his sole supporter, has to break in with so-called good advice which merely makes it clear that everything is lost, everything.

"If only I had spoken sooner, instead of looking out of the window," Karl told himself, dropping his eyes before the stoker and letting his hands fall to his sides as a sign that all hope was gone.

But the stoker mistook the gesture, sensing, no doubt, that Karl was nursing some secret grudge against him, and with the good intention of talking him out of it, crowned all his other offenses by starting to wrangle at this moment with Karl. At this very moment, when the men at the round table were completely exasperated by the senseless babble that disturbed their important labors, when the Head Purser was gradually beginning to find the Captain's patience incomprehensible and was just on the point of exploding, when the attendant, once more entirely within his masters' sphere, was measuring the stoker with savage eyes, and when, finally, the gentleman with the bamboo cane, whom even the Captain eyed now and then in a friendly manner, already quite bored by the stoker, indeed disgusted by him, had pulled out a little notebook and was obviously preoccupied with quite different thoughts, glancing first at the notebook and then at Karl.

"Yes, I know," said Karl, who had difficulty turning aside the torrent which the stoker now directed at him, yet was still able to summon up a friendly smile for him in spite of all dissension, "you're right, you're right, I never doubted it for a minute." In his fear of being struck by the stoker's gesticulating hands he would have liked to catch hold of them,

and still better to force the man into a corner so as to whisper a few soothing, reassuring words to him which no one else could hear. But the stoker was quite out of control. Karl now actually began to take a sort of comfort in the thought that if things got serious the stoker could overwhelm the seven men in the room with the very strength of his desperation. But on the desk, as he could see at a glance, there was a signal-board with far too many buttons; the mere pressure of one hand on them would raise the whole ship and call up all the hostile men that filled its passageways.

But at this point, in spite of his air of bored detachment, the gentleman with the bamboo cane came over to Karl and asked, not very loudly yet clearly enough to be heard above the stoker's ravings: "Tell me, what is your name?" At that moment, as if someone behind the door had been waiting to hear this remark, there was a knock. The attendant looked over at the Captain; the Captain nodded. Thereupon the attendant went to the door and opened it. Outside stood a middle-sized man in an old military coat, not looking at all like the kind of person who might work with machinery—and yet he was Schubal. If Karl had not guessed this from the expression of satisfaction that lit up all eyes, even the Captain's, he must have recognized it with horror from the demeanor of the stoker, who clenched his fists at the ends of his outstretched arms with a vehemence that made the very clenching of them seem the most important thing about him, to which he was prepared to sacrifice everything else in life. All his strength was concentrated in his fists, including the very strength that held him upright.

And so here was the enemy, fresh and carefree in his shore-leave outfit, a ledger under his arm probably containing a record of the stoker's wages and his working papers, and he was openly scanning the faces of everyone present, a frank admission that his first concern was to discover on which side they stood. All seven of them were already his friends, for even though the Captain had raised certain objections to him earlier, or had at least pretended to do so because he felt sorry for the stoker, it was now apparent that he had not the slightest fault to find with Schubal. A man like the stoker could not be too severely reprimanded, and if Schubal were to be reproached for anything, it was for not having subdued the stoker's recalcitrance sufficiently, since the fellow had the gall to confront the Captain this very day.

Yet it might still be assumed that the confrontation of Schubal and the stoker would achieve, even before a human tribunal, the result that would have been awarded by divine justice, since Schubal, even if he were good at making a show of virtue, might easily give himself away in the long run. A brief flare-up of his evil nature would suffice to reveal it to these gentlemen, and Karl would see to that. He already had a pretty good knowledge of the shrewdness, the weaknesses, the moods of the various individuals in the room, and in this respect the time he had spent there had not been wasted. It was a pity that the stoker had not been more competent; he seemed completely incapable of doing battle. If one were to hand Schubal over to him, he would probably split the man's detested skull with his fists; but it was beyond his power to take the couple of steps needed to bring Schubal within reach. Why had Karl not foreseen what so easily could have been foreseen: that Schubal would inevitably put in an appearance, if not of his own accord, then by order of the Captain? Why had he not outlined a precise battle plan with the stoker when they were on their way here, instead of simply walking in, hopelessly unprepared, as soon as they found a door, which was what they had done? Was the stoker even capable of uttering a word by this time, of answering yes and no, as he must do if he were to be cross-examined, although, to be sure, a cross-examination was almost too much to hope for now? There he stood, his legs asprawl, weak in the knees, his head slightly raised, and the air flowing in and out of his open mouth as if the man had no lungs to control its motion.

But Karl himself felt stronger and more clear-headed than he had perhaps ever been at home. If only his parents could see him now, fighting for justice in a strange land before men of authority, and, though not yet triumphant, dauntlessly resolved to win the final victory! Would they revise their opinion of him? Set him between them and praise him? Look into his eyes at last, at last, these eyes so filled with devotion to them? Ambiguous questions, and this the most unsuitable moment to ask them!

"I have come here because I believe this stoker is accusing me of some sort of dishonesty. A maid in the kitchen told me she saw him on his way here. Captain, and all you other gentlemen, I am prepared to show you papers to disprove any such accusation, and, if you like, to call on the evidence of unprejudiced and uncorrupted witnesses, who are

waiting outside the door now." Thus spoke Schubal. It was, to be sure, a clear and manly statement, and from the altered expression of the listeners one might have thought they were hearing a human voice for the first time after a long interval. They certainly did not notice the holes that could be picked even in that fine speech. Why, for instance, had the first relevant word to occur to him been "dishonesty"? Should he in fact have been accused of that, instead of nationalistic prejudice? A maid in the kitchen had seen the stoker on his way to the office, and Schubal had immediately divined what that meant? Wasn't it his own guilty conscience that had sharpened his apprehension? And he had immediately collected witnesses, had he, and then called them unprejudiced and uncorrupted to boot? A fraud, nothing but a fraud! And these gentlemen were not only taken in by it, but regarded it with approval? Why had he allowed so much time to elapse between the kitchen-maid's report and his arrival here? Simply in order to let the stoker weary the gentlemen, until they began to lose their powers of clear judgment, which Schubal feared most of all. Standing for a long time behind the door, as he must have done, had he deliberately refrained from knocking until he heard the casual question of the gentleman with the bamboo cane, which gave him grounds to hope that the stoker was finally finished and done for?

The whole thing was obvious and Schubal's very behavior involuntarily corroborated it, but it would have to be proved to these gentlemen by other and still more palpable means. They must be shaken up. Now then, Karl, quick, make the best of every minute you have before the witnesses pour in and confuse everything!

At that very moment, however, the Captain waved Schubal away, and at once—seeing that his case seemed to be temporarily postponed—he stepped aside and was joined by the attendant, with whom he began a whispered conversation involving many side-glances at the stoker and Karl, as well as all sorts of vigorous gestures. It was as if Schubal were rehearsing his next fine speech.

"Didn't you want to ask this youngster something, Mr. Jacob?" the Captain said in the general silence to the gentleman with the bamboo cane.

"Indeed I did," replied the other, with a slight bow in acknowledgment of the Captain's courtesy. And he asked Karl again,

“What is your name?”

Karl, who thought that his main business would be best served by satisfying his stubborn questioner as quickly as possible, replied briefly, without introducing himself by means of his passport, which he would have had to tug out of his pocket: “Karl Rossmann.”

“Well!” said the gentleman who had been addressed as Jacob, taking a step backward, with an almost incredulous smile on his face. Likewise, the Captain, the Head Purser, the ship’s officer, even the attendant, all displayed an excessive astonishment on hearing Karl’s name. Only the harbor officials and Schubal remained indifferent.

“Well!” repeated Mr. Jacob, walking a little stiffly up to Karl, “then I’m your Uncle Jacob and you’re my own dear nephew. I suspected it all the time!” he said to the Captain before embracing and kissing Karl, who silently submitted to everything.

“And what may your name be?” asked Karl when he felt himself released again, very courteously, but quite coolly, trying hard to estimate the consequences which this new development might have for the stoker. At the moment, there was nothing to indicate that Schubal could extract any advantage from it.

“Try to understand your good fortune, young man!” said the Captain, who thought that Mr. Jacob was wounded in his dignity by Karl’s question, for he had retired to the window, obviously to conceal from the others the agitation on his face, which he also kept dabbing with a handkerchief. “It is Senator Edward Jacob who has just revealed himself to be your uncle. You now have a brilliant career before you, against all your previous expectations, I dare say. Try to realize this, as far as you can in the first shock of the moment, and pull yourself together!”

“I certainly have an Uncle Jacob in America,” said Karl, turning to the Captain, “but if I understood correctly, Jacob is the family name of this gentleman.”

“That is so,” said the Captain, expectantly.

“Well, my Uncle Jacob, my mother’s brother, had Jacob for a Christian name, but his family name must of course be the same as my mother’s, and her maiden name was Bendelmayer.”

“Gentlemen!” cried the Senator, coming forward in response to Karl’s explanation, quite cheerful now after his recuperative retreat to the window. Everyone except the harbor officials burst into laughter, some

as if really touched, others for no visible reason.

"But what I said wasn't so ridiculous as all that," thought Karl.

"Gentlemen," repeated the Senator, "against my will and against yours you are involved in a little family scene, and so I can't avoid giving you an explanation, because as far as I know no one but the Captain here"—this reference was followed by a reciprocal bow—"is fully informed of the circumstances."

"I really have to pay attention to every word now," Karl told himself, and glancing over his shoulder he was happy to see that life had begun to return to the figure of the stoker.

"During the many years of my sojourn in America—though sojourn is hardly the right word to use for an American citizen, and I am an American citizen with all my heart—for all these many years, then, I have lived completely cut off from my relatives in Europe, for reasons which in the first place do not concern us here, and in the second, would really cause me too much pain to relate. I actually dread the moment when I may be forced to explain them to my dear nephew, for some frank criticism of his parents and their circle will be unavoidable, I'm afraid."

"It's my uncle, no doubt about it," Karl told himself, listening eagerly, "he must have changed his name."

"Now, my dear nephew was simply thrown out—we may as well call a spade a spade—was simply thrown out by his parents, just as you throw a cat out of the house when it annoys you. I have no intention of glossing over what my nephew did to merit that punishment, yet his transgression was of a kind that merely needs to be mentioned to find indulgence."

"That's not too bad," thought Karl, "but I hope he won't tell the whole story. Anyhow, he can't know much about it. Who would tell him?"

"For he was," Uncle Jacob went on, bracing himself with the bamboo cane and making little bouncing motions that helped to make the situation a good deal less solemn than it would otherwise have been, "for he was seduced by a servant, Johanna Brummer, a person of about thirty-five. It is far from my wish to offend my nephew by using the word 'seduced,' but it is difficult to find another equally suitable word."

Karl, who had moved quite close to his uncle, turned around to read in the gentlemen's faces the impression the story had made. None of them

laughed, all were listening patiently and seriously. After all, one doesn't laugh at the nephew of a Senator at the first opportunity. It was rather the stoker who now smiled at Karl, though very faintly, but that was, in the first place, a pleasure to see, as a sign of his reviving spirits, and excusable in the second place, since in the stoker's bunk Karl had tried to make an impenetrable mystery of the very story that was now being made so public.

"Now this Brummer woman," Uncle Jacob went on, "had a child by my nephew, a healthy boy who was baptized Jacob, evidently in honor of my unworthy self, since my nephew's doubtless quite casual references to me must nevertheless have made a deep impression on the woman. Fortunately, let me add. For the boy's parents, to avoid paying alimony or being personally involved in any further scandal—I must point out that I know nothing about the laws of their state nor anything about their personal circumstances—to avoid the scandal, then, and the payment of alimony, they packed off their son, my dear nephew, to America, shamefully unprovided-for, as you can see, and the poor lad, despite the signs and wonders which still happen in America if nowhere else, would have come to a wretched end in some back alley of New York, being thrown entirely on his own resources, if this servant girl hadn't written a letter to me, which after long delays reached me the day before yesterday, giving me the whole story, along with a description of my nephew and, very wisely, the name of the ship as well. If I were setting out to entertain you, gentlemen, I could read a few passages to you from this letter"—he pulled out and flourished before them two huge, closely written sheets of letter paper. "You would certainly be impressed, for the letter is written with somewhat simple but well-intended cunning and with much loving concern for the father of the child. But I have no intention either of entertaining you for longer than my explanation needs, or of wounding at the very start the perhaps still sensitive feelings of my nephew, who, if he likes, can read the letter for his own instruction in the seclusion of the room already waiting for him."

But Karl had no feelings for that girl. Hemmed in by an ever-receding past, she sat in her kitchen beside the counter, resting her elbows on top of it. She looked at him whenever he came to the kitchen to get a glass of water for his father or do some errand for his mother. Sometimes,

awkwardly sitting sideways at the counter, she would write a letter, drawing her inspiration from Karl's face. Sometimes she would sit with one hand over her eyes, impervious to anything that was said to her. Sometimes she would kneel in her tiny room next to the kitchen and pray to a wooden crucifix; then Karl would feel shy if he passed by and caught a glimpse of her through the crack of the slightly open door. Sometimes she would race around the kitchen and jump back, laughing like a witch, if Karl got in her way. Sometimes she would shut the kitchen door after Karl entered and hold it shut until he had to beg to be let out. Sometimes she would bring him things he did not even want and press them silently into his hand. And once she called him "Karl" and led him, dumbfounded at this unusual familiarity, into her tiny room, sighing and grimacing, and locked the door. Then she flung her arms around his neck, almost choking him, and while urging him to take off her clothes, she was actually taking off his and laid him on her bed, as if she would never give him up to anyone else and would caress and care for him to the end of time. "Oh Karl, my Karl!" she cried; it was as if her eyes were devouring him, while his eyes saw nothing at all and he felt uncomfortable in all the warm bedclothes which she seemed to have piled up for him alone. Then she lay down by him and wanted some secrets from him, but he could tell her none, and she got angry, either in jest or in earnest, shook him, listened to his heart, offered her breast that he might listen to hers in turn, but could not get him to do it, pressed her naked belly against his body, felt with her hand between his legs, so disgustingly that his head and neck started up from the pillows, then thrust her body several times against him—it felt as if she were a part of himself, and for that reason perhaps he was seized by a terrible feeling of need. With tears running down his cheeks he reached his own bed at last, after many entreaties from her to come again. That was all that had happened, and yet his uncle had managed to make a big issue out of it. And so the cook had also been thinking about him and had informed his uncle of his arrival. That had been very good of her and some day he would repay her for it, if he could.

"And now," cried the Senator, "I want you to tell me openly whether I am your uncle or not?"

"You are my uncle," said Karl, kissing his hand and receiving a kiss on the brow. "I'm very glad to have found you, but you're mistaken if you

think my father and mother never speak kindly of you. And besides that, you've got some points quite wrong in your speech; what I mean to say is that it didn't all happen like that in reality. But you can't really be expected to understand these things at such a distance, and I also think it won't do any great harm if these gentlemen are somewhat incorrectly informed about the details of something which really can't be of much interest to them."

"Well spoken," said the Senator, leading Karl up to the Captain, who was clearly sympathetic, and asking, "Haven't I got a splendid nephew?"

"I am delighted," said the Captain, making the sort of bow which only those trained in the military can carry off, "to have met your nephew, Senator. My ship is honored to have provided the setting for such a reunion. Undoubtedly, the voyage in steerage must have been very unpleasant, but how are we to know who might be traveling with us down below? We do everything possible to make conditions tolerable, far more, for instance, than the American lines do, but to turn such a passage into a pleasure cruise is more than we've been able to manage yet."

"It did me no harm," said Karl.

"It did him no harm!" repeated the Senator, laughing loudly.

"Except that I'm afraid I've lost my …" and with that he remembered all that had happened and all that remained to be done, and he looked around him and saw the others still in their same places, silent with respect and surprise, their eyes fixed upon him. Only the harbor officials, so far as one could tell from their stern and self-satisfied faces, betrayed some regret at having come at such an unpropitious time, and the pocket watch they had laid on the table before them was probably more important to them than everything that had happened or might still happen there in that room.

The first to express his sympathy, after the Captain, was curiously enough the stoker. "I congratulate you heartily," he said, and shook Karl's hand in a way that was also meant to express something like gratitude. Yet when he turned to the Senator with the same words the Senator drew back, as if the stoker were exceeding his rights; and the stoker immediately desisted.

But the others now saw what was expected of them and at once pressed in a confused throng around Karl and the Senator. And so it

happened that Karl even received Schubal's congratulations, accepted them and thanked him for them. The last to advance in the ensuing lull were the harbor officials who spoke a few words in English, which made a comical impression.

The Senator was now perfectly in the mood to extract the last ounce of enjoyment from the situation by refreshing his own and the others' minds with some less important details, and this was not merely tolerated but of course welcomed with interest by everyone. So he told them that he had entered in his notebook, for quick consultation should the occasion arise, his nephew's most distinctive physical features as enumerated by the cook in her letter. During the stoker's insufferable rantings, he had pulled out the notebook simply to distract himself, and had begun for his own amusement to compare the cook's descriptions, which were naturally not those of a professional detective, with Karl's appearance. "And that's how to find a nephew!" he concluded proudly, as if he wanted to be congratulated all over again.

"What will happen to the stoker now?" asked Karl, ignoring his uncle's last remarks. In his new circumstances he thought he was entitled to say whatever came into his mind.

"The stoker will get what he deserves," said the Senator, "and what the Captain considers to be right. I think we have had enough, more than enough of the stoker, a view in which every gentleman here will certainly concur."

"But that's not the point in a question of justice," said Karl. He was standing between his uncle and the Captain, and, perhaps influenced by his position, thought that he was holding the balance between them.

And yet the stoker seemed to have abandoned hope. He had thrust his hands halfway into the belt of his trousers, which together with a strip of checked shirt had come prominently into view during his excited tirade. That did not worry him in the least; he had displayed the misery of his heart, now they might as well see the rags that covered his body, and then they could drag him away. He had concluded that the attendant and Schubal, as the two least important men in the room, would do him that last kindness. Schubal would have peace then and no longer be driven to desperation, as the Head Purser had put it. The Captain could take on crowds of Rumanians; Rumanian would be spoken all over the ship; and then perhaps things would really improve. There would be no

more stoker to pester the head office with his ravings, yet his last outburst would be remembered almost fondly, since, as the Senator expressly declared, it had been the indirect cause of his recognizing his nephew. The nephew himself had several times tried to help him and thus had already more than repaid him for his services in the recognition scene; it did not even occur to the stoker to ask anything more from him now. Besides, even if he were the nephew of a senator, he was far from being a captain yet, and it was from the Captain's mouth that the dire verdict would fall. And having reached these conclusions, the stoker did his best not to look at Karl, though unfortunately in that roomful of enemies there was no other resting-place for his eyes.

"Don't misinterpret the situation," said the Senator to Karl, "this may be a question of justice, but at the same time it's a question of discipline. On this ship both of these, and most especially the latter, are entirely within the discretion of the Captain."

"That's right," muttered the stoker. Those who heard him and understood smiled uneasily.

"But we have already obstructed the Captain for too long in his official duties, which must be piling up considerably now that he has reached New York, and it's high time we left the ship, instead of adding to our sins by interfering quite unnecessarily in this petty quarrel between two mechanics and thus making something important of it. I understand your attitude perfectly, my dear nephew, but that very fact justifies me in hurrying you away from here immediately."

"I shall have a boat lowered for you at once," said the Captain, without for a moment taking exception to the Senator's words, which surprised Karl greatly, since his uncle could be said to have humbled himself. The Head Purser rushed hastily to his desk and telephoned the Captain's order to the boatswain.

"There's hardly any time left," Karl told himself, "but I can't do anything without offending everybody. I really can't desert my uncle now, just when he's found me. The Captain is polite, certainly, but that's all. When it comes to discipline, his politeness disappears. And my uncle certainly told him what he felt. I don't want to speak to Schubal; I'm sorry that I even shook hands with him. And all the other people here are of no consequence."

With these thoughts in mind he slowly went over to the stoker, pulled

the man's right hand out of his belt and held it playfully in his.

"Why don't you say something, dear friend?" he asked. "Why do you put up with everything?"

The stoker merely knitted his brow, as if he were seeking the right words for what he had to say. While doing this he looked down at his own hand and Karl's.

"You've been treated unjustly, more than anyone else on this ship; I am positive of that." And as Karl drew his fingers back and forth between the stoker's, the stoker gazed around with shining eyes, as if blessed by a great happiness that no one could begrudge him.

"Now you must get ready to defend yourself, answer yes and no, or else these people won't have any idea of the truth. You must promise me to do what I tell you, for I'm afraid, and with good reason, that I won't be able to help you anymore." And then Karl burst out crying and kissed the stoker's hand, taking that rough and almost lifeless hand and pressing it to his cheek like a treasure that he would soon have to give up.—But now his uncle the Senator was at his side and gently yet firmly led him away.

"The stoker seems to have bewitched you," he said, giving the Captain a knowing look over Karl's head. "You felt lonely, then you found the stoker, and you're grateful to him now; that's all to your credit, I'm sure. But if only for my sake, don't push things too far, learn to understand your position."

Outside the door a hubbub had arisen, shouts could be heard; it sounded even as if someone were being brutally pushed against the door. A sailor entered in a somewhat disheveled state with a girl's apron tied around his waist. "There's a mob outside," he cried, thrusting out one elbow as if he were still pushing his way through the crowd. Finally he pulled himself together and was about to salute the Captain, when he noticed the apron, tore it off, threw it on the floor and shouted: "That's disgusting; they've tied a girl's apron on me." Then he clicked his heels together and saluted. Someone began to laugh, but the Captain said sternly: "This is a fine state of affairs. Who is out there?"

"It's my witnesses," said Schubal, stepping forward. "I respectfully beg your pardon, sir, for their bad behavior. The crew sometimes get a little wild when they've reached port."

"Bring them in at once!" the Captain ordered, then immediately

turning to the Senator said politely but hastily: “Now please be good enough, Senator, to take your nephew and follow this man who will conduct you to your boat. I need hardly say what a pleasure and honor it has been for me to make your personal acquaintance. I only wish, Senator, that I may have an early opportunity to resume our interrupted talk about the state of the American fleet, and that it may again be interrupted in as pleasant a manner.”

“One nephew is quite enough for me, for the time being,” said Karl’s uncle, laughing. “And now accept my best thanks for your kindness, and goodbye. Besides, it isn’t altogether impossible that we”—he put his arm warmly around Karl—“might see quite a lot of you on our next voyage to Europe.”

“That would give me great pleasure,” said the Captain. The two gentlemen shook hands with each other, Karl barely touched the Captain’s hand in silent haste, for the latter’s attention was already engrossed by the fifteen people who were now being shepherded into the room by Schubal, somewhat chastened but still noisy enough. The sailor asked the Senator’s permission to lead the way and opened a path through the crowd for him and Karl, so that they passed with ease through ranks of bowing figures. It seemed that these good-natured folk regarded the quarrel between Schubal and the stoker as a joke, and not even the Captain’s presence could make them take it seriously. Karl noticed among them the kitchen-maid Lina, who with a cheerful wink at him was now tying around her waist the apron which the sailor had flung away, for it was hers.

Still following the sailor, they left the office and turned into a small passage that brought them in a couple of steps to a little door, from which a short ladder led down to the boat that was waiting for them. Their conductor leapt down into the boat with a single bound, and the sailors in the boat rose and saluted. The Senator was just warning Karl to be careful how he came down, when Karl, as he stood on the top rung, burst into violent sobs. The Senator put his right hand under Karl’s chin, drew him close and caressed him with his left hand. In this posture they slowly descended step by step and, still clinging together, entered the boat, where the Senator found a comfortable place for Karl, immediately facing him. At a sign from the Senator the sailors pushed off from the ship and at once began rowing at full speed. They were scarcely a few

yards from the ship when Karl made the unexpected discovery that they were on the side of the ship toward which the windows of the office looked out. All three windows were filled with Schubal's witnesses, who saluted and waved in the most friendly way; even Uncle Jacob waved back and one of the sailors showed his skill by flinging a kiss up to the ship without interrupting the regular rhythm of his rowing. It was now as if there were really no stoker at all. Karl took a more careful look at his uncle, whose knees were almost touching his own, and doubts came into his mind whether this man would ever be able to take the stoker's place. And his uncle evaded his eyes and stared at the waves on which their boat was tossing.

The Metamorphosis

THE METAMORPHOSIS

I

AS GREGOR SAMSA awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his domelike brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt could hardly stay in place and was about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes.

What has happened to me? he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, only rather too small, lay quiet within its four familiar walls. Above the table on which a collection of cloth samples was unpacked and spread out—Samsa was a traveling salesman—hung the picture which he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put into a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, with a fur hat on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the spectator a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished!

Gregor's eyes turned next to the window, and the overcast sky—one could hear raindrops beating on the window gutter—made him quite melancholy. What about sleeping a little longer and forgetting all this nonsense, he thought, but it could not be done, for he was accustomed to sleep on his right side and in his present condition he could not turn himself over. However violently he forced himself toward his right side he always rolled onto his back again. He tried it at least a hundred times, shutting his eyes to keep from seeing his struggling legs, and only desisted when he began to feel in his side a faint dull ache he had never felt before.

Oh God, he thought, what an exhausting job I've picked out for myself! On the road day in, day out. It's much more irritating work than doing the actual business in the home office, and on top of that there's the trouble of constant traveling, of worrying about train connections,

the bad food and irregular meals, casual acquaintances that are always new and never become intimate friends. The devil take it all! He felt a slight itching up on his belly, slowly pushed himself on his back nearer to the top of the bed so that he could lift his head more easily, identified the itching place which was surrounded by many small white spots the nature of which he could not understand and was about to touch it with a leg, but drew the leg back immediately, for the contact made a cold shiver run through him.

He slid down again into his former position. This getting up early, he thought, can make an idiot out of anyone. A man needs his sleep. Other salesmen live like harem women. For instance, when I come back to the hotel in the morning to write up my orders, these others are only sitting down to breakfast. Let me just try that with my boss; I'd be fired on the spot. Anyhow, that might be quite a good thing for me, who can tell? If I didn't have to hold back because of my parents I'd have given notice long ago, I'd have gone to the boss and told him exactly what I think of him. That would knock him right off his desk! It's a peculiar habit of his, too, sitting on top of the desk like that and talking down to employees, especially when they have to come quite near because the boss is hard of hearing. Well, there's still hope; once I've saved enough money to pay back my parents' debts to him—that should take another five or six years—I'll do it without fail. I'll cut my ties completely then. For the moment, though, I'd better get up, since my train leaves at five.

He looked at the alarm clock ticking on the chest of drawers. Heavenly Father! he thought. It was half-past six and the hands were quietly moving on, it was even past the half-hour, it was getting on toward a quarter to seven. Had the alarm clock not gone off? From the bed one could see that it had been properly set for four o'clock; of course it must have gone off. Yes, but was it possible to sleep quietly through that ear-splitting noise? Well, he had not slept quietly, yet apparently all the more soundly for that. But what was he to do now? The next train went at seven o'clock; to catch that he would need to hurry like mad and his samples weren't even packed, and he himself wasn't feeling particularly fresh and energetic. And even if he did catch the train he couldn't avoid a tirade from the boss, since the messenger boy must have been waiting for the five o'clock train and must have long since reported his failure to turn up. This messenger was a creature of the boss's, spineless and

stupid. Well, supposing he were to say he was sick? But that would be very awkward and would look suspicious, since during his five years' employment he had not been ill once. The boss himself would be sure to come with the health insurance doctor, would reproach his parents for their son's laziness, and would cut all excuses short by handing the matter over to the insurance doctor, who of course regarded all mankind as perfectly healthy malingerers. And would he be so far wrong in this case? Gregor really felt quite well, apart from a drowsiness that was quite inexcusable after such a long sleep, and he was even unusually hungry.

As all this was running through his mind at top speed without his being able to decide to leave his bed—the alarm clock had just struck a quarter to seven—there was a cautious tap at the door near the head of his bed. "Gregor," said a voice—it was his mother's—"it's a quarter to seven. Didn't you have a train to catch?" That gentle voice! Gregor had a shock as he heard his own voice answering hers, unmistakably his own voice, it was true, but with a persistent horrible twittering squeak behind it like an undertone, which left the words in their clear shape only for the first moment and then rose up reverberating around them to destroy their sense, so that one could not be sure one had heard them rightly. Gregor wanted to answer at length and explain everything, but in the circumstances he confined himself to saying: "Yes, yes, thank you, Mother, I'm getting up now." The wooden door between them must have kept the change in his voice from being noticeable outside, for his mother contented herself with this statement and shuffled away. Yet this brief exchange of words had made the other members of the family aware that Gregor was, strangely, still at home, and at one of the side doors his father was already knocking, gently, yet with his fist. "Gregor, Gregor," he called, "What's the matter with you?" And after a little while he called again in a deeper voice: "Gregor! Gregor!" At the other side door his sister was saying in a low, plaintive tone: "Gregor? Aren't you well? Do you need anything?" He answered them both at once: "I'm just about ready," and did his best to make his voice sound as normal as possible by enunciating the words very clearly and leaving long pauses between them. So his father went back to his breakfast, but his sister whispered: "Gregor, open the door, I beg you." However, he was not thinking of opening the door, and felt thankful for the prudent habit he

had acquired on the road of locking all doors during the night, even at home.

His immediate intention was to get up quietly without being disturbed, to put on his clothes and above all eat his breakfast, and only then to consider what else had to be done, since he was well aware his meditations would come to no sensible conclusion if he remained in bed. He remembered that often enough in bed he had felt small aches and pains, probably caused by lying in awkward positions, which had proved purely imaginary once he got up, and he looked forward eagerly to seeing this morning's delusions gradually evaporate. That the change in his voice was nothing but the precursor of a bad cold, a typical ailment of traveling salesmen, he had not the slightest doubt.

To get rid of the quilt was quite easy; he had only to inflate himself a little and it fell off by itself. But the next move was difficult, especially because he was so unusually broad. He would have needed arms and hands to hoist himself up; instead he had only the numerous little legs which never stopped waving in all directions and which he could not control in the least. When he tried to bend one of them the first thing it did was to stretch itself out straight; and if he finally succeeded in making it do what he wanted, all the other legs meanwhile waved the more wildly in the most painful and unpleasant way. "But what's the use of lying idle in bed?" said Gregor to himself.

He thought that he might get out of bed with the lower part of his body first, but this lower part, which he had not yet seen and of which he could form no clear picture, proved too difficult to move; it shifted so slowly; and when finally, almost wild with annoyance, he gathered his forces together and thrust out recklessly, he had miscalculated the direction and bumped heavily against the lower end of the bed, and the stinging pain he felt informed him that precisely this lower part of his body was at the moment probably the most sensitive.

So he tried to get the top part of himself out first, and cautiously moved his head toward the edge of the bed. That proved easy enough, and despite its breadth and mass the bulk of his body at last slowly followed the movement of his head. Still, when he finally got his head free over the edge of the bed he felt too scared to go on advancing, for, after all, if he let himself fall in this way it would take a miracle to keep his head from being injured. And under no circumstances could he afford

to lose consciousness now, precisely now; he would rather stay in bed.

But when after a repetition of the same efforts he lay in his former position again, sighing, and watched his little legs struggling against each other more wildly than ever, if that were possible, and saw no way of bringing any calm and order into this senseless confusion, he told himself again that it was impossible to stay in bed and that the most sensible course was to risk everything for the smallest hope of getting away from it. At the same time, however, he did not forget to remind himself occasionally that cool reflection, the coolest possible, was much better than desperate resolves. At such moments he focused his eyes as sharply as possible on the window, but, unfortunately, the prospect of the morning fog, which enshrouded even the other side of the narrow street, brought him little encouragement and comfort. “Seven o’clock already,” he said to himself when the alarm clock chimed again, “seven o’clock already and still such a thick fog.” And for a little while he lay quiet, breathing lightly, as if perhaps expecting the total silence around him to restore all things to their real and normal condition.

But then he said to himself: “Before it strikes a quarter past seven I absolutely must be quite out of this bed, without fail. Anyhow, by that time someone will have come from the office to ask for me, since it opens before seven.” And he began to rock his whole body at once in a regular rhythm, with the idea of swinging it out of the bed. If he tipped himself out in that way he could keep his head from injury by lifting it at a sharp angle as he fell. His back seemed to be hard and was not likely to suffer from a fall on the carpet. His biggest worry was the loud crash he would not be able to help making, which would probably cause anxiety, if not terror, behind all the doors. Still, he must take the risk.

When he was already half out of the bed—the new method was more a game than an effort, for he needed only to shift himself across by rocking to and fro—it struck him how simple it would be if he could get help. Two strong people—he thought of his father and the maid—would be amply sufficient; they would only have to thrust their arms under his convex back, lever him out of the bed, bend down with their burden, and then be patient enough to let him turn himself right over onto the floor, where it was to be hoped his little legs would then find their proper function. Well, ignoring the fact that the doors were all locked, should he really call for help? In spite of his predicament he could not

suppress a smile at the very idea of it.

He had already gotten to the point where he would lose his balance if he rocked any harder, and very soon he would have to make up his mind once and for all since in five minutes it would be a quarter past seven—when the front doorbell rang. “That’s someone from the office,” he said to himself, and grew almost rigid, while his little legs only thrashed about all the faster. For a moment everything stayed quiet. “They’re not going to open the door,” said Gregor to himself, grasping at some kind of irrational hope. But then of course the maid went as usual to the door with her determined stride and opened it. Gregor needed only to hear the first good morning of the visitor to know immediately who it was—the chief clerk himself. What a fate: to be condemned to work for a firm where the slightest negligence at once gave rise to the gravest suspicion! Were all the employees nothing but a bunch of scoundrels, was there not among them one single loyal devoted man who, had he wasted only an hour or so of the firm’s time in the morning, was so tormented by conscience as to be driven out of his mind and actually incapable of leaving his bed? Wouldn’t it really have been sufficient to send an office boy to inquire— if indeed any inquiry were necessary—did the chief clerk himself have to come and thus indicate to the entire innocent family that this suspicious circumstance could be investigated by no one less versed in affairs than himself? And more through the agitation caused by these reflections than through any act of will Gregor swung himself out of bed with all his strength. There was a loud thump, but it was not really a crash. His fall was broken to some extent by the carpet, his back, too, was less stiff than he had thought, and so there was merely a dull thud, not so very startling. Only he had not lifted his head carefully enough and had hit it; he turned it and rubbed it on the carpet in pain and irritation.

“Something fell in there,” said the chief clerk in the adjacent room to the left. Gregor tried to suppose to himself that something like what had happened to him today might someday happen to the chief clerk; one really could not deny that it was possible. But, as if in brusque reply to this supposition, the chief clerk took a couple of firm steps in the next-door room and his patent leather boots creaked. From the right-hand room his sister was whispering to inform him of the situation: “Gregor, the chief clerk’s here.” “I know,” muttered Gregor to himself; but he

didn't dare to make his voice loud enough for his sister to hear it.

"Gregor," said his father now from the room on the left, "the chief clerk has come and wants to know why you didn't catch the early train. We don't know what to say to him. Besides, he wants to talk to you in person. So open the door, please. He will be good enough to excuse the mess in your room." "Good morning, Mr. Samsa," the chief clerk was calling amiably meanwhile. "He's not well," said his mother to the visitor, while his father was still speaking through the door, "he's not well, sir, believe me. What else would make him miss a train! The boy thinks about nothing but his work. It makes me almost cross the way he never goes out in the evening; he's been here all last week and has stayed at home every single evening. He just sits there quietly at the table reading a newspaper or looking through railroad timetables. The only amusement he gets is working with his jigsaw. For instance, he spent two or three evenings cutting out a little picture frame; you would be surprised to see how pretty it is; it's hanging in his room; you'll see it in a minute when Gregor opens the door. I must say I'm glad you've come, sir; we should never have gotten him to unlock the door by ourselves; he's so obstinate; and I'm sure he's unwell, even if he denied it earlier this morning." "I'll be right there," said Gregor slowly and carefully, not moving an inch for fear of losing one word of the conversation. "I can't think of any other explanation, madam," said the chief clerk, "I hope it's nothing serious. Although on the other hand I must say that we men of business—unfortunately or perhaps fortunately —very often simply have to ignore any slight indisposition, since business must be attended to." "Well, can the chief clerk come in now?" asked Gregor's father impatiently, again knocking on the door. "No," said Gregor. In the left-hand room a painful silence followed this refusal; in the right-hand room his sister began to sob.

Why didn't his sister join the others? She had probably just gotten out of bed and hadn't even begun to put on her clothes yet. Well, why was she crying? Because he wouldn't get up and let the chief clerk in, because he was in danger of losing his job, and because the head of the firm would begin dunning his parents again for the old debts? Surely these were things one didn't need to worry about for the present. Gregor was still at home and not in the least thinking of deserting the family. At the moment, true, he was lying on the carpet and no one who knew the

condition he was in could seriously expect him to admit the chief clerk. But for such a small discourtesy, which could plausibly be explained away somehow later on, Gregor could hardly be fired on the spot. And it seemed to Gregor that it would be much more sensible to leave him in peace for the present than to trouble him with tears and entreaties. Still, of course, their uncertainty bewildered them all and excused their behavior.

"Mr. Samsa," the chief clerk called now in a louder voice, "what's the matter with you? Here you are, barricading yourself in your room, giving only 'yes' and 'no' for answers, causing your parents a lot of unnecessary trouble and neglecting—I mention this only in passing—neglecting your business duties in an incredible fashion. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and of your employer, and I beg you quite seriously to give me an immediate and precise explanation. You amaze me, you amaze me. I thought you were a quiet, dependable person, and now all at once you seem bent on making a disgraceful exhibition of yourself. The boss did hint to me early this morning a possible explanation for your disappearance—with reference to the cash payments that were entrusted to you recently—but I almost pledged my solemn word of honor that this could not be so. But now that I see how incredibly obstinate you are, I no longer have the slightest desire to take your part at all. And your position in the firm is not exactly unassailable. I came with the intention of telling you all this in private, but since you are wasting my time so needlessly I don't see why your parents shouldn't hear it too. For some time now your work has been most unsatisfactory; this is not the best time of the year for business, of course, we admit that, but a time of the year for doing no business at all, that does not exist, Mr. Samsa, must not exist."

"But, sir," cried Gregor, beside himself and in his agitation forgetting everything else, "I'm just about to open the door this very minute. A slight illness, an attack of dizziness, has kept me from getting up. I'm still lying in bed. But I feel all right again. I'm getting out of bed right now. Just give me a moment or two longer! It's not going as well as I thought. But I'm all right, really. How such a thing can suddenly strike one down! Only last night I was quite well, my parents can tell you, or rather I did have a slight presentiment. I must have showed some sign of it. Why didn't I mention it at the office! But we always think we can get

over any illness without having to stay at home. Oh sir, do spare my parents! All that you're reproaching me with now has no foundation; no one has ever said a word to me about it. Perhaps you haven't looked at the last orders I sent in. Anyway, I can still catch the eight-o'clock train, I'm much the better for my few extra hours' rest. Don't let me detain you here, sir; I'll be attending to business very soon, and do be good enough to tell the boss so and to give him my best regards!"

And while all this was tumbling out in a rush and Gregor hardly knew what he was saying, he had reached the chest of drawers quite easily, perhaps because of the practice he had had in bed, and was now trying to get himself upright by means of it. He actually meant to open the door, actually meant to show himself and speak to the chief clerk; he was eager to find out what the others, after all their insistence, would say at the sight of him. If they were horrified then the responsibility was no longer his and he could relax. But if they took it in stride, then he had no reason either to be upset, and could actually get to the station for the eight-o'clock train if he hurried. At first he slipped down a few times from the polished surface of the chest, but finally with one last heave he stood upright; he paid no more attention to the pains in the lower part of his body, no matter how much they smarted. Then he let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair, and clung to its frame with his little legs. With that he regained control over himself and he stopped speaking, for now he could hear that the chief clerk was saying something.

"Did you understand one single word of that?" the chief clerk was asking; "surely he can't be trying to make fools of us?" "Oh, dear God," cried his mother, in tears, "perhaps he's terribly ill and we're tormenting him. Grete! Grete!" she called out then. "Yes, Mother?" called his sister from the other side. They were calling to each other through Gregor's room. "You must go this minute for the doctor. Gregor is ill. Go for the doctor, quick. Did you hear how he was speaking?" "That was the voice of an animal," said the chief clerk in a voice conspicuously soft compared to the shrillness of the mother's. "Anna! Anna!" his father was calling through the hall to the kitchen, clapping his hands, "get a locksmith at once!" And the two girls were already running through the hall with a swish of skirts—how could his sister have gotten dressed so quickly?—and were tearing the front door open. There was no sound of

its closing again; they had evidently left it open, as one does in homes where some great misfortune has happened.

But Gregor was now much calmer. The words he uttered could no longer be understood, apparently, although they seemed clear enough to him, even clearer than before, perhaps because his ear had grown accustomed to the sound of them. Yet at any rate people now believed that something was wrong with him, and were ready to help. The positive certainty with which these first measures had been taken comforted him. He felt himself drawn once more into the human circle and hoped for great and remarkable results from both the doctor and the locksmith, without really distinguishing precisely between them. To make his voice as clear as possible for the crucial consultations that were soon to take place he cleared his throat a little, as quietly as he could, of course, since this noise too might not sound human for all he was able to judge. In the next room meanwhile there was complete silence. Perhaps his parents were sitting at the table with the chief clerk, whispering, perhaps they were all leaning against the door and listening.

Slowly Gregor pushed the chair toward the door, then let go of it, caught hold of the door for support—the pads at the ends of his little legs were somewhat sticky—and rested against it for a moment after his efforts. Then he set himself to turning the key in the lock with his mouth. It seemed, unfortunately, that he didn't really have any teeth—what was he supposed to grip the key with?—but on the other hand his jaws were certainly very strong; with their help he did manage to get the key turning, heedless of the fact that he was undoubtedly damaging himself, since a brown fluid issued from his mouth, flowed over the key, and dripped onto the floor. "Just listen to that," 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 shouted encouragement to him, his father and mother too: "Come on, Gregor," they should have called out, "keep going, get a good grip on that key!" And in the belief that they were all following his efforts intently, he bit down frantically on the key with all the force at his command. As the turning of the key progressed he circled around the lock, holding on now only with his mouth, pushing on the key, as required, or pulling it down again with all the weight of his body. The louder click of the finally yielding lock literally quickened Gregor. With a deep breath of relief he said to himself: "So I didn't need

the locksmith," and laid his head on the handle to open the door wide.

Since he had to pull the door toward him, he was still invisible even when it was really wide open. He had to edge himself slowly around the near half of the double door, and to do it very carefully if he was not to fall flat on his back before he even got inside. He was still carrying out this difficult maneuver, with no time to observe anything else, when he heard the chief clerk utter a loud "Oh!"—it sounded like a gust of wind—and now he could see the man, standing as he was nearest to the door, clapping one hand over his open mouth and slowly backing away as if he were being repelled by some unseen but inexorable force. His mother—in spite of the chief clerk's presence her hair was still undone and sticking out in all directions—first clasped her hands and looked at his father, then took two steps toward Gregor and fell on the floor among her outspread skirts, her face completely hidden on her breast. His father clenched one fist with a fierce expression on his face as if he meant to knock Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly around the living room, covered his eyes with his hands, and wept until his great chest heaved.

Gregor did not go now into the living room, but leaned against the inside of the firmly shut wing of the door, so that only half his body was visible and his head above it tilted sideways to look at the others. It had meanwhile become much brighter outside; on the other side of the street one could see clearly a section of the endlessly long, dark gray building opposite—it was a hospital—its façade relentlessly punctuated by evenly spaced windows; the rain was still falling, but only in large, singly discernible drops, each one of which, it seemed, was literally being hurled to the ground below. The breakfast dishes were set out on the table in great number, for breakfast was the most important meal of the day for Gregor's father, who stretched it out for hours over various newspapers. Right opposite Gregor on the wall hung a photograph of himself in military service, as a lieutenant, hand on sword, a carefree smile on his face, inviting respect for his uniform and military bearing. The door leading to the hall was open, and one could see that the front door stood open too, showing the landing beyond and the beginning of the stairs going down.

"Well," said Gregor, knowing perfectly that he was the only one who had retained any composure, "I'll get dressed right away, pack up my

samples, and start off. Will you, will you be willing to let me go? You see, sir, I'm not stubborn, and I like my work; traveling is a hard life, but I couldn't live without it. Where are you going now, sir? To the office? Yes? Will you give an honest account of all this? One can be temporarily incapacitated, but that's just the moment for remembering former services and for bearing in mind that later on, when the problem has been resolved, one will certainly work all the harder and with all the more concentration. I'm so indebted to the head of the firm, you know that very well. On the other hand, I have my parents and my sister to worry about. I'm in great difficulties, but I'll get out of them again. Don't make things any worse for me than they already are. Stand up for me in the firm. Salesmen are not popular there, I know. People think they earn piles of money and just have a good time. A prejudice there's no particular reason to correct. But you, sir, have a better view of the situation than the rest of the staff, yes, let me tell you in confidence, a better view than the boss himself, who, being the owner, lets his judgment be easily swayed against one of his employees. And you know very well that a traveling salesman, who is almost never seen in the office all year long, can so easily fall victim to gossip and bad luck and unfair accusations he can't defend himself against because he generally knows nothing about them and only finds out when he comes back exhausted from one of his trips and then has to suffer the terrible consequences in some mysterious personal way. Sir, sir, don't go away without a word to me to show that you think me in the right at least to some extent!"

But at Gregor's very first words the chief clerk had already backed away and only stared at him with parted lips over one twitching shoulder. And while Gregor was speaking he did not stand still one moment but inched toward the door, yet without taking his eyes off Gregor, as if obeying some mysterious order not to leave the room. He was already in the hall, and to judge from the suddenness with which he took his last step out of the living room one could easily have thought he had burned the sole of his foot. Once in the hall he stretched his right arm before him toward the staircase, as if some supernatural power were waiting there to deliver him.

Gregor realized that the chief clerk must on no account be allowed to go away in this frame of mind if his position in the firm were not to be

endangered to the utmost. His parents did not understand this so well; they had convinced themselves in the course of years that Gregor was settled for life in this firm, and, besides, they were so preoccupied with their immediate troubles that all foresight had forsaken them. But Gregor had this foresight. The chief clerk must be detained, soothed, persuaded, and finally won over; the whole future of Gregor and his family depended on it! If only his sister were here! She was intelligent; she had begun to cry even while Gregor was still lying quietly on his back. And no doubt the chief clerk, so partial to ladies, would have been guided by her; she would have shut the door to the apartment and in the hall talked him out of his horror. But she was not there, and Gregor would have to handle the situation himself. And without remembering that he was still unaware what powers of movement he possessed, without even remembering that his words in all possibility, indeed in all likelihood, would again be unintelligible, he let go the wing of the door, pushed himself through the opening, and started to walk toward the chief clerk, who was already clinging ridiculously with both hands to the railing on the landing; but immediately, as he was feeling for a support, he fell down with a little cry upon all his numerous legs. Hardly was he down when he experienced for the first time this morning a sense of physical well-being; his legs had firm ground under them; they were completely obedient, as he noted with joy; they even strove to carry him along in whatever direction he chose; and he was inclined to believe that a final relief from all his sufferings was at hand. But at the same moment as he found himself on the floor, not far from his mother, indeed just in front of her, rocking with pent-up eagerness to move, she, who had seemed so completely crushed, sprang all at once to her feet, her arms and fingers spread wide, cried: “Help, for God’s sake, help!” bent her head down as if to see Gregor better, yet on the contrary kept backing senselessly away; had quite forgotten that the breakfast table stood behind her; sat down upon it abruptly and with a confused look on her face when she bumped into it; and seemed altogether unaware that the big coffeepot beside her had been tipped over and that coffee was gushing all over the carpet.

“Mother, Mother,” said Gregor in a low voice, and looked up at her. The chief clerk had for the moment quite slipped from his mind; instead, he could not resist snapping his jaws together a couple of times at the

sight of the streaming coffee. That made his mother scream again; she fled from the table and fell into the arms of his father, who rushed to catch her. But Gregor had no time now to spare for his parents; the chief clerk was already on the stairs; with his chin on the banister he was taking one last backward look. Gregor made a dash forward, to be as sure as possible of overtaking him; the chief clerk must have suspected what he was up to, for he leaped down several steps at once and vanished. “Aieee!” he yelled; it was the last sound heard from him, and it echoed through the whole stairwell.

Unfortunately, the flight of the chief clerk seemed completely to unhinge Gregor’s father, who had remained relatively calm until now, for instead of running after the man himself, or at least not hindering Gregor in his pursuit, he seized in his right hand the walking stick that the chief clerk had left behind on a chair, together with his hat and overcoat, snatched in his left hand a large newspaper from the table, and began stamping his feet and flourishing the cane and the newspaper to drive Gregor back into his room. No entreaty of Gregor’s was of any use, indeed no entreaty was even understood; no matter how humbly he inclined his head his father only stamped on the floor the more forcefully. Over there his mother had thrown open a window, despite the cold weather, and was leaning far out of it with her face in her hands. A powerful draft set in from the street to the staircase, the window curtains blew in, the newspapers on the table fluttered, stray pages sailed across the floor. Pitilessly Gregor’s father drove him back, making hissing sounds like a savage. But Gregor had had no practice yet in walking backward, it really was a slow business. If only he had a chance to turn around he could get back to his room at once, but he was afraid of exasperating his father with such a time-consuming maneuver and at any moment the stick in his father’s hand might strike him a fatal blow on the back or the head. In the end, however, nothing else was left for him to do since to his horror he realized that in moving backward he could not even control the direction he took; and so, keeping an anxious eye on his father all the time over his shoulder, he began to turn around as quickly as he could, which was in reality very slowly. Perhaps his father noticed his good intentions, for he did not interfere; instead, every now and then he even directed the maneuver like a conductor from a distance with the point of the stick. If only he would stop making that

unbearable hissing noise! It drove Gregor out of his mind. By the time he managed to turn almost completely around, the hissing noise so distracted him that he even turned a little too far. But when he finally succeeded in getting his head right up in front of the doorway, it was clear that his body was too broad to fit easily through the opening. His father, of course, in his present mood was far from thinking of such a thing as opening the other half of the door, to let Gregor have enough space. The only thought in his head was that Gregor should get back into his room as quickly as possible. He would never have allowed Gregor to make the complicated preparations needed for standing upright again and perhaps slipping through the door that way. On the contrary, the father was now making more noise than ever in an effort to drive Gregor forward, as if there were no obstacle in the way at all; to Gregor, though, the noise at his rear no longer sounded like the voice of one single father; this was really no joke, and Gregor thrust himself—come what might—into the doorway. One side of his body rose up, he was tilted at an angle in the doorway, his flank was scraped raw; horrid blotches stained the white door, soon he was stuck fast and, left to himself, could not have moved at all; his little legs on one side fluttered trembling in the air, those on the other were crushed painfully to the floor—when from behind his father gave him a strong push which was literally a deliverance and he flew far into the room, bleeding violently. The door was slammed behind him with the stick, and then at last there was silence.

II

Not until it was twilight did Gregor awake out of a deep sleep, more like a swoon than a sleep. He would certainly have awoken of his own accord not much later, for he felt himself sufficiently well rested, but it seemed to him as if a fleeting step and a cautious shutting of the door leading into the hall had aroused him. The electric lights in the street cast a pale sheen here and there on the ceiling and the upper surfaces of the furniture, but down below, where he lay, it was dark. Slowly, awkwardly trying out his feelers, which he now first learned to appreciate, he pushed his way to the door to see what had been

happening there. His left side felt like one single long, unpleasantly tense scar, and he had actually to limp on his two rows of legs. One little leg, moreover, had been severely damaged in the course of that morning's events—it was almost a miracle that only one had been damaged—and trailed uselessly behind him.

He had reached the door before he discovered what had really drawn him to it: the smell of food. For there stood a bowl filled with fresh milk in which floated little slices of white bread. He could almost have laughed with joy, since he was now far hungrier than in the morning, and he dipped his head almost up to his eyes in the milk. But soon in disappointment he withdrew it again; not only did he find it difficult to eat because of his tender left side—and he could only eat with the cooperation of his whole snorting body—he did not like the milk either, although milk had been his favorite drink and that was certainly why his sister had set it there for him; indeed it was almost with repulsion that he turned away from the bowl and crawled back to the middle of the room.

He could see through the crack of the door that the gas was turned on in the living room, but while usually at this time his father made a habit of reading the afternoon newspaper in a loud voice to his mother and occasionally to his sister as well, not a sound was now to be heard. Well, perhaps his father had recently given up this habit of reading aloud, which his sister had mentioned so often in conversation and in her letters. But there was the same silence all around, although the apartment was certainly not empty of occupants. "What a quiet life our family leads," said Gregor to himself, and as he sat there motionless staring into the darkness he felt great pride in the fact that he had been able to provide such a life for his parents and sister in such a fine apartment. But what if all the quiet, the comfort, the contentment were now to end in horror? To keep himself from being lost in such thoughts Gregor took refuge in movement and crawled back and forth in the room.

Once during the long evening one of the side doors was opened a little and quickly shut again, later the other side door too; someone had apparently wanted to come in and then thought better of it. Gregor now stationed himself immediately before the living room door, determined to persuade any hesitating visitor to come in or at least to discover who

it might be; but the door was not opened again and he waited in vain. In the early morning, when the doors were locked, they had all wanted to come in, now that he had opened one door and the others had apparently been opened during the day, no one came in and even the keys were on the other side of the doors.

It was late at night before the gaslights were extinguished in the living room, and Gregor could easily tell that his parents and his sister had all stayed awake until then, for he could clearly hear the three of them stealing away on tiptoe. No one was likely to visit him, not until the morning, that was certain; so he had plenty of time to meditate at his leisure on how he was to rearrange his life. But the lofty, empty room in which he had to lie flat on the floor filled him with an apprehension he could not account for, since it had been his very own room for the past five years—and half-unconsciously, not without a slight feeling of shame, he turned from the door and scuttled under the sofa, where he felt comfortable at once, although his back was a little cramped and he could not lift his head up, and his only regret was that his body was too broad to get all of it under the sofa.

He stayed there all night, spending the time partly in a light slumber, from which his hunger kept waking him up with a start, and partly in worrying and sketching vague hopes, which all led to the same conclusion, that he must lie low for the present and, by exercising patience and the utmost consideration, help the family to bear the inconvenience he was bound to cause them in his present condition.

Very early in the morning—it was still almost night—Gregor had the chance to test the strength of his new resolutions, for his sister, nearly fully dressed, opened the door from the hall and peered in apprehensively. She did not see him at once, yet when she caught sight of him under the sofa—well, he had to be somewhere, he couldn't have flown away, could he?—she was so startled that without being able to help it she slammed the door shut again. But as if regretting her behavior she opened the door again immediately and came in on tiptoe, as if she were visiting an invalid or even a stranger. Gregor had pushed his head forward to the very edge of the sofa and watched her. Would she notice that he had left the milk standing, and not for lack of hunger, and would she bring in some other kind of food more to his taste? If she did not do it of her own accord, he would rather starve than draw her

attention to the fact, although he felt a wild impulse to dart out from under the sofa, throw himself at her feet, and beg her for something to eat. But his sister at once noticed, with surprise, that the bowl was still full, except for a little milk that had been spilled all around it, she lifted it immediately, not with her bare hands, true, but with a cloth and carried it away. Gregor was extremely curious to know what she would bring instead, and imagined all sorts of possibilities. Yet what she actually did next, in the goodness of her heart, he could never have guessed. To find out what he liked she brought him a whole selection of food, all set out on an old newspaper. There were old, half-decayed vegetables, bones from last night's supper covered with a white sauce that had congealed; some raisins and almonds; a piece of cheese that Gregor would have pronounced inedible two days ago; a plain piece of bread, a buttered piece, and a piece both buttered and salted. Besides all that, she set down again the same bowl, into which she had poured some water, and which was apparently to be reserved for his exclusive use. And with great tact, knowing that Gregor would not eat in her presence, she withdrew quickly and even turned the key, to let him understand that he could make himself as comfortable as he liked. Gregor's little legs all whirred in his rush to get to the food. His wounds must have healed completely, moreover, for he no longer felt incapacitated, which amazed him and made him reflect how more than a month ago he had cut one finger a little with a knife and was still suffering from the wound only the day before yesterday. Might it be that I am less sensitive now? he thought, and sucked greedily at the cheese, which more than any of the other delicacies attracted him at once, and strongly. One after another, and with tears of satisfaction in his eyes, he quickly devoured the cheese, the vegetables, and the sauce; the fresh food, on the other hand, had no charm for him, he could not even stand the smell of it and actually dragged away to some little distance the things he wanted to eat. He had long since finished his meal and was only lying lazily on the same spot when his sister turned the key slowly as a sign for him to retreat. That roused him at once, although he was nearly asleep, and he hurried under the sofa again. But it took considerable self-control for him to stay under the sofa, even for the short time his sister was in the room, since the large meal had swollen his body somewhat and he was so cramped he could hardly breathe. Slight attacks of breathlessness

afflicted him and his eyes were bulging a little from their sockets as he watched his unsuspecting sister sweeping together with a broom not only the remains of what he had eaten but even the things he had not touched, as if these were now of no use to anyone, and hastily shoveling it all into a bucket, which she covered with a wooden lid and carried away. Hardly had she turned her back when Gregor came from under the sofa and stretched and puffed himself out.

In this manner Gregor was fed, once in the early morning while his parents and the maid were still asleep, and a second time after they had all had their midday meal, for then his parents took a short nap and the girl could be sent out on some errand or other by his sister. Not that they would have wanted him to starve, of course, but perhaps they could not have endured learning more about his feeding than from hearsay; perhaps too his sister wanted to spare them such little anxieties wherever possible, since they had quite enough to bear as it was.

Under what pretext the doctor and the locksmith had been gotten rid of on that first morning Gregor could not discover, for since what he said was not understood by the others it never occurred to any of them, not even his sister, that he could understand what they said, and so whenever his sister came into his room he had to content himself with hearing her utter only a sigh now and then and an occasional appeal to the saints. Later on, when she had gotten a little used to the situation—of course she could never get completely used to it—Gregor would occasionally catch a remark which was kindly meant or could be so interpreted. “Well, he liked his dinner today,” she would say when Gregor had gobbled down all of his food; and when he had not eaten, which gradually happened more and more often, she would say almost sadly: “Everything’s been left untouched again.”

But although Gregor could get no news directly, he overheard a lot from the neighboring rooms, and as soon as voices were audible, he would run to the door of whichever room it was and press his whole body against it. In the first few days especially there was no conversation that did not concern him somehow, even if only indirectly. For two whole days there were family consultations at every mealtime about what should be done; but also between meals the same subject was discussed, for there were always at least two members of the family at home, since no one wanted to be alone in the apartment and to leave it

altogether empty was unthinkable. And on the very first of these days the cook—it was not quite clear what and how much she knew of the situation—fell on her knees before his mother and begged permission to leave, and when she departed a quarter of an hour later gave thanks for her release with tears in her eyes as if this were the greatest blessing that could ever be conferred on her, and without any prompting swore a solemn oath that she would never say a single word to anyone about what had happened.

Now Gregor's sister had to do the cooking too with her mother's help; true, this did not amount to much, for they ate scarcely anything. Gregor was always hearing one of the family vainly urging another to eat and getting no answer but "Thanks, I've had all I want," or something similar. Nor did they seem to be drinking anything either. Time and again his sister kept asking his father if he wouldn't like some beer and kindly offered to go and fetch it herself, and when he didn't answer suggested that she could ask the concierge to fetch it, so that he need feel no sense of obligation, but then a loud "No" came from his father and no more was said about it.

In the course of that very first day Gregor's father explained the family's financial position and prospects to both his mother and his sister. Now and then he rose from the table to get some document or notebook out of the small safe he had rescued from the collapse of his business five years earlier. One could hear him opening the complicated lock and taking papers out and shutting it again. These explanations were the first cheerful information Gregor had heard since his imprisonment. He had been of the opinion that nothing at all was left over from his father's business, at least his father had never said anything to the contrary, and of course he had not asked him directly. At that time Gregor's sole desire was to do his utmost to help the family to forget as soon as possible the catastrophe that had overwhelmed the business and thrown them all into a state of complete despair. And so he had set to work with unusual ardor and almost overnight had become a traveling salesman instead of a little clerk, with of course much greater chances of earning money, and his success was immediately transformed into hard cash which he could lay on the table before his amazed and happy family. These had been fine times, and they had never recurred, at least not with the same sense of glory, although later on Gregor had

earned so much money that he was able to meet the expenses of the whole household and did so. They had simply gotten used to it, both the family and Gregor; the money was gratefully accepted and gladly given, but there was no special outpouring of warm feeling. With his sister alone had he remained intimate, and it was a secret plan of his that she, who, unlike himself, loved music and could play the violin movingly, should be sent next year to study at the Conservatory, despite the great expense that would entail and which would have to be made up in some other way. During his brief visits home the Conservatory was often mentioned in the talks he had with his sister, but always merely as a beautiful dream which could never come true, and his parents discouraged even these innocent references to it; yet Gregor had made up his mind firmly about it and meant to announce the fact with due solemnity on Christmas Day.

Such were the thoughts, completely futile in his present condition, that went through his head as he stood glued upright to the door and listening. Sometimes out of sheer weariness he could no longer pay attention and accidentally let his head fall against the door, but he always pulled himself together again at once, for even the slight sound his head made was audible next door and brought all conversation to a stop. “What can he be doing now?” his father would say after a while, obviously turning toward the door, and only then would the interrupted conversation gradually start up again.

Gregor was now informed as amply as he could wish—for his father tended to repeat himself in his explanations, partly because it was a long time since he had dealt with such matters and partly because his mother could not always grasp things at once—that a certain amount of money, not all that much really, had survived the wreck of their fortunes and had even increased a little because the dividends had not been touched meanwhile. And besides that, the money Gregor brought home every month—he had kept only a few thalers for himself—had never been quite used up and now amounted to a substantial sum. Behind the door Gregor nodded his head eagerly, delighted by this evidence of unexpected thrift and foresight. True, he could really have paid off some more of his father’s debts to the head of his firm with this extra money, and thus brought much nearer the day on which he could quit his job, but doubtless it was better the way his father had arranged it.

Yet this capital was by no means sufficient to let the family live on the interest from it; for one year, perhaps, or at the most two, they could live on the principal, that was all. It was simply a sum that ought not to be touched and should be kept for a rainy day; money for living expenses would have to be earned. Now his father was still healthy enough but an old man, and he had done no work for the past five years and could not be expected to exert himself; during these five years, the first years of leisure in his laborious though unsuccessful life, he had put on a lot of weight and become sluggish. And Gregor's old mother, how was she to earn a living with her asthma, which troubled her even when she walked through the apartment and kept her lying on a sofa every other day panting for breath beside an open window? And was his sister to earn her bread, she who was still a child of seventeen and whose life hitherto had been so pleasant, consisting as it did in dressing herself nicely, sleeping long, helping with the housework, going out to a few modest entertainments, and above all playing the violin? At first whenever the need for earning money was mentioned Gregor let go of the door and threw himself down on the cool leather sofa beside it, he felt so hot with shame and grief.

Often he just lay there the long nights through without sleeping at all, scrabbling for hours on the leather. Or he worked himself up to the great effort of pushing an armchair to the window, then crawled up over the window-sill and, braced against the chair, leaned against the windowpanes, obviously in some recollection of the sense of freedom that looking out of a window always used to give him. For, in reality, day-by-day things that were only a little distance away were growing dimmer to his sight; the hospital across the street, which he used to curse for being all too often before his eyes, was now quite beyond his range of vision, and if he had not known that he lived on Charlotte Street, a quiet street but still a city street, he might have believed that his window looked out on a desert waste where gray sky and gray land blended indistinguishably into each other. His quick-witted sister only needed to observe twice that the armchair stood by the window; after that whenever she had tidied the room she always pushed the chair back to the same place at the window and even left the inner casements open.

If he could have spoken to her and thanked her for all she had to do for him, he could have endured her ministrations better; as it was, they

pained him. She certainly tried to make as light as possible of whatever was disagreeable in her task, and as time went on she succeeded, of course, more and more, but time also allowed Gregor to see through things better too. The very way she came in distressed him. Hardly was she in the room when she rushed straight to the window, without even taking time to shut the door, careful as she was usually to shield the sight of Gregor's room from the others, and as if she were about to suffocate tore the windows open with impatient hands, standing then in the open draft for a while even in the bitterest cold and drawing deep breaths. This rushing around and banging of hers upset Gregor twice a day; he would crouch trembling under the sofa all the while, knowing quite well that she would certainly have spared him such a disturbance had she found it at all possible to stay in his presence without opening the window.

On one occasion, about a month after Gregor's metamorphosis, when there was surely no reason for her to be still startled at his appearance, she came a little earlier than usual and found him gazing out of the window, quite motionless, and thus the perfect figure of terror. Gregor would not have been surprised had she not come in at all, for she could not immediately open the window while he was there, but not only did she retreat, she jumped back as if in alarm and slammed the door shut; a stranger might well have thought that he had been lying in wait for her there, planning to bite her. Of course he hid himself under the sofa at once, but he had to wait until midday before she came again, and she seemed more ill at ease than usual. This made him realize how repulsive the sight of him still was to her, and that it was bound to go on being repulsive, and what an effort it must cost her not to run away even from the sight of the small portion of his body that stuck out from under the sofa. In order to spare her that, therefore, one day he carried a sheet on his back to the sofa—it cost him four hours' labor—and arranged it there in such a way as to hide himself completely, so that even if she were to bend down she could not see him. Had she considered the sheet unnecessary, she would certainly have stripped it off the sofa again, for it was clear enough that this total confinement of himself had not been undertaken just for his own pleasure, but she left it where it was, and Gregor even imagined that he caught a grateful look in her eye when he lifted the sheet carefully a very little with his head to see how she was

taking the new arrangement.

For the first two weeks his parents could not bring themselves to enter his room, and he often heard them expressing their appreciation of his sister's activities, whereas formerly they had frequently been annoyed with her for being as they thought a somewhat useless girl. But now both of them often waited outside the door, his father and his mother, while his sister tidied his room, and as soon as she came out she had to tell them exactly how things were in the room, what Gregor had eaten, how he had conducted himself this time, and whether there was not perhaps some slight improvement in his condition. His mother, moreover, began relatively soon to want to visit him, but his father and sister dissuaded her at first with arguments which Gregor listened to very attentively and altogether approved. Later, however, she had to be held back by force, and when she cried out, "Let me in to see Gregor, he is my unfortunate son! Can't you understand that I must go to him?" Gregor thought that it might be well to have her come in, not every day, of course, but perhaps once a week; she understood things, after all, much better than his sister, who was only a child despite her courage and when all was said and done had perhaps taken on so difficult a task merely out of childish frivolity.

Gregor's desire to see his mother was soon fulfilled. During the daytime he did not want to show himself at the window, out of consideration for his parents, but he could not crawl very far around the few square yards of floor space he had, nor could he bear lying quietly at rest all during the night; in addition he was fast losing any interest he had ever taken in food, so for mere recreation he had formed the habit of crawling crisscross over the walls and ceiling. He especially enjoyed hanging suspended from the ceiling; it was altogether different from lying on the floor; one could breathe more freely; one's body swung and rocked lightly; and in the almost blissful absorption induced by this suspension it could happen, to his own surprise, that he let go and fell plop onto the floor. Yet he now had his body much better under control than formerly, and even such a big fall did him no harm. His sister noticed at once the new distraction Gregor had found for himself—he left behind traces of the sticky stuff from his pads wherever he crawled—and she got the idea in her head of giving him as wide a field as possible to crawl around in and of removing the pieces of furniture that

hindered him, above all the chest of drawers and the writing desk. But that was more than she could manage all by herself; she did not dare ask her father to help her; and as for the maid, a girl of sixteen who had had the courage to stay on after the cook's departure, she could not be asked to help, for she had begged as a special favor that she might keep the kitchen door locked and open it only on a definite summons; so there was nothing left but to turn to her mother one day when her father was out. And the mother did come, with exclamations of excitement and joy, which, however, died away at the door of Gregor's room. Gregor's sister, of course, went in first to see that everything was in order before letting his mother enter. In great haste Gregor had pulled the sheet lower than usual and arranged it more in folds so that it really looked as if it had been thrown casually over the sofa. And this time he did not peer out from under it; he denied himself the pleasure of seeing his mother on this first occasion and was only glad that she had come at all. "Come in, he's out of sight," said his sister, obviously leading her mother in by the hand. Gregor could now hear the two frail women struggling to shift the heavy old chest from its place, and his sister insisting on doing the greater part of the work herself without listening to the admonitions of her mother, who feared she might overstrain herself. It took a long time. After at least a quarter of an hour's tugging his mother said that the chest had better be left right where they had found it, for in the first place it was too heavy and could never be removed before his father came home, and with the chest halfway in the middle of the room like this it would only hamper Gregor's movements, while in the second place it was not at all certain that removing the furniture would be doing Gregor a favor. She was inclined to think the contrary; the sight of the naked wall made her own heart heavy, and why shouldn't Gregor have the same feeling, considering that he had been used to his furniture for so long and might feel forlorn without it. "And doesn't it look," his mother concluded in a low voice—in fact she had been almost whispering all the time as if to avoid letting Gregor, whose exact whereabouts she did not know, hear even the sounds of her voice, for she was convinced that he could not understand her words—"doesn't it look as if we were showing him, by taking away his furniture, that we have given up hope of his ever getting better and are just thoughtlessly leaving him to himself? I think it would be best to keep his room exactly

as it has always been, so that when he comes back to us he will find everything unchanged and be able to forget all the more easily what has happened in the meantime."

On hearing these words from his mother Gregor realized that the lack of all direct human communication for the past two months together with the monotony of family life must have confused his mind, otherwise he could not account for the fact that he had seriously looked forward to having his room emptied of its furnishings. Did he really want his cozy room, so comfortably fitted with old family furniture, to be turned into a cave in which he would certainly be able to crawl unhampered in all directions but at the price of shedding instantly and totally all recollection of his human past? He had indeed been close to the brink of forgetfulness and only the voice of his mother, which he had not heard for so long, had drawn him back from it. Nothing should be taken out of his room; everything must stay as it was; he could not dispense with the beneficial effects of the furniture on his state of mind; and even if the furniture did hamper him in his senseless crawling around and around, that was no drawback but a great advantage.

Unfortunately his sister was of the contrary opinion; she had grown accustomed, and not without reason, to consider herself an expert in Gregor's affairs as against her parents, and so her mother's advice was now enough to make her determined on the removal not only of the chest and the desk, which had been her first intention, but of all the furniture except the indispensable sofa. This determination was not, of course, merely the outcome of childish recalcitrance and of the self-confidence she had recently developed so unexpectedly and at such cost; she had in fact perceived that Gregor needed a lot of space to crawl around in, while on the other hand he never used the furniture at all, so far as could be seen. Another factor might also have been the enthusiastic temperament of girls her age, which seeks to indulge itself at every opportunity and which now tempted Grete to exaggerate the horror of her brother's circumstances in order that she might do all the more for him. In a room where Gregor lorded it all alone over empty walls no one except herself was likely ever to set foot.

And so she was not to be moved from her resolve by her mother, who seemed, moreover, to be ill at ease in Gregor's room and therefore unsure of herself, was soon reduced to silence and helped her daughter

as best she could to push the chest outside. Now, Gregor could do without the chest if need be, but the desk had to stay. As soon as the two women had gotten the chest out of his room, groaning as they pushed it, Gregor stuck his head out from under the sofa to see how he might intervene as considerately and cautiously as possible. But as bad luck would have it, his mother was the first to return, leaving Grete grappling with the chest in the room next door where she was trying to shift it all by herself, without of course moving it from the spot. His mother however was not accustomed to the sight of him, it might sicken her, and so in alarm Gregor backed quickly to the other end of the sofa, yet could not prevent the sheet from swaying a little in front. That was enough to put her on the alert. She paused, stood still for a moment, and then went back to Grete.

Although Gregor kept reassuring himself that nothing out of the ordinary was happening, that only a few bits of furniture were being rearranged, he soon had to admit that all this trotting to and fro of the two women, their little shouts to each other, and the scraping of furniture along the floor had the effect on him of some vast disturbance coming from all sides at once, and however much he tucked in his head and legs and pressed his body to the floor, he had to confess that he would not be able to stand it much longer. They were clearing his room out; taking away everything he loved; the chest in which he kept his jigsaw and other tools was already dragged off; they were now loosening the desk which had almost sunk into the floor, the desk at which he had done all his homework when he was at the commercial academy, at the secondary school before that, and, yes, even at the primary school—he had no more time to waste in weighing the good intentions of the two women, whose existence he had by now almost forgotten, for they were so exhausted that they were laboring in silence and nothing could be heard but the heavy scuffling of their feet.

And so he broke out—the women were just leaning against the desk in the next room to give themselves a breather—and four times changed his direction, since he really did not know what to rescue first, then on the wall opposite, which was already all but empty, he was struck by the picture of the lady muffled in so much fur and quickly crawled up to it and pressed himself to the glass, which was a good surface to adhere to and soothed his hot belly. This picture at least, now entirely hidden

beneath him, was going to be removed by nobody. He turned his head toward the door of the living room so as to observe the women when they came back.

They had not allowed themselves much of a rest and were already returning; Grete had twined her arm around her mother and was almost supporting her. “Well, what shall we take now?” said Grete, looking around. Her eyes met Gregor’s from the wall. She kept her composure, presumably because of her mother, bent her head down to her mother, to keep her from looking up, and said, although in a trembling and unconvincing tone of voice: “Come, hadn’t we better go back to the living room for a moment?” Her intentions were clear enough to Gregor, she wanted to get her mother to safety and then drive him down from the wall. Well, just let her try it! He clung to his picture and would not give it up. He would rather fly in Grete’s face.

But Grete’s words had succeeded in upsetting her mother, who took a step to one side, caught sight of the huge brown mass on the flowered wallpaper, and before she was really aware that what she saw was Gregor, screamed in a loud, hoarse voice, “Oh God, oh God!” fell with outspread arms over the sofa as if giving up, and did not move. “Gregor!” cried his sister, shaking her fist and glaring at him. This was the first time she had directly addressed him since his metamorphosis. She ran into the next room for some smelling salts with which to rouse her mother from her fainting fit. Gregor wanted to help too—there was time to rescue the picture later—but he was stuck fast to the glass and had to tear himself loose; he then ran after his sister into the next room as if he could still advise her the way he used to; but all he could do was stand helplessly behind her; she meanwhile searched among various small bottles and when she turned around started in alarm at the sight of him; one bottle fell on the floor and broke; a splinter of glass cut Gregor’s face and some kind of corrosive medicine splashed him; without pausing a moment longer Grete gathered up all the bottles she could carry and ran to her mother with them; she banged the door shut with her foot. Gregor was now cut off from his mother, who was perhaps about to die because of him; he dared not open the door for fear of frightening away his sister, who had to stay with her mother; there was nothing he could do but wait; and tormented by self-reproach and worry he began now to crawl to and fro, over everything, walls, furniture, and

ceiling, and finally in his despair, when the whole room seemed to be reeling around him, fell down onto the middle of the big table.

A little while elapsed, Gregor was still lying there feebly and all around him was quiet; perhaps that was a good omen. Then the doorbell rang. The maid was of course locked in her kitchen, and Grete had to go and open the door. It was his father. “What’s happened?” were his first words; the look on Grete’s face must have told him everything. Grete answered in a muffled voice, apparently hiding her head on his chest: “Mother fainted, but she’s better now. Gregor’s broken loose.” “Just what I expected,” said his father, “just what I’ve been telling you would happen, but you women would never listen.” It was clear to Gregor that his father had taken the worst interpretation of Grete’s all too brief statement and was assuming that Gregor had been guilty of some violent act. Therefore Gregor must now try to calm his father down, since he had neither time nor means for an explanation. And so he ran to the door of his own room and crouched against it, to let his father see as soon as he came in from the hall that his son had the good intention of getting back into his room immediately and that it was not necessary to drive him there, but that if only the door were opened for him he would disappear at once.

Yet his father was not in the mood to perceive such fine distinctions. “Aha!” he cried as soon as he appeared, in a tone that sounded at once angry and exultant. Gregor drew his head back from the door and lifted it to look at his father. Truly, this was not the father he had imagined to himself; admittedly he had been too absorbed of late in his new recreation of crawling over the ceiling to take the same interest as before in what was happening elsewhere in the apartment, and he really should have been prepared for some changes. And yet, and yet, could that be his father? The man who used to lie wearily sunk in bed whenever Gregor set out on a business trip; who on the evenings of his return welcomed him back lying in an easy chair in his bathrobe; who could not really rise to his feet but only lifted his arms in greeting, and who on the rare occasions when he did go out with his family, on one or two Sundays a year and on the most important holidays, walked between Gregor and his mother, who were slow walkers themselves, even more slowly than they did, muffled in his old overcoat, shuffling laboriously forward with the help of his crook-handled cane, which he set down

most cautiously at every step and, whenever he wanted to say anything, nearly always came to a full stop and gathered his escort around him? Now he was standing there straight as a stick, dressed in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons, such as bank attendants wear; his strong double chin bulged over the stiff high collar of his jacket; from under his bushy eyebrows his black eyes darted fresh and penetrating glances; his formerly tangled white hair had been combed flat on either side of a shining and carefully exact parting. He pitched his cap, which bore a gold monogram, probably the badge of some bank, in a wide arc across the whole room onto a sofa and with the tail-ends of his jacket thrown back, his hands in his trouser pockets, advanced with a grim visage toward Gregor. Likely enough he did not himself know what he meant to do; at any rate, he lifted his feet unusually high off the floor, and Gregor was dumbfounded at the enormous size of his shoe soles. But Gregor could not risk standing up to him, aware, as he had been from the very first day of his new life, that his father believed only the severest measures suitable for dealing with him. And so he ran before his father, stopping when he stopped and scuttling forward again when his father made any kind of move. In this way they circled the room several times without anything decisive happening, indeed the whole operation did not even look like a pursuit because it was carried out so slowly. And so Gregor confined himself to the floor, for he feared that his father might interpret any recourse to the walls or the ceiling as especially wicked behavior. All the same, he could not keep this race up much longer, for while his father took a single step he had to carry out a whole series of movements. He was already beginning to feel breathless, just as in his former life his lungs had not been very dependable. As he was staggering along, trying to concentrate his energy on running, hardly keeping his eyes open, in his dazed state never even thinking of any other escape than simply going forward, and having almost forgotten that the walls were free to him, which in this room, to be sure, were obstructed by finely carved pieces of furniture full of sharp points and jagged edges—suddenly something lightly flung landed close beside him and rolled in front of him. It was an apple; a second apple followed immediately; Gregor came to a stop in alarm; there was no point in running away now, for his father was determined to bombard him. He had filled his pockets with fruit from the dish on the sideboard and was now throwing

apple after apple, without taking particularly good aim for the moment. The small red apples rolled about the floor as if magnetized and bumped into each other. An apple thrown without much force grazed Gregor's back and glanced off harmlessly. But another, following immediately, landed right on his back and got stuck in it; Gregor wanted to drag himself forward, as if this startling, incredible pain would disappear if he moved to a different spot; but he felt as if he were nailed to the floor, and stretched himself out in the complete derangement of all his senses. With his last conscious look he saw the door of his room being torn open and his mother rushing out ahead of his screaming sister, in her underbodice, for her daughter had loosened her clothing to let her breathe more freely and recover from her swoon; he saw his mother rushing toward his father, leaving her loosened petticoats, one after another, behind her on the floor, stumbling over them straight to his father and embracing him, in complete union with him—but by now Gregor's sight was already failing—with her hands clasped around his father's neck as she begged for Gregor's life.

III

The serious injury done to Gregor, which disabled him for more than a month—the apple remained stuck in his body as a visible reminder, since no one dared to remove it—seemed to have made even his father recollect that Gregor was a member of the family, despite his present unfortunate and repulsive shape, and ought not to be treated as an enemy, that, on the contrary, family duty required them to swallow their disgust and to practice patience, nothing but patience.

And although his injury had impaired, probably forever, his powers of movement, and for the time being it took him long, long minutes to creep across his room like an old invalid—there was no question now of crawling up the wall—yet in his own opinion he was sufficiently compensated for this worsening of his condition by the fact that toward evening the living-room door, which he used to watch intently for an hour or two beforehand, was now always opened, so that lying in the darkness of his room, invisible to the family, he was permitted to see them all at the lamp-lit table and listen to their talk by general consent,

as it were, very different from his earlier eavesdropping.

True, their conversation lacked the lively character of former times, which he had always called to mind with a certain wistfulness in the small hotel bedrooms where he so often used to throw himself down, tired out, on the damp bedding. They were now mostly very silent. Soon after supper his father would fall asleep in his armchair; his mother and sister would admonish each other to be silent; his mother, bending low under the lamp, would sew delicate undergarments for a fashionable shop; his sister, who had taken a job as a salesgirl, was learning shorthand and French in the evenings in the hopes of getting a better position some day. Sometimes his father woke up, and as if quite unaware that he had been sleeping said to his mother: “What a lot of sewing you’re doing today!” and at once fell asleep again, while the two women exchanged a tired smile.

With a kind of mulishness his father persisted in keeping his uniform on even in the house; his robe hung uselessly on its peg and he slept fully dressed where he sat, as if he were ready for service at any moment and even here only awaiting the call of his superior. As a result, his uniform, which was not brand-new to start with, began to look dirty, despite all the loving care of the mother and sister to keep it clean, and Gregor often spent whole evenings gazing at the many greasy spots on the garment, gleaming with gold buttons always in a high state of polish, in which the old man sat sleeping in extreme discomfort and yet quite peacefully.

As soon as the clock struck ten his mother tried to rouse his father with gentle words and to persuade him after that to get into bed, for sitting there he could not have a proper sleep and that was what he needed most, since he had to go on duty at six. But with the mulishness he displayed since becoming a bank attendant he always insisted on staying longer at the table, although he regularly fell asleep again and finally only with the greatest trouble could be persuaded to relinquish his armchair and go to bed. However insistently Gregor’s mother and sister kept urging him with gentle reminders, he would go on slowly shaking his head for a quarter of an hour, keeping his eyes shut, and refuse to get to his feet. The mother plucked at his sleeve, whispering endearments in his ear, the sister left her lessons to come to her mother’s help, but it all made little impression on Gregor’s father. He would only

sink down deeper in his chair. Not until the two women hoisted him up by the armpits did he open his eyes and look at them both, one after the other, usually with the remark, “What a life. So this is the peace and quiet of my old age.” And leaning on the two of them he would heave himself up, with difficulty, as if he were his own greatest burden, permit them to lead him as far as the door, and then wave them away and go on alone, while the mother threw down her needlework and the sister her pen in order to run after him and be of further assistance.

Who could find time in this overworked and tired-out family to bother about Gregor more than was absolutely necessary? The household was reduced more and more; the maid was now let go; a gigantic bony cleaning woman with white hair flying around her head came in mornings and evenings to do the rough work; Gregor’s mother did all the rest, as well as all her sewing. Even various pieces of family jewelry, which his mother and sister had loved to wear at parties and celebrations, had to be sold, as Gregor discovered one evening from hearing them discuss the prices obtained. But what they lamented most was the fact that they could not leave the apartment, which was much too big for their present circumstances, because they could not think of any way to transfer Gregor. Yet Gregor saw well enough that consideration for him was not the main difficulty preventing the move, for they could easily have carried him in some suitable box with a few air holes in it; what really kept them from moving into another apartment was rather their own complete hopelessness and the belief that they had been singled out for a misfortune such as had never happened to any of their relations or acquaintances. They fulfilled to the utmost all that the world demands of poor people: the father fetched breakfast for the minor clerks in the bank, the mother devoted her energy to making underwear for strangers, the sister trotted back and forth behind the counter at the demand of her customers, but more than this they had not the strength to do. And the wound in Gregor’s back began to hurt him afresh when his mother and sister, after getting his father into bed, came back again, left their work lying, drew close to each other, and sat cheek by cheek—when his mother, pointing toward his room, said, “Shut that door now, Grete,” and he was left again in darkness, while next door the women mingled their tears or perhaps sat dry-eyed, staring at the table.

Gregor hardly slept at all now, night or day. He was often haunted by the idea that the next time the door opened he would take the family's affairs in hand again just as he used to do; once again after this long interval, there appeared in his thoughts the figures of the boss and the chief clerk, the salesmen and the apprentices, the messenger boy who was so dull-witted, two or three friends in other firms, a chambermaid in one of the rural hotels, a sweet and fleeting memory, a cashier in a milliner's shop, whom he had courted earnestly but too slowly—they all appeared, together with strangers or people he had quite forgotten, but instead of helping him and his family they were all inaccessible and he was glad when they vanished. At other times he would not be in the mood to bother about his family, he was only filled with rage at the way they were neglecting him, and although he could not imagine what he might like to eat he would make plans for getting into the pantry to take the food that, after all, was due him, hungry or not. His sister no longer gave a second thought now to what might especially please him, but in the morning and at noon before she went to work hurriedly pushed into his room with her foot any food that was available, and in the evening cleared it out again with one sweep of the broom, heedless of whether it had been nibbled at, or—as most frequently happened—left completely untouched. The cleaning of his room, which she now always did in the evenings, could not have been done more hastily. Streaks of dirt were smeared along the walls, here and there lay balls of dust and filth. At first Gregor used to station himself in some particularly filthy corner when his sister arrived, in order to reproach her with it, so to speak. But he could have sat there for weeks without getting her to make any improvement; she could see the dirt as well as he did, but she had simply made up her mind to leave it alone. And yet, with a touchiness that was new to her, and which seemed, moreover, to have infected the whole family, she jealously guarded her claim to be the sole caretaker of Gregor's room. His mother once subjected his room to a thorough cleaning, which was achieved only by means of several buckets of water —all this dampness of course upset Gregor too and he lay stretched out, sulky and motionless on the sofa—but she was well punished for it. Hardly had his sister noticed the changed aspect of his room that evening than she rushed mortally offended into the living room and, despite the imploringly raised hands of her mother, burst into a storm of

weeping, while her parents—her father had of course been startled out of his chair—looked on at first in helpless amazement; then they too began to go into action; the father reproached the mother on his right for not having left the cleaning of Gregor's room to his sister; shrieked at the sister on his left that never again would she be allowed to clean Gregor's room; while the mother tried to drag the father into his bedroom since he was beside himself with agitation; the sister, shaken with sobs, then beat upon the table with her small fists; and Gregor hissed loudly with rage because not one of them thought of shutting the door to spare him such a spectacle and so much noise.

Still, even if the sister, exhausted by her daily work, had grown tired of looking after Gregor as she formerly did, there was no need at all for his mother's intervention or for Gregor's being neglected. The cleaning woman was there. This old widow, whose strong and bony frame had enabled her to survive the worst a long life could offer, had no particular aversion to Gregor. Without being in the least inquisitive she had once by chance opened the door to his room and at the sight of Gregor, who, taken by surprise, began to rush to and fro although no one was chasing him, merely stood there in amazement with her arms folded. From that time on she never failed to open his door a little for a moment, morning and evening, to have a look at him. At first she even used to call him to her, with words which apparently she meant to be friendly, such as: "Come on over here, you old dung beetle!" or "Will you look at that old dung beetle!" To such forms of address Gregor made no answer, but stayed motionless where he was, as if the door had never been opened. Instead of being allowed to disturb him so senselessly whenever the whim took her, that servant should have been ordered instead to clean out his room daily. Once, early in the morning—heavy rain was lashing at the windowpanes, perhaps a sign that spring was on its way—Gregor was so exasperated when she began addressing him again that he turned and went toward her as if to attack her, although slowly and feebly enough. But the cleaning woman, instead of being afraid, merely picked up a chair that happened to be beside the door, held it high, and as she stood there with her mouth wide open it was clear that she meant to shut it only after she brought the chair down on Gregor's back. "Not coming any closer, then?" she asked, as Gregor turned away again, and quietly put the chair back into the corner.

Gregor was now eating hardly anything. Only when he happened to pass the food laid out for him did he take a bit of something in his mouth as a kind of game, kept it there for hours at a time, and usually spat it out again. At first he thought it was chagrin over the state of his room that prevented him from eating, yet in fact he very quickly got used to the various changes in his room. It had become a habit in the family to put things into his room for which there was no space elsewhere, and there were plenty of these things now, since one of the rooms had been rented to three boarders. These serious gentlemen—all three of them with full beards, as Gregor once observed through a crack in the door—had a passion for order, not only in their own room but, since they were now members of the household, in all its arrangements, especially in the kitchen. They could not endure useless, let alone dirty, clutter. Besides, they had brought with them most of the furnishings they needed. For this reason many things could be dispensed with that it was no use trying to sell but that should not be thrown away either. All of them found their way into Gregor's room. The ash can likewise and the kitchen garbage can. Anything that was not needed for the moment was simply flung into Gregor's room by the cleaning woman, who did everything in a hurry; fortunately Gregor usually saw only the object, whatever it was, and the hand that held it. Perhaps she intended to take the things away again as time and opportunity offered, or to collect them until she could throw them all out in a heap, but in fact they just lay wherever she happened to throw them, except when Gregor pushed his way through the junk heap and arranged it somewhat, at first out of necessity because he had no room to crawl around in, but later with increasing enjoyment, although after such excursions, being sad and weary to death, he would lie motionless for hours.

Since the boarders often ate their supper at home in the common living room, the living-room door stayed shut many an evening, yet Gregor reconciled himself quite easily to the shutting of the door, for often enough on evenings when it was opened he had disregarded it entirely and lain in the darkest corner of his room, quite unnoticed by the family. On one occasion the cleaning woman had left the door open a little and it stayed ajar even when the lodgers came in for supper and the lamp was lit. They sat down at the upper end of the table where formerly Gregor and his father and mother had eaten their meals,

unfolded their napkins, and took knife and fork in hand. At once his mother appeared in the doorway with a platter of meat and close behind her his sister with a bowl of potatoes piled high. The food steamed with a thick vapor. The boarders bent over the food set before them as if to scrutinize it before eating; in fact, the man in the middle, who seemed to pass for an authority with the other two, cut a piece of meat as it lay on the platter, obviously to determine if it was tender enough or should be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied, and Gregor's mother and sister, who had been watching anxiously, breathed a sigh of relief and began to smile.

The family itself took its meals in the kitchen. Nonetheless, Gregor's father came into the living room before going to the kitchen and with one prolonged bow, cap in hand, made a round of the table. The boarders all stood up and muttered something in their beards. When they were alone again they ate their food in almost complete silence. It seemed remarkable to Gregor that among the various noises coming from the table he could always distinguish the sound of their chewing teeth, as if this were a sign to Gregor that one needed teeth in order to eat, and that even with the finest of toothless jaws one could do nothing. "I'm certainly hungry," said Gregor sadly to himself, "but not for that kind of food. How these boarders are stuffing themselves, and here am I dying of starvation!"

On that very evening—during all this time Gregor could not remember ever having heard the violin—the sound of violin playing came from the kitchen. The boarders had already finished their supper, the one in the middle had brought out a newspaper and given the other two a page apiece, and now they were leaning back at ease reading and smoking. When the violin began to play they pricked up their ears, got to their feet, and went on tiptoe to the hall door where they stood huddled together. Their movements must have been heard in the kitchen, for Gregor's father called out: "Is the violin playing disturbing you, gentlemen? It can be stopped at once." "On the contrary," said the middle boarder, "wouldn't the young lady like to join us here and play where it is much more pleasant and comfortable?" "Oh certainly," cried Gregor's father, as if he were the violin player. The boarders returned to the living room and waited. Soon Gregor's father arrived with the music stand, his mother carrying the music and his sister with the violin. His

sister calmly made everything ready to start playing; his parents, who had never let rooms before and so had an exaggerated idea of the courtesy due to boarders, did not venture to sit down on their own chairs; his father leaned against the door, his right hand thrust between two buttons of his uniform jacket, which was formally buttoned up; but his mother was offered a chair by one of the boarders and, since she left the chair just where he had happened to put it, sat down in a corner off to one side.

Gregor's sister began to play; the father and mother, from either side, intently watched the movements of her hands. Gregor, attracted by the playing, ventured to move forward a little until his head was actually inside the living room. He felt hardly any surprise at his growing lack of consideration for the others; there had been a time when he prided himself on being considerate. Yet on this occasion he had more reason than ever to hide himself, since owing to the amount of dust that lay thick in his room and rose into the air at the slightest movement, he too was covered with dust; fluff and hair and remnants of food trailed with him, caught on his back and along his sides; his indifference to everything was much too great for him to turn on his back and scrape himself clean on the carpet, as once he had done several times a day. And in spite of his condition, no shame deterred him from advancing a little over the spotless floor of the living room.

To be sure, no one paid any attention to him. The family was entirely absorbed in the violin playing; the boarders, however, who at first had stationed themselves, hands in pockets, much too close behind the music stand so that they could all have read the music, something which must have bothered his sister, had soon retreated to the window, half whispering with bowed heads, and stayed there while his father turned an anxious eye on them. Indeed, they were making it more than obvious that they had been disappointed in their expectation of hearing good or even entertaining violin playing, that they had had more than enough of the performance, and that they were putting up with this disturbance of their peace only out of courtesy. From the way they all kept blowing the smoke of their cigars high in the air through nose and mouth one could divine their irritation. And yet Gregor's sister was playing so beautifully. Her face tilted to one side, intently and sadly her eyes followed the notes of music. Gregor crawled a little farther forward and lowered his head to

the ground so that it might be possible for his eyes to meet hers. Was he an animal, since music so moved him? He felt as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved. He was determined to push forward until he reached his sister, to pull at her skirt and so let her know 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 let her out of his room, at least not so long as he lived; his frightful appearance would become, for the first time, useful to him; he would watch over all the doors of his room at once and hiss like a dragon at any intruders; but his sister would not be forced to stay, she would stay with him of her own free will; she would sit beside him on the sofa, bend down her ear to him, and hear him confide that he had had the firm intention of sending her to the Conservatory and that, but for his mishap, last Christmas—surely Christmas was long past?—he would have announced it to everybody without allowing a single objection. After this declaration his sister would be so touched that she would burst into tears, and Gregor would then raise himself to her shoulder and kiss her on the neck, which, now that she was a young working woman, she kept free of any ribbon or collar.

"Mr. Samsa!" cried the middle boarder to Gregor's father, and pointed, without wasting any more words, at Gregor, now working himself slowly forward. The violin fell silent, the middle boarder first smiled to his friends with a shake of the head and then looked at Gregor again. Instead of driving Gregor out, his father seemed to think it more important to begin by soothing down the boarders, although they were not at all agitated and apparently found Gregor more entertaining than the violin playing. He hurried toward them and, spreading out his arms, tried to urge them back into their own room and at the same time to block their view of Gregor. They now began to be really a little angry, one could not tell whether because of the old man's behavior or because it had just dawned on them that without knowing it they had such a neighbor as Gregor in the next room. They demanded explanations of his father, they waved their arms like him, tugged uneasily at their beards, and only with reluctance backed toward their room. Meanwhile Gregor's sister, who stood there as if lost when her playing was so abruptly broken off, came to life again, pulled herself together all at once after standing for a while holding violin and bow in her slack and drooping

hands and staring at her music, pushed her violin into the lap of her mother, who was still sitting in her chair fighting asthmatically for breath, and ran into the boarders' room, to which they were now being shepherded by her father rather more quickly than before. One could see the pillows and blankets on the beds flying about under her practiced fingers and being laid in order. Even before the boarders had actually reached their room she had finished making the beds and slipped out.

The father seemed once more to be so possessed by his mulish self-assertiveness that he was forgetting all the respect he owed his boarders. He kept driving them on and driving them on until, at the very door of the bedroom, the middle boarder stamped his foot loudly on the floor and so brought him to a halt. "I herewith declare," said the boarder, lifting one hand and looking also at Gregor's mother and sister, "that because of the disgusting conditions prevailing in this household and family"—here he spat on the floor with emphatic brevity—"I give you notice on the spot. Naturally I won't pay you a penny for the days I have lived here, on the contrary I shall consider suing you for damages, based on claims—believe me—that will be easily substantiated." He ceased and stared straight ahead, as if he were expecting something. In fact, his two friends at once rushed into the breach with these words: "And we too give notice on the spot." At that he seized the door handle and shut the door with a slam.

Gregor's father, groping with his hands, staggered forward and fell into his chair; it looked as if he were stretching himself out there for his usual evening nap, but the powerful and uncontrolled jerking of his head showed that he was far from asleep. Gregor had simply stayed quietly all the time on the spot where the boarders had caught sight of him. Disappointment at the failure of his plan, perhaps also the weakness arising from extreme hunger, made it impossible for him to move. He feared, with a fair degree of certainty, that at any moment the general tension would discharge itself in a combined attack upon him, and he lay there waiting. He did not react even to the noise made by the violin as it fell off his mother's lap from under her trembling fingers and gave out a resonant sound.

"My dear parents," said his sister, slapping her hand on the table by way of introduction, "things can't go on like this. Perhaps you don't realize that, but I do. I won't utter my brother's name in the presence of

this creature, and so all I say is: we must try to get rid of it. We've tried to look after it and to put up with it as far as is humanly possible, and I don't think anyone could reproach us in the slightest."

"She is absolutely right," said Gregor's father to himself. His mother, who was still choking for lack of breath, began to cough hollowly into her hand with a wild look in her eyes.

His sister rushed over to her and held her forehead. His father's thoughts seemed to have lost their vagueness at Grete's words, he sat more upright, fingering his service cap, which lay among the plates still on the table from the boarders' supper, and from time to time looked at the motionless form of Gregor.

"We must try to get rid of it," his sister now said explicitly to her father, since her mother was coughing too much to hear a word, "it will be the death of both of you, I can see that coming. When one has to work as hard as we do, all of us, one can't stand this continual torment at home on top of it. At least I can't stand it any longer." And she burst into such a fit of sobbing that her tears dropped onto her mother's face, from which she wiped them with mechanical flicks of her hand.

"My child," said the old man sympathetically and with evident understanding, "but what should we do?"

Gregor's sister merely shrugged her shoulders to indicate the feeling of helplessness that, in contrast to her former confidence, had overtaken her during her weeping fit.

"If only he could understand us," said her father, half questioningly; Grete, still sobbing, vehemently waved a hand to show how unthinkable that was.

"If he could understand us," repeated the old man, shutting his eyes to consider his daughter's conviction that understanding was impossible, "then perhaps we might come to some agreement with him. But as it is …"

"He must go," cried Gregor's sister, "that's the only solution, Father. You must just try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. The fact that we've believed it for so long is the root of all our misfortune. But how can it be Gregor? If this were Gregor, he would have realized long ago that human beings can't live with such a creature, and he'd have gone away of his own accord. We wouldn't have any brother then, but we'd be able to go on living and keep his memory in honor. As it is, this

creature persecutes us, drives away our boarders, obviously wants the whole apartment to himself, and would have us all sleep in the gutter. Look, Father," she suddenly shrieked, "he's at it again!" And in a state of panic that was quite incomprehensible to Gregor she even left her mother's side, literally thrusting the chair from her as if she would rather sacrifice her mother than be anywhere near Gregor, and rushed behind her father, who also stood up, upset by her behavior, and half spread his arms out as if to protect her.

Yet Gregor hadn't the slightest intention of frightening anyone, least of all his sister. He had only begun to turn around in order to crawl back to his room, but it was certainly a startling operation to see, since because of his disabled condition he could not execute the difficult turning movements except by lifting his head and then bracing it against the floor over and over again. He paused and looked around. His good intentions seemed to have been recognized; the alarm had only been momentary. Now they were all watching him in melancholy silence. His mother lay in her chair, her legs stiffly outstretched and pressed together, her eyes almost closing from sheer exhaustion; his father and his sister were sitting beside each other, his sister's arm around the father's neck.

Now perhaps they'll let me go on turning around, thought Gregor, and began his labors again. He could not stop himself from panting with the effort, and had to pause now and then to take a breath. Nor was anyone rushing him, he was left entirely to himself. When he had completed the turn, he began at once to crawl straight back. He was amazed at the distance separating him from his room and could not understand how in his weak state he had managed to accomplish the same journey so recently, almost without noticing it. Intent on crawling as fast as possible, he hardly realized that not a single word, not one exclamation from his family, interfered with his progress. Only when he was already in the doorway did he turn his head around, not completely, for his neck muscles were getting stiff, but enough to see that nothing had changed behind him except that his sister had risen to her feet. His last glance fell on his mother, who was now sound asleep.

Hardly was he inside his room when the door was hastily pushed shut, bolted, and locked. The sudden noise behind him startled him so much that his little legs collapsed beneath him. It was his sister who had

shown such haste. She had been standing ready, waiting, and had made a light spring forward, 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, looking around in the darkness. Soon he made the discovery that he was now completely unable to move. This did not surprise him, rather it seemed unnatural that he should ever actually have been able to move at all on these feeble little legs. Otherwise he felt relatively comfortable. True, his whole body was aching, but it seemed that the pain was gradually growing less and would finally pass away. The rotting apple in his back and the inflamed area around it, all covered with soft dust, already hardly troubled him. He thought of his family with tenderness and love. The conviction that he must disappear was one that he held even more strongly than his sister, if that were possible. In this state of empty and peaceful meditation he remained until the tower clock struck three in the morning. The first broadening of light in the world outside the window just entered his consciousness. Then his head sank to the floor of its own accord and from his nostrils came the last faint flicker of his breath.

When the cleaning woman arrived early in the morning—out of sheer strength and impatience she slammed all the doors so loudly, regardless of how often she had been begged not to do so, that no one in the whole apartment could enjoy any quiet sleep after her arrival—she noticed nothing unusual as she took her customary peek into Gregor’s room. She thought he was lying motionless on purpose, pretending to be in a sulk; she credited him with every kind of intelligence. Since she happened to have the long-handled broom in her hand she tried to tickle him with it from the doorway. When that too produced no reaction she felt provoked and poked at him a little harder, and only when she had pushed him along the floor without meeting any resistance was her attention aroused. Soon the truth of the matter dawned on her, her eyes widened, she let out a whistle, yet did not waste much time over it but tore open the door of the Samsas’ bedroom and yelled into the darkness at the top of her voice: “Come look at this, it’s dead; it’s lying there, dead as a doornail!”

Mr. and Mrs. Samsa sat bolt upright in their double bed and had some difficulty getting over the shock before they realized the nature of the cleaning woman’s announcement. But then they got out of bed quickly,

one on either side, Mr. Samsa throwing a blanket over his shoulders, Mrs. Samsa in nothing but her nightgown; in this array they entered Gregor's room. Meanwhile the door of the living room opened, too, where Grete had been sleeping since the arrival of the boarders; she was completely dressed, as if she had not been to bed, which seemed to be confirmed also by the paleness of her face. "Dead?" said Mrs. Samsa, looking questioningly at the cleaning woman, although she could have investigated for herself, indeed the fact was obvious enough without investigation. "I should say so," said the cleaning woman, and to prove it she pushed Gregor's corpse a long way to one side with her broomstick; Mrs. Samsa made a movement as if to stop her, but checked herself. "Well," said Mr. Samsa, "now thanks be to God." He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example. Grete, whose eyes never left the corpse, said: "Just see how thin he was. It's such a long time since he ate anything at all. The food came out again just as it went in." Indeed, Gregor's body was completely flat and dry, as could only now be seen when it was no longer supported by the legs and nothing prevented one from looking closely at it.

"Come into our room, Grete, for a little while," said Mrs. Samsa with a tremulous smile, and Grete, not without looking back at the corpse, followed her parents into their bedroom. The cleaning woman shut the door and opened the window wide. Although it was still early in the morning a certain softness was perceptible in the fresh air. After all, it was already the end of March.

The three boarders emerged from their room and were surprised to see no breakfast; they had been forgotten. "Where's our breakfast?" said the middle boarder peevishly to the cleaning woman. But she put her finger to her lips and hastily, without a word, indicated by gestures that they should follow her into Gregor's room. They did so and stood, their hands in the pockets of their somewhat shabby coats, around Gregor's corpse in the room where it was now fully light.

At that the door of the Samsas' bedroom opened and Mr. Samsa appeared in his uniform, his wife on one arm, his daughter on the other. They all looked a little as if they had been crying; from time to time Grete pressed her face against her father's arm.

"Leave my home at once!" said Mr. Samsa, and pointed to the door without disengaging himself from the women. "What do you mean by

that?” said the middle boarder, taken somewhat aback, with a feeble smile. The two others put their hands behind their backs and kept rubbing them together, as if in gleeful expectation of a big fight in which they were bound to come out the winners. “I mean just what I say,” answered Mr. Samsa, and advanced in a straight line with his two companions toward the boarder. He stood his ground quietly at first, looking at the floor as if his thoughts were forming a new pattern in his head. “Well, let’s go then,” he said, and looked up at Mr. Samsa as if in a sudden access of humility he were asking his approval even for this decision. Mr. Samsa merely nodded at him briefly once or twice with wide-open eyes. Thereupon the boarder actually did go with long strides into the front hall; his two friends had been listening and by now had stopped rubbing their hands together and went scuttling after him as if afraid that Mr. Samsa might get into the hall before them and cut them off from their leader. In the hall all three took their hats from the rack, their sticks from the umbrella stand, bowed in silence, and left the apartment. With a suspiciousness that proved quite unfounded Mr. Samsa and the two women followed them out to the landing; leaning over the banister they watched the three figures slowly but surely going down the long stairs, vanishing from sight at a certain turn of the staircase on every floor and coming into view again after a moment or so; the more they dwindled, the more the Samsa family’s interest in them dwindled, and when a butcher’s boy met them and passed them on the stairs coming up proudly with a tray on his head, Mr. Samsa and the two women soon left the landing and as if a burden had been lifted from them went back into their apartment.

They decided to spend this day in resting and going for a stroll; they had not only deserved such a respite from work, but absolutely needed it. And so they sat down at the table and wrote three notes of excuse, Mr. Samsa to his board of management, Mrs. Samsa to her employer, and Grete to the head of her firm. While they were writing, the cleaning woman came in to say that she was going now, since her morning’s work was finished. At first they only nodded without looking up, but as she kept hovering there they eyed her irritably. “Well?” said Mr. Samsa. The cleaning woman stood grinning in the doorway as if she had good news to impart to the family but meant not to say a word unless properly questioned. The little ostrich feather standing upright on her hat, which

had annoyed Mr. Samsa ever since she had been hired, was waving gaily in all directions. “Well, what is it then?” asked Mrs. Samsa, who obtained more respect from the cleaning woman than the others. “Oh,” said the cleaning woman, so overcome by amiable laughter that she could not continue right away, “just this: you don’t need to worry about how to get rid of that thing in the next room. It’s been taken care of already.” Mrs. Samsa and Grete bent over their letters again, as if continuing to write; Mr. Samsa, who perceived that she was eager to begin describing it all in detail, stopped her with a decisive gesture of his outstretched hand. But since she was not allowed to tell her story, she remembered the great hurry she was in, obviously deeply insulted: “Bye, everybody,” she said, whirling off violently, and departed with a frightful slamming of doors.

“She’ll be given notice tonight,” said Mr. Samsa, but neither from his wife nor his daughter did he get any answer, for the cleaning woman seemed to have shattered again the composure they had barely achieved. They rose, went to the window and stayed there, holding each other tight. Mr. Samsa turned in his chair to look at them and quietly observed them for a while. Then he called out: “Come over here, you two. Let bygones be bygones. And you might have a little consideration for me too.” The two of them complied at once, ran over to him, caressed him, and then quickly finished their letters.

Then all three left the apartment together, which was more than they had done for months, and took the streetcar to the open country outside of town. The car, in which they were the only passengers, was filled with warm sunshine. Leaning comfortably back in their seats they talked over their prospects for the future, and it appeared on closer inspection that these were not at all bad, for the jobs they had, which so far they had never really discussed with each other, were all three quite promising and likely to lead to better things later on. The greatest immediate improvement in their situation would of course come from moving to another apartment; they wanted to take a smaller and cheaper but also better situated and more practical apartment than the one they had, which Gregor had selected. While they were thus conversing, it struck both Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, almost at the same moment, as they became aware of their daughter’s increasing vivacity, that in spite of all the sorrow of recent times, which had made her cheeks pale, she had

bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure. They grew quieter and half unconsciously exchanged glances of complete agreement, having both come to the conclusion that it would soon be time to find a good husband for her. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their ride their daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body.

Letter to His Father

LETTER TO HIS FATHER

Dearest Father,

You asked me recently why I maintain that I am afraid of you. As usual, I was unable to think of any answer to your question, partly for the very reason that I am afraid of you, and partly because an explanation of the grounds for this fear would mean going into far more details than I could even approximately keep in mind while talking. And if I now try to give you an answer in writing, it will still be very incomplete, because, even in writing, this fear and its consequences hamper me in relation to you and because the magnitude of the subject goes far beyond the scope of my memory and power of reasoning.

To you the matter always seemed very simple, at least in so far as you talked about it in front of me, and indiscriminately in front of many other people. It looked to you more or less as follows: you have worked hard all your life, have sacrificed everything for your children, above all for me, consequently I have lived high and handsome, have been completely at liberty to learn whatever I wanted, and have had no cause for material worries, which means worries of any kind at all. You have not expected any gratitude for this, knowing what "children's gratitude" is like, but have expected at least some sort of obligingness, some sign of sympathy. Instead I have always hidden from you, in my room, among my books, with crazy friends, or with crackpot ideas. I have never talked to you frankly; I have never come to you when you were in the synagogue, never visited you at Franzensbad, nor indeed ever shown any family feeling; I have never taken any interest in the business or your other concerns; I saddled you with the factory and walked off; I encouraged Ottla in her obstinacy, and never lifted a finger for you (never even got you a theater ticket), while I do everything for my friends. If you sum up your judgment of me, the result you get is that, although you don't charge me with anything downright improper or wicked (with the exception perhaps of my latest marriage plan), you do charge me with coldness, estrangement, and ingratitude. And, what is

more, you charge me with it in such a way as to make it seem my fault, as though I might have been able, with something like a touch on the steering wheel, to make everything quite different, while you aren't in the slightest to blame, unless it be for having been too good to me.

This, your usual way of representing it, I regard as accurate only in so far as I too believe you are entirely blameless in the matter of our estrangement. But I am equally entirely blameless. If I could get you to acknowledge this, then what would be possible is—not, I think, a new life, we are both much too old for that—but still, a kind of peace; no cessation, but still, a diminution of your unceasing reproaches.

Oddly enough you have some sort of notion of what I mean. For instance, a short time ago you said to me: "I have always been fond of you, even though outwardly I didn't act toward you as other fathers generally do, and this precisely because I can't pretend as other people can." Now, Father, on the whole I have never doubted your goodness toward me, but this remark I consider wrong. You can't pretend, that is true, but merely for that reason to maintain that other fathers pretend is either mere opinionatedness, and as such beyond discussion, or on the other hand—and this in my view is what it really is—a veiled expression of the fact that something is wrong in our relationship and that you have played your part in causing it to be so, but without its being your fault. If you really mean that, then we are in agreement.

I'm not going to say, of course, that I have become what I am only as a result of your influence. That would be very much exaggerated (and I am indeed inclined to this exaggeration). It is indeed quite possible that even if I had grown up entirely free from your influence I still could not have become a person after your own heart. I should probably have still become a weakly, timid, hesitant, restless person, neither Robert Kafka nor Karl Hermann, but yet quite different from what I really am, and we might have got on with each other excellently. I should have been happy to have you as a friend, as a boss, an uncle, a grandfather, even (though rather more hesitantly) as a father-in-law. Only as a father you have been too strong for me, particularly since my brothers died when they were small and my sisters came along only much later, so that I alone had to bear the brunt of it—and for that I was much too weak.

Compare the two of us: I, to put it in a very much abbreviated form, a Löwy with a certain Kafka component, which, however, is not set in

motion by the Kafka will to life, business, and conquest, but by a Löwyish spur that impels more secretly, more diffidently, and in another direction, and which often fails to work entirely. You, on the other hand, a true Kafka in strength, health, appetite, loudness of voice, eloquence, self-satisfaction, worldly dominance, endurance, presence of mind, knowledge of human nature, a certain way of doing things on a grand scale, of course also with all the defects and weaknesses that go with these advantages and into which your temperament and sometimes your hot temper drive you. You are perhaps not wholly a Kafka in your general outlook, in so far as I can compare you with Uncle Philipp, Ludwig, and Heinrich. That is odd, and here I don't see quite clear either. After all, they were all more cheerful, fresher, more informal, more easygoing, less severe than you. (In this, by the way, I have inherited a great deal from you and taken much too good care of my inheritance, without, admittedly, having the necessary counterweights in my own nature, as you have.) Yet you too, on the other hand, have in this respect gone through various phases. You were perhaps more cheerful before you were disappointed by your children, especially by me, and were depressed at home (when other people came in, you were quite different); perhaps you have become more cheerful again since then, now that your grandchildren and your son-in-law again give you something of that warmth which your children, except perhaps Valli, could not give you. In any case, we were so different and in our difference so dangerous to each other that if anyone had tried to calculate in advance how I, the slowly developing child, and you, the full-grown man, would behave toward one another, he could have assumed that you would simply trample me underfoot so that nothing was left of me. Well, that did not happen. Nothing alive can be calculated. But perhaps something worse happened. And in saying this I would all the time beg of you not to forget that I never, and not even for a single moment, believe any guilt to be on your side. The effect you had on me was the effect you could not help having. But you should stop considering it some particular malice on my part that I succumbed to that effect.

I was a timid child. For all that, I am sure I was also obstinate, as children are. I am sure that Mother spoiled me too, but I cannot believe I was particularly difficult to manage; I cannot believe that a kindly word,

a quiet taking by the hand, a friendly look, could not have got me to do anything that was wanted of me. Now you are, after all, basically a charitable and kindhearted person (what follows will not be in contradiction to this, I am speaking only of the impression you made on the child), but not every child has the endurance and fearlessness to go on searching until it comes to the kindliness that lies beneath the surface. You can treat a child only in the way you yourself are constituted, with vigor, noise, and hot temper, and in this case such behavior seemed to you to be also most appropriate, because you wanted to bring me up to be a strong, brave boy.

Your educational methods in the very early years I can't, of course, directly describe today, but I can more or less imagine them by drawing conclusions from the later years and from your treatment of Felix. What must be considered as heightening the effect is that you were then younger and hence more energetic, wilder, more primitive, and still more reckless than you are today and that you were, besides, completely tied to the business, scarcely able to be with me even once a day, and therefore made all the more profound impression on me, one that never really leveled out to the flatness of habit.

There is only one episode in the early years of which I have a direct memory. You may remember it, too. One night I kept on whimpering for water, not, I am certain, because I was thirsty, but probably partly to be annoying, partly to amuse myself. After several vigorous threats had failed to have any effect, you took me out of bed, carried me out onto the *pavlatche*,* and left me there alone for a while in my nightshirt, outside the shut door. I am not going to say that this was wrong—perhaps there was really no other way of getting peace and quiet that night—but I mention it as typical of your methods of bringing up a child and their effect on me. I dare say I was quite obedient afterward at that period, but it did me inner harm. What was for me a matter of course, that senseless asking for water, and then the extraordinary terror of being carried outside were two things that I, my nature being what it was, could never properly connect with each other. Even years afterward I suffered from the tormenting fancy that the huge man, my father, the ultimate authority, would come almost for no reason at all and take me out of bed in the night and carry me out onto the *pavlatche*, and that consequently I meant absolutely nothing as far as he was concerned.

That was only a small beginning, but this feeling of being nothing that often dominates me (a feeling that is in another respect, admittedly, also a noble and fruitful one) comes largely from your influence. What I would have needed was a little encouragement, a little friendliness, a little keeping open of my road, instead of which you blocked it for me, though of course with the good intention of making me take another road. But I was not fit for that. You encouraged me, for instance, when I saluted and marched smartly, but I was no future soldier, or you encouraged me when I was able to eat heartily or even drink beer with my meals, or when I was able to repeat songs, singing what I had not understood, or prattle to you using your own favorite expressions, imitating you, but nothing of this had anything to do with my future. And it is characteristic that even today you really only encourage me in anything when you yourself are involved in it, when what is at stake is your own sense of self-importance, which I damage (for instance by my intended marriage) or which is damaged in me (for instance when Pepa is abusive to me). Then I receive encouragement, I am reminded of my worth, the matches I would be entitled to make are pointed out to me, and Pepa is condemned utterly. But apart from the fact that at my age I am already nearly unsusceptible to encouragement, what help could it be to me anyway, if it only comes when it isn't primarily a matter of myself at all?

At that time, and at that time in every way, I would have needed encouragement. I was, after all, weighed down by your mere physical presence. I remember, for instance, how we often undressed in the same bathing hut. There was I, skinny, weakly, slight; you strong, tall, broad. Even inside the hut I felt a miserable specimen, and what's more, not only in your eyes but in the eyes of the whole world, for you were for me the measure of all things. But then when we stepped out of the bathing hut before the people, you holding me by my hand, a little skeleton, unsteady, barefoot on the boards, frightened of the water, incapable of copying your swimming strokes, which you, with the best of intentions, but actually to my profound humiliation, kept on demonstrating, then I was frantic with desperation and at such moments all my bad experiences in all areas, fitted magnificently together. I felt best when you sometimes undressed first and I was able to stay behind in the hut alone and put off the disgrace of showing myself in public

until at last you came to see what I was doing and drove me out of the hut. I was grateful to you for not seeming to notice my anguish, and besides, I was proud of my father's body. By the way, this difference between us remains much the same to this very day.

In keeping, furthermore, was your intellectual domination. You had worked your way so far up by your own energies alone, and as a result you had unbounded confidence in your opinion. That was not yet so dazzling for me as a child as later for the boy growing up. From your armchair you ruled the world. Your opinion was correct, every other was mad, wild, *meshugge*, not normal. Your self-confidence indeed was so great that you had no need to be consistent at all and yet never ceased to be in the right. It did sometimes happen that you had no opinions whatsoever about a matter and as a result every conceivable opinion with respect to the matter was necessarily wrong, without exception. You were capable, for instance, of running down the Czechs, and then the Germans, and then the Jews, and what is more, not only selectively but in every respect, and finally nobody was left except yourself. For me you took on the enigmatic quality that all tyrants have whose rights are based on their person and not on reason. At least so it seemed to me.

Now, when I was the subject you were actually astonishingly often right; which in conversation was not surprising, for there was hardly ever any conversation between us, but also in reality. Yet this was nothing particularly incomprehensible, either; in all my thinking I was, after all, under the heavy pressure of your personality, even in that part of it—and particularly in that—which was not in accord with yours. All these thoughts, seemingly independent of you, were from the beginning burdened with your belittling judgments; it was almost impossible to endure this and still work out a thought with any measure of completeness and permanence. I am not here speaking of any sublime thoughts, but of every little childhood enterprise. It was only necessary to be happy about something or other, to be filled with the thought of it, to come home and speak of it, and the answer was an ironic sigh, a shaking of the head, a tapping on the table with a finger: "Is that all you're so worked up about?" or "Such worries I'd like to have!" or "The things some people have time to think about!" or "Where is that going to get you?" or "What a song and dance about nothing!" Of course, you couldn't be expected to be enthusiastic about every childish triviality

when you were in a state of vexation and worry. But that was not the point. Rather, by virtue of your antagonistic nature, you could not help but always and inevitably cause the child such disappointments; and further, this antagonism, accumulating material, was constantly intensified; eventually the pattern expressed itself even if, for once, you were of the same opinion as I; finally, these disappointments of the child were not the ordinary disappointments of life but, since they involved you, the all-important personage, they struck to the very core. Courage, resolution, confidence, delight in this and that, could not last when you were against it or even if your opposition was merely to be assumed; and it was to be assumed in almost everything I did.

This applied to people as well as to thoughts. It was enough that I should take a little interest in a person—which in any case did not happen often, as a result of my nature—for you, without any consideration for my feelings or respect for my judgment, to move in with abuse, defamation, and denigration. Innocent, childlike people, such as, for instance, the Yiddish actor Löwy, had to pay for that. Without knowing him you compared him, in some dreadful way that I have now forgotten, to vermin and, as was so often the case with people I was fond of, you were automatically ready with the proverb of the dog and its fleas. Here I particularly recall the actor because at that time I made a note of your pronouncements about him, with the comment: “This is how my father speaks of my friend (whom he does not even know), simply because he is my friend. I shall always be able to bring this up against him whenever he reproaches me with the lack of a child’s affection and gratitude.” What was always incomprehensible to me was your total lack of feeling for the suffering and shame you could inflict on me with your words and judgments. It was as though you had no notion of your power. I too, I am sure, often hurt you with what I said, but then I always knew, and it pained me, but I could not control myself, could not keep the words back, I was sorry even while I was saying them. But you struck out with your words without much ado, you weren’t sorry for anyone, either during or afterward, one was utterly defenseless against you.

But your whole method of upbringing was like that. You have, I think, a gift for bringing up children; you could, I am sure, have been of help to a human being of your own kind with your methods; such a person

would have seen the reasonableness of what you told him, would not have troubled about anything else, and would quietly have done things the way he was told. But for me as a child everything you called out to me was positively a heavenly commandment, I never forgot it, it remained for me the most important means of forming a judgment of the world, above all of forming a judgment of you yourself, and there you failed entirely. Since as a child I was with you chiefly during meals, your teaching was to a large extent the teaching of proper behavior at table. What was brought to the table had to be eaten, the quality of the food was not to be discussed—but you yourself often found the food inedible, called it "this swill," said "that cow" (the cook) had ruined it. Because in accordance with your strong appetite and your particular predilection you ate everything fast, hot, and in big mouthfuls, the child had to hurry; there was a somber silence at table, interrupted by admonitions: "Eat first, talk afterward," or "faster, faster, faster," or "there you are, you see, I finished ages ago." Bones mustn't be cracked with the teeth, but you could. Vinegar must not be sipped noisily, but you could. The main thing was that the bread should be cut straight. But it didn't matter that you did it with a knife dripping with gravy. Care had to be taken that no scraps fell on the floor. In the end it was under your chair that there were the most scraps. At table one wasn't allowed to do anything but eat, but you cleaned and cut your fingernails, sharpened pencils, cleaned your ears with a toothpick. Please, Father, understand me correctly: in themselves these would have been utterly insignificant details, they only became depressing for me because you, so tremendously the authoritative man, did not keep the commandments you imposed on me. Hence the world was for me divided into three parts: one in which I, the slave, lived under laws that had been invented only for me and which I could, I did not know why, never completely comply with; then a second world, which was infinitely remote from mine, in which you lived, concerned with government, with the issuing of orders and with the annoyance about their not being obeyed; and finally a third world where everybody else lived happily and free from orders and from having to obey. I was continually in disgrace; either I obeyed your orders, and that was a disgrace, for they applied, after all, only to me; or I was defiant, and that was a disgrace too, for how could I presume to defy you; or I could not obey because I did not, for instance,

have your strength, your appetite, your skill, although you expected it of me as a matter of course; this was the greatest disgrace of all. This was not the course of the child's reflections, but of his feelings.

My situation at that time becomes clearer, perhaps, if I compare it with that of Felix. You do, of course, treat him in a similar way, even indeed employing a particularly terrible method against him in his upbringing: whenever at meals he does anything that is in your opinion unclean, you are not content to say to him, as you used to say to me: "You are a pig," but add: "a real Hermann" or "just like your father." Now this may perhaps—one can't say more than "perhaps"—not really harm Felix in any essential way, because you are only a grandfather to him, an especially important one, of course, but still not everything as you were for me; and besides, Felix is of a quiet, even at this stage to a certain extent manly character, one who may perhaps be disconcerted by a great voice thundering at him, but not permanently conditioned by it. But above all he is, of course, only comparatively seldom with you, and besides, he is also under other influences; you are for him a rather endearing curiosity from which he can pick and choose whatever he likes. For me you were nothing in the least like a curiosity, I couldn't pick and choose, I had to take everything.

And this without being able to produce any arguments against any of it, for it is fundamentally impossible for you to talk calmly about a subject you don't approve of or even one that was not suggested by you; your imperious temperament does not permit it. In recent years you have been explaining this as due to your nervous heart condition. I don't know that you were ever essentially different. Rather, the nervous heart condition is a means by which you exert your domination more strongly, since the thought of it necessarily chokes off the least opposition from others. This is, of course, not a reproach, only a statement of fact. As in Ottla's case, when you say: "You simply can't talk to her at all, she flies straight in your face," but in reality she does not begin by flying out at all. You mistake the person for the thing. The thing under discussion is what flies in your face and you immediately made up your mind about it without listening to the person; whatever is brought forward afterward merely serves to irritate you further, never to convince you. Then all one gets from you is: "Do whatever you like. So far as I'm concerned you have a free hand. You're of age, I've no advice to give you," and all this

with that frightful, hoarse undertone of anger and utter condemnation that makes me tremble less today than in my childhood only because the child's exclusive sense of guilt has been partly replaced by insight into our helplessness, yours and mine.

The impossibility of getting on calmly together had one more result, actually a very natural one: I lost the capacity to talk. I daresay I would not have become a very eloquent person in any case, but I would, after all, have acquired the usual fluency of human language. But at a very early stage you forbade me to speak. Your threat, "Not a word of contradiction!" and the raised hand that accompanied it have been with me ever since. What I got from you—and you are, whenever it is a matter of your own affairs, an excellent talker—was a hesitant, stammering mode of speech, and even that was still too much for you, and finally I kept silent, at first perhaps out of defiance, and then because I could neither think nor speak in your presence. And because you were the person who really brought me up, this has had its repercussions throughout my life. It is altogether a remarkable mistake for you to believe I never complied with your wishes. "Always contrary" was really not my basic principle where you were concerned, as you believe and as you reproach me. On the contrary: if I had obeyed you less, I am sure you would have been much better pleased with me. As it is, all your educational measures hit the mark exactly. There was no hold I tried to escape. As I now am, I am (apart, of course, from the fundamentals and the influence of life itself) the result of your upbringing and of my obedience. That this result is nevertheless distressing to you, indeed that you unconsciously refuse to acknowledge it as the result of your methods of upbringing, is due to the fact that your hand and the material I offered were so alien to each other. You would say: "Not a word of contradiction!" thinking that that was a way of silencing the oppositional forces in me that were disagreeable to you, but the effect of it was too strong for me, I was too docile, I became completely dumb, cringed away from you, hid from you, and only dared to stir when I was so far away from you that your power could no longer reach me—at least not directly. But you were faced with all that, and it all seemed to you to be "contrary," whereas it was only the inevitable consequence of your strength and my weakness.

Your extremely effective rhetorical methods in bringing me up, which

never failed to work with me, were: abuse, threats, irony, spiteful laughter, and—oddly enough—self-pity.

I cannot recall your ever having abused me directly and in downright abusive terms. Nor was that necessary; you had so many other methods, and besides, in talk at home and particularly at the shop the words of abuse went flying around me in such swarms, as they were flung at other people's heads, that as a little boy I was sometimes almost stunned and had no reason not to apply them to myself too, for the people you were abusing were certainly no worse than I was and you were certainly not more displeased with them than with me. And here again was your enigmatic innocence and inviolability; you cursed and swore without the slightest scruple; yet you condemned cursing and swearing in other people and would not have it.

You reinforced abusiveness with threats, and this applied to me too. How terrible for me was, for instance, that "I'll tear you apart like a fish," although I knew, of course, that nothing worse was to follow (admittedly, as a little child I didn't know that), but it was almost exactly in accord with my notions of your power, and I saw you as being capable of doing this too. It was also terrible when you ran around the table, shouting, grabbing at one, obviously not really trying to grab, yet pretending to, and Mother (finally) had to rescue one, as it seemed. Once again one had, so it seemed to the child, remained alive through your mercy and bore one's life henceforth as an undeserved gift from you. This is also the place to mention the threats about the consequences of disobedience. When I began to do something you did not like and you threatened me with the prospect of failure, my veneration for your opinion was so great that the failure became inevitable, even though perhaps it happened only at some later time. I lost confidence in my own actions. I was wavering, doubtful. The older I became, the more material there was for you to bring up against me as evidence of my worthlessness; gradually you began really to be right in a certain respect. Once again, I am careful not to assert that I became like this solely through you; you only intensified what was already there, but you intensified it greatly, simply because where I was concerned you were very powerful and you employed all your power to that end.

You put special trust in bringing up children by means of irony, and this was most in keeping with your superiority over me. An admonition

from you generally took this form: “Can’t you do it in such-and-such a way? That’s too hard for you, I suppose. You haven’t the time, of course?” and so on. And each such question would be accompanied by malicious laughter and a malicious face. One was, so to speak, already punished before one even knew that one had done something bad. Maddening were also those rebukes in which one was treated as a third person, in other words, considered not worthy even to be spoken to angrily; that is to say, when you would speak ostensibly to Mother but actually to me, who was sitting right there. For instance: “Of course, that’s too much to expect of our worthy son,” and the like. (This produced a corollary in that, for instance, I did not dare to ask you, and later from habit did not even really much think of asking, anything directly when Mother was there. It was much less dangerous for the child to put questions to Mother, sitting there beside you, and to ask Mother: “How is Father?”—so guarding oneself against surprises.) There were, of course, also cases when one was entirely in agreement with even the worst irony, namely, when it referred to someone else, such as Elli, with whom I was on bad terms for years. There was an orgy of malice and spiteful delight for me when such things were said of her, as they were at almost every meal: “She has to sit ten feet back from the table, the big fat lump,” and when you, morosely sitting on your chair without the slightest trace of pleasantness or good humor, a bitter enemy, would exaggeratedly imitate the way she sat, which you found utterly loathsome. How often such things happened, over and over again, and how little you really achieved as a result of them! I think the reason was that the expenditure of anger and malice seemed to be in no proper relation to the subject itself, one did not have the feeling that the anger was caused by this trifle of sitting some way back from the table, but that the whole bulk of it had already been present to begin with, then, only by chance, happened to settle on this matter as a pretext for breaking out. Since one was convinced that a pretext would be found anyway, one did not try very hard, and one’s feelings became dulled by these continued threats. One had gradually become pretty sure of not getting a beating, anyway. One became a glum, inattentive, disobedient child, always intent on escape, mainly within one’s own self. So you suffered, and so we suffered. From your own point of view you were quite right when, clenching your teeth and with that gurgling laughter

that gave the child its first notions of hell, you used to say bitterly (as you did only just recently in connection with a letter from Constantinople): “A *nice* crowd that is!”

What seemed to be quite incompatible with this attitude toward your children was, and it happened very often, that you openly lamented your situation. I confess that as a child (though probably somewhat later) I was completely callous about this and could not understand how you could possibly expect to get any sympathy from anyone. You were such a giant in every respect. What could you care for our pity or even our help? Our help, indeed, you could not but despise, as you so often despised us ourselves. Hence, I did not take these laments at their face value and looked for some hidden motive behind them. Only later did I come to understand that you really suffered a great deal because of your children; but at that time, when these laments might under different circumstances still have met with a childish, candid sympathy, unhesitatingly ready to offer any help it could, to me they had to seem like overemphatic means of disciplining me and humiliating me, as such not in themselves very intense, but with the harmful side effect that the child became conditioned not to take very seriously the very things it should have taken seriously.

Fortunately, there were exceptions to all this, mostly when you suffered in silence, and affection and kindliness by their own strength overcame all obstacles, and moved me immediately. Rare as this was, it was wonderful. For instance, in earlier years, in hot summers, when you were tired after lunch, I saw you having a nap at the office, your elbow on the desk; or you joined us in the country, in the summer holidays, on Sundays, worn out from work; or the time Mother was gravely ill and you stood holding on to the bookcase, shaking with sobs; or when, during my last illness, you came tiptoeing to Ottla’s room to see me, stopping in the doorway, craning your neck to see me, and out of consideration only waved to me with your hand. At such times one would lie back and weep for happiness, and one weeps again now, writing it down.

You have a particularly beautiful, very rare way of quietly, contentedly, approvingly smiling, a way of smiling that can make the person for whom it is meant entirely happy. I can’t recall its ever having expressly been my lot in my childhood, but I dare say it may have

happened, for why should you have refused it to me at a time when I still seemed blameless to you and was your great hope? Yet in the long run even such friendly impressions brought about nothing but an increased sense of guilt, making the world still more incomprehensible to me.

I would rather keep to the practical and permanent. In order to assert myself even a little in relation to you, and partly too from a kind of vengefulness, I soon began to observe little ridiculous things about you, to collect them and to exaggerate them. For instance, how easily you let yourself be dazzled by people who were only seemingly above you, how you would keep on talking about them, as of some Imperial Councilor or some such (on the other hand, such things also pained me, to see you, my father, believing you had any need of such trifling confirmations of your own value, and boasting about them). Or I would note your taste for indecent expressions, which you would produce in the loudest possible voice, laughing about them as though you had said something particularly good, while in point of fact it was only a banal little obscenity (at the same time this again was for me a humiliating manifestation of your vitality). There were, of course, plenty of such observations. I was happy about them; they gave me occasion for whispering and joking; you sometimes noticed it and were angry about it, took it for malice and lack of respect, but believe me, it was for me nothing other than a means—moreover, a useless one—of attempted self-preservation; they were jokes of the kind that are made about gods and kings, jokes that are not only compatible with the profoundest respect but are indeed part and parcel of it.

Incidentally, you too, in keeping with your similar position where I was concerned, tried a similar form of self-defense. You were in the habit of pointing out how exaggeratedly well off I was and how well I had in fact been treated. That is correct, but I don't believe it was of any real use to me under the prevailing circumstances.

It is true that Mother was endlessly good to me, but for me all that was in relation to you, that is to say, in no good relation. Mother unconsciously played the part of a beater during a hunt. Even if your method of upbringing might in some unlikely case have set me on my own feet by means of producing defiance, dislike, or even hate in me, Mother canceled that out again by kindness, by talking sensibly (in the

confusion of my childhood she was the very prototype of good sense and reasonableness), by pleading for me; and I was again driven back into your orbit, which I might perhaps otherwise have broken out of, to your advantage and to my own. Or it happened that no real reconciliation came about, that Mother merely shielded me from you in secret, secretly gave me something, or allowed me to do something, and then where you were concerned I was again the furtive creature, the cheat, the guilty one, who in his worthlessness could only pursue sneaky methods even to get the things he regarded as his right. Of course, I became used to taking such a course also in quest of things to which, even in my own view, I had no right. This again meant an increase in the sense of guilt.

It is also true that you hardly ever really gave me a beating. But the shouting, the way your face got red, the hasty undoing of the suspenders and laying them ready over the back of the chair, all that was almost worse for me. It is as if someone is going to be hanged. If he really is hanged, then he is dead and it is all over. But if he has to go through all the preliminaries to being hanged and he learns of his reprieve only when the noose is dangling before his face, he may suffer from it all his life. Besides, from the many occasions on which I had, according to your clearly expressed opinion, deserved a beating but was let off at the last moment by your grace, I again accumulated only a huge sense of guilt. On every side I was to blame, I was in your debt.

You have always reproached me (either alone or in front of others, since you have no feeling for the humiliation of the latter, and your children's affairs were always public) for living in peace and quiet, warmth and abundance, lacking nothing, thanks to your hard work. I think of remarks that must positively have worn grooves in my brain, such as: "When I was only seven I had to push a handcart from village to village." "We all had to sleep in one room." "We were glad when we got potatoes." "For years I had open sores on my legs because I did not have enough warm clothes." "I was only a little boy when I was sent to Pisek to work in a store." "I got nothing from home, not even when I was in the army, but still I managed to send money home." "But for all that, for all that—Father was always Father to me. Ah, nobody knows what that means these days! What do these children know? Nobody's been through that! Does any child understand such things today?" Under other conditions such stories might have been very educational, they might

have been a way of encouraging one and strengthening one to endure torments and deprivations similar to those one's father had undergone. But that wasn't what you wanted at all; the situation had, after all, become quite different as a result of all your efforts, and there was no opportunity to distinguish oneself as you had done. Such an opportunity would first of all have had to be created by violence and revolutions, it would have meant breaking away from home (assuming one had had the resolution and strength to do so and that Mother wouldn't have worked against it, for her part, with other means). But that was not what you wanted at all, that you termed ingratitude, extravagance, disobedience, treachery, madness. And so, while on the one hand you tempted me to it by means of example, story, and humiliation, on the other hand you forbade it with the utmost severity. Otherwise, for instance, you ought to have been delighted with Ottla's Zürau escapade[*]—apart from the accompanying circumstances. She wanted to get back to the country from which you had come, she wanted work and hardship such as you had had, she did not want to depend on the fruits of your labor, just as you yourself were independent of your father. Were those such dreadful intentions? Was that so remote from your example and your precept? Well, Ottla's intentions finally came to nothing in practice, were indeed perhaps carried out in a somewhat ridiculous way, with too much fuss, and she did not have enough consideration for her parents. But was that exclusively her fault and not also the fault of the circumstances and, above all, of the fact that you were so estranged from her? Was she any less estranged from you (as you later tried to convince yourself) in the business than afterward at Zürau? And would you not quite certainly have had the power (assuming you could have brought yourself to do so) to turn that escapade into something very good by means of encouragement, advice, and supervision, perhaps even merely by means of toleration?

In connection with such experiences you used to say, in bitter jest, that we were too well off. But that joke is, in a sense, no joke at all. What you had to fight for we received from your hand, but the fight for external life, a fight that was instantly open to you and which we are, of course, not spared either, we now have to fight for only late in life, in our maturity but with only childish strength. I do not say that our situation is therefore inevitably less favorable than yours was, on the

contrary, it is probably no better and no worse (although this is said without reference to our different natures), only we have the disadvantage of not being able to boast of our wretchedness and not being able to humiliate anyone with it as you have done with your wretchedness. Nor do I deny that it might have been possible for me to really enjoy the fruits of your great and successful work; that I could have turned them to good account and, to your joy, continued to work with them; but here again, our estrangement stood in the way. I could enjoy what you gave, but only in humiliation, weariness, weakness, and with a sense of guilt. That was why I could be grateful to you for everything only as a beggar is, and could never show it by doing the right things.

The next external result of this whole method of upbringing was that I fled everything that even remotely reminded me of you. First, the business. In itself, especially in my childhood, so long as it was still a simple shop, I ought to have liked it very much, it was so full of life, lit up in the evening, there was so much to see and hear; one was able to help now and then, to distinguish oneself, and, above all, to admire you for your magnificent commercial talents, for the way you sold things, managed people, made jokes, were untiring, in case of doubt knew how to make the right decision immediately, and so forth; even the way you wrapped a parcel or opened a crate was a spectacle worth watching; all this was certainly not the worst school for a child. But since you gradually began to terrify me on all sides and the business and you became one thing for me, the business too made me feel uneasy. Things that had at first been a matter of course for me there now began to torment and shame me, particularly the way you treated the staff. I don't know, perhaps it was the same in most businesses (in the Assicurazioni Generali, for instance, in my time it was really similar, and the explanation I gave the director for my resignation was, though not strictly in accordance with the truth, still not entirely a lie: my not being able to bear the cursing and swearing, which incidentally had not actually been directed at me; it was something to which I had become too painfully sensitive from home), but in my childhood other businesses did not concern me. But you I heard and saw shouting, cursing, and raging in the shop, in a way that in my opinion at that time had no equal anywhere in the world. And not only cursing, but other sorts of

tyrannizing. For instance, the way you pushed goods you did not want to have mixed up with others off the counter—only the thoughtlessness of your rage was some slight excuse—and how the clerk had to pick them up. Or your constant comment about a clerk who had TB: “The sooner that sick dog croaks the better.” You called the employees “paid enemies,” and that was what they were, but even before they became that, you seemed to me to be their “paying enemy.” There, too, I learned the great lesson that you could be unjust; in my own case I would not have noticed it so soon, for there was too much accumulated sense of guilt in me ready to admit that you were right; but in the shop, in my childish view—which later, of course, became somewhat modified, although not too much so—were strangers, who were, after all, working for us and for that reason had to live in constant dread of you. Of course I exaggerated, because I simply assumed you had as terrible an effect on these people as on me. If it had been so, they could not have lived at all; since, however, they were grown-up people, most of them with excellent nerves, they shook off this abuse without any trouble and in the end it did you much more harm than it did them. But it made the business insufferable to me, reminding me far too much of my relations with you; quite apart from your proprietary interest and apart from your mania for domination even as a businessman, you were so greatly superior to all those who ever came to learn the business from you that nothing they ever did could satisfy you, and you must, as I assumed, in the same way be forever dissatisfied with me too. That was why I could not help siding with the staff; I did it also, by the way, because from sheer nervousness I could not understand how anyone could be so abusive to a stranger, and therefore—from sheer nervousness and for no other reason than my own security—I tried to reconcile the staff, which must, I thought, be in a terrible state of indignation, with you and with our family. To this end it was not enough for me to behave in an ordinary decent way toward the staff, or even modestly; more than that, I had to be humble, not only be first to say “good morning” or “good evening,” but if at all possible I had to forestall any return of the greeting. And even if I, insignificant creature that I was, down below, had licked their feet it would still have been no compensation for the way that you, the master, were lashing out at them up above. This relationship that I came to have toward my fellow man extended beyond the limits of the business and on into the

future (something similar, but not so dangerous and deep-going as in my case, is for instance Ottla's taste for associating with poor people, sitting together with the maids, which annoys you so much, and the like). In the end I was almost afraid of the business and, in any case, it had long ceased to be any concern of mine even before I went to the Gymnasium and hence was taken even further away from it. Besides, it seemed to be entirely beyond my resources and capacities, since, as you said, it exhausted even yours. You then tried (today this seems to me both touching and shaming) to extract, nevertheless, some little sweetness for yourself from my dislike of the business, of your work—a dislike that was after all very distressing to you—by asserting that I had no business sense, that I had loftier ideas in my head, and the like. Mother was, of course, delighted with this explanation that you wrung from yourself, and I too, in my vanity and wretchedness, let myself be influenced by it. But if it had really been only or mainly "loftier ideas" that turned me against the business (which I now, but only now, have come really and honestly to hate), they would have had to express themselves differently, instead of letting me float quickly and timidly through my schooling and my law studies until I finally landed at a clerk's desk.

If I was to escape from you, I had to escape from the family as well, even from Mother. True, one could always get protection from her, but only in relation to you. She loved you too much and was too devoted and loyal to you to have been for long an independent spiritual force in the child's struggle. This was, incidentally, a correct instinct of the child, for with the passing of the years Mother became ever more closely allied to you; while, where she herself was concerned, she always kept her independence, within the narrowest limits, delicately and beautifully, and without ever essentially hurting you, still, with the passing of the years she more and more completely, emotionally rather than intellectually, blindly adopted your judgments and your condemnations with regard to the children, particularly in the case—certainly a grave one—of Ottla. Of course, it must always be borne in mind how tormenting and utterly wearing Mother's position in the family was. She toiled in the business and in the house, and doubly suffered all the family illnesses, but the culmination of all this was what she suffered in her position between us and you. You were always affectionate and considerate toward her, but in this respect you spared her just as little as

we spared her. We all hammered ruthlessly away at her, you from your side, we from ours. It was a diversion, nobody meant any harm, thinking of the battle that you were waging with us and that we were waging with you, and it was Mother who got the brunt of all our wild feelings. Nor was it at all a good contribution to the children's upbringing the way you—of course, without being in the slightest to blame for it yourself—tormented her on our account. It even seemed to justify our otherwise unjustifiable behavior toward her. How she suffered from us on your account, and from you on our account, even without counting those cases in which you were in the right because she was spoiling us, even though this "spoiling" may sometimes have been only a quiet, unconscious counterdemonstration against your system. Of course, Mother could not have borne all this if she had not drawn the strength to bear it from her love for us all and her happiness in that love.

My sisters were only partly on my side. The one who was happiest in her relation to you was Valli. Being closest to Mother, she fell in with your wishes in a similar way, without much effort and without suffering much harm. And because she reminded you of Mother, you did accept her in a more friendly spirit, although there was little Kafka material in her. But perhaps that was precisely what you wanted; where there was nothing of the Kafka's, even you could not demand anything of the sort, nor did you feel, as with the rest of us, that something was getting lost which had to be saved by force. Besides, it may be that you were never particularly fond of the Kafka element as it manifested itself in women. Valli's relationship to you would perhaps have become even friendlier if the rest of us had not disturbed it somewhat.

Elli is the only example of the almost complete success of a breaking away from your orbit. When she was a child she was the last person I should have expected it of. For she was such a clumsy, tired, timid, bad-tempered, guilt-ridden, overmeek, malicious, lazy, greedy, miserly child, I could hardly bring myself to look at her, certainly not to speak to her, so much did she remind me of myself, in so very much the same way was she under the same spell of our upbringing. Her miserliness was especially abhorrent to me, since I had it to an, if possible, even greater extent. Miserliness is, after all, one of the most reliable signs of profound unhappiness; I was so unsure of everything that, in fact, I possessed only what I actually had in my hands or in my mouth or what was at least on

the way there, and this was precisely what she, being in a similar situation, most enjoyed taking away from me. But all this changed when, at an early age—this is the most important thing—she left home, married, had children, and became cheerful, carefree, brave, generous, unselfish, and hopeful. It is almost incredible how you did not really notice this change at all, or at any rate did not give it its due, blinded as you were by the grudge you have always borne Elli and fundamentally still bear her to this day; only this grudge matters much less now, since Elli no longer lives with us and, besides, your love for Felix and your affection for Karl have made it less important. Only Gerti sometimes has to suffer for it still.

I scarcely dare write of Ottla; I know that by doing so I jeopardize the whole effect I hope for from this letter. In ordinary circumstances, that is, so long as she is not in particular need or danger, all you feel is only hatred for her; you yourself have confessed to me that in your opinion she is always intentionally causing you suffering and annoyance and that while you are suffering on her account she is satisfied and pleased. In other words, a sort of fiend. What an immense estrangement, greater still than that between you and me, must have come about between you and her, for such an immense misunderstanding to be possible. She is so remote from you that you scarcely see her any more, instead, you put a specter in the place where you suppose her to be. I grant you that you have had a particularly difficult time with her. I don't, of course, quite see to the bottom of this very complicated case, but at any rate here was something like a kind of Löwy, equipped with the best Kafka weapons. Between us there was no real struggle; I was soon finished off; what remained was flight, embitterment, melancholy, and inner struggle. But you two were always in a fighting position, always fresh, always energetic. A sight as magnificent as it was desperate. At the very beginning you were, I am sure, very close to each other, because of the four of us Ottla is even today perhaps the purest representation of the marriage between you and Mother and of the forces it combined. I don't know what it was that deprived you both of the happiness of the harmony between father and child, but I can't help believing that the development in this case was similar to that in mine. On your side there was the tyranny of your own nature, on her side the Löwy defiance, touchiness, sense of justice, restlessness, and all that backed by the

consciousness of the Kafka vigor. Doubtless I too influenced her, but scarcely of my own doing, simply through the fact of my existence. Besides, as the last to arrive, she found herself in a situation in which the balance of power was already established, and was able to form her own judgment from the large amount of material at her disposal. I can even imagine that she may, in her inmost being, have wavered for some time as to whether she should fling herself into your arms or into those of the adversaries; and it is obvious that at that time there was something you failed to do and that you rebuffed her, but if it had been possible, the two of you would have become a magnificently harmonious pair. That way I should have lost an ally, but the sight of you two would have richly compensated me; besides, the incredible happiness of finding complete contentment at least in one child would have changed you much to my advantage. All this, however, is today only a dream. Ottla has no contact with her father and has to seek her way alone, like me, and the degree of confidence, self-confidence, health, and ruthlessness by which she surpasses me makes her in your eyes more wicked and treacherous than I seem to you. I understand that. From your point of view she can't be different. Indeed, she herself is capable of regarding herself with your eyes, of feeling what you suffer and of being—not desperate (despair is my business) but very sad. You do see us together often enough, in apparent contradiction to this, whispering and laughing, and now and then you hear us mentioning you. The impression you get is that of impudent conspirators. Strange conspirators. You are, admittedly, a chief subject of our conversations, as of our thoughts ever since we can remember, but truly, not in order to plot against you do we sit together, but in order to discuss—with all our might and main, jokingly and seriously, in affection, defiance, anger, revulsion, submission, consciousness of guilt, with all the resources of our heads and hearts—this terrible trial that is pending between us and you, to examine it in all its details, from all sides, on all occasions, from far and near—a trial in which you keep on claiming to be the judge, whereas, at least in the main (here I leave a margin for all the mistakes I may naturally make) you are a party too, just as weak and deluded as we are.

An example of the effect of your methods of upbringing, one that is very instructive in the context of the whole situation, is the case of Irma.

On the one hand, she was, after all, a stranger, already grown up when she entered your business, and had to deal with you mainly as her employer, so that she was only partially exposed to your influence, and this at an age when she had already developed powers of resistance; yet, on the other hand, she was also a blood relation, venerating you as her father's brother, and the power you had over her was far greater than that of a mere employer. And despite all this she, who, with her frail body, was so efficient, intelligent, hard-working, modest, trustworthy, unselfish, and loyal, who loved you as her uncle and admired you as her employer, she who proved herself in previous and in subsequent positions, was not a very good clerk to you. Her relationship with you was, in fact, nearly that of one of your children—pushed into that role, naturally, by us, too—and the power of your personality to bend others was, even in her case, so great that (admittedly only in relation to you and, it is to be hoped, without the deeper suffering of a child) she developed forgetfulness, carelessness, a sort of gallows humor, and perhaps even a shade of defiance, in so far as she was capable of that at all. And I do not even take into account that she was ailing, and not very happy in other respects either, and that she was burdened by a bleak home life. What was so illuminating to me in your relation to her, you yourself summed up in a remark that became classical for us, one that was almost blasphemous, but at the same time extraordinary evidence of the naïveté of your way of treating people: "The late lamented has left me quite a mess."

I might go on to describe further orbits of your influence and of the struggle against it, but there I would be entering uncertain ground and would have to construct things and, apart from that, the farther you are away from your business and your family, the pleasanter you have always become, easier to get on with, better mannered, more considerate, and more sympathetic (I mean outwardly, too), in exactly the same way as for instance an autocrat, when he happens to be outside the frontiers of his own country, has no reason to go on being tyrannical and is able to associate good-humoredly even with the lowest of the low. In fact, in the group photographs taken at Franzensbad, for instance, you always looked as big and jolly, among those sulky little people, as a king on his travels. This was something, I grant you, from which your children might have benefited too, if they had been capable of

recognizing this even as little children, which was impossible; and if I, for one, had not had to live constantly within the inmost, strictest, binding ring of your influence, as, in fact, I did.

Not only did I lose my family feeling, as you say; on the contrary, I did indeed have a feeling about the family, mostly in a negative sense, concerned with the breaking away from you (which, of course, could never be done completely). Relations with people outside the family, however, suffered possibly still more under your influence. You are entirely mistaken if you believe I do everything for other people out of affection and loyalty, and for you and the family nothing, out of coldness and betrayal. I repeat for the tenth time: Even in other circumstances I should probably have become a shy and nervous person, but it is a long dark road from there to where I have really come. (Up to now I have intentionally passed over in silence relatively little in this letter, but now and later I shall have to keep silent about some things that are still too hard for me to confess—to you and to myself. I say this in order that, if the picture as a whole should be somewhat blurred here and there, you should not believe that this is due to lack of evidence; on the contrary, there is evidence that might well make the picture unbearably stark. It is not easy to find a middle way.) Here, it is enough to remind you of early days. I had lost my self-confidence where you were concerned, and in its place had developed a boundless sense of guilt. (In recollection of this boundlessness I once wrote of someone, accurately: “He is afraid the shame will outlive him.”) I could not suddenly change when I was with other people; rather, I came to feel an even deeper sense of guilt with them, for, as I have already said, I had to make up to them for the wrongs you had done them in your business, wrongs in which I too had my share of responsibility. Besides, you always had some objection to make, frankly or covertly, about everyone I associated with, and for this too I had to atone. The mistrust that you tried to instill into me toward most people, at business and at home (name a single person who was of importance to me in my childhood whom you didn’t at least once tear to shreds with your criticism), was, oddly enough, of no particular burden to you (you were strong enough to bear it; besides, it was perhaps really only a token of the autocrat). This mistrust (which was nowhere confirmed in the eyes of the little boy, since everywhere I saw only people excellent beyond any hope of emulation) turned in me to mistrust

of myself and perpetual anxiety about everything else. There, then, I was in general certain of not being able to escape from you. That you were mistaken on this point was perhaps due to your actually never learning anything about my association with other people; and mistrustfully and jealously (I don't deny, do I, that you are fond of me?) you assumed that I had to compensate elsewhere for the lack of a family life, since it must be impossible that away from home I should live in the same way. Incidentally, in this respect, it was precisely in my childhood that I did find a certain comfort in my very mistrust of my own judgment. I would say to myself: "Oh, you're exaggerating, you tend too much to feel trivialities as great exceptions, the way young people always do." But this comfort I later lost almost entirely, when I gained a clearer perspective of the world.

I found just as little escape from you in Judaism. Here some measure of escape would have been thinkable in principle, moreover, it would have been thinkable that we might both have found each other in Judaism or that we even might have begun from there in harmony. But what sort of Judaism was it that I got from you? In the course of the years, I have taken roughly three different attitudes to it.

As a child I reproached myself, in accord with you, for not going to the synagogue often enough, for not fasting, and so on. I thought that in this way I was doing a wrong not to myself but to you, and I was penetrated by a sense of guilt, which was, of course, always near at hand.

Later, as a young man, I could not understand how, with the insignificant scrap of Judaism you yourself possessed, you could reproach me for not making an effort (for the sake of piety at least, as you put it) to cling to a similar, insignificant scrap. It was indeed, so far as I could see, a mere nothing, a joke—not even a joke. Four days a year you went to the synagogue, where you were, to say the least, closer to the indifferent than to those who took it seriously, patiently went through the prayers as a formality, sometimes amazed me by being able to show me in the prayer book the passage that was being said at the moment, and for the rest, so long as I was present in the synagogue (and this was the main thing) I was allowed to hang around wherever I liked. And so I yawned and dozed through the many hours (I don't think I was ever again so bored, except later at dancing lessons) and did my best to

enjoy the few little bits of variety there were, as for instance when the Ark of the Covenant was opened, which always reminded me of the shooting galleries where a cupboard door would open in the same way whenever one hit a bull's-eye; except that there something interesting always came out and here it was always just the same old dolls without heads. Incidentally, it was also very frightening for me there, not only, as goes without saying, because of all the people one came into close contact with, but also because you once mentioned in passing that I too might be called to the Torah. That was something I dreaded for years. But otherwise I was not fundamentally disturbed in my boredom, unless it was by the *bar mitzvah*, but that demanded no more than some ridiculous memorizing, in other words, it led to nothing but some ridiculous passing of an examination; and, so far as you were concerned, by little, not very significant incidents, as when you were called to the Torah and passed, in what to my way of feeling was a purely social event, or when you stayed on in the synagogue for the prayers for the dead, and I was sent away, which for a long time—obviously because of the being sent away and the lack of any deeper interest—aroused in me the more or less unconscious feeling that something indecent was about to take place.—That's how it was in the synagogue; at home it was, if possible, even poorer, being confined to the first Seder, which more and more developed into a farce, with fits of hysterical laughter, admittedly under the influence of the growing children. (Why did you have to give way to that influence? Because you had brought it about.) This was the religious material that was handed on to me, to which may be added at most the outstretched hand pointing to "the sons of the millionaire Fuchs," who attended the synagogue with their father on the High Holy Days. How one could do anything better with that material than get rid of it as fast as possible, I could not understand; precisely the getting rid of it seemed to me to be the devoutest action.

Still later, I did see it again differently and realized why it was possible for you to think that in this respect too I was malevolently betraying you. You really had brought some traces of Judaism with you from the ghetto-like village community; it was not much and it dwindled a little more in the city and during your military service; but still, the impressions and memories of your youth did just about suffice for some sort of Jewish life, especially since you did not need much help of that

kind, but came of robust stock and could personally scarcely be shaken by religious scruples unless they were strongly mixed with social scruples. Basically the faith that ruled your life consisted in your believing in the unconditional Tightness of the opinions of a certain class of Jewish society, and hence actually, since these opinions were part and parcel of your own nature, in believing in yourself. Even in this there was still Judaism enough, but it was too little to be handed on to the child; it all dribbled away while you were passing it on. In part, it was youthful memories that could not be passed on to others; in part, it was your dreaded personality. It was also impossible to make a child, overacutely observant from sheer nervousness, understand that the few flimsy gestures you performed in the name of Judaism, and with an indifference in keeping with their flimsiness, could have any higher meaning. For you they had meaning as little souvenirs of earlier times, and that was why you wanted to pass them on to me, but since they no longer had any intrinsic value even for you, you could do this only through persuasion or threat; on the one hand, this could not be successful, and on the other, it had to make you very angry with me on account of my apparent obstinacy, since you did not recognize the weakness of your position in this.

The whole thing is, of course, no isolated phenomenon. It was much the same with a large section of this transitional generation of Jews, which had migrated from the still comparatively devout countryside to the cities. It happened automatically; only, it added to our relationship, which certainly did not lack in acrimony, one more sufficiently painful source for it. Although you ought to believe, as I do, in your guiltlessness in this matter too, you ought to explain this guiltlessness by your nature and by the conditions of the times, not merely by external circumstances; that is, not by saying, for instance, that you had too much work and too many other worries to be able to bother with such things as well. In this manner you tend to twist your undoubted guiltlessness into an unjust reproach to others. That can be very easily refuted everywhere and here too. It was not a matter of any sort of instruction you ought to have given your children, but of an exemplary life. Had your Judaism been stronger, your example would have been more compelling too; this goes without saying and is, again, by no means a reproach, but only a refutation of your reproaches. You have

recently been reading Franklin's memoirs of his youth. I really did purposely give you this book to read, though not, as you ironically commented, because of a little passage on vegetarianism, but because of the relationship between the author and his father, as it is there described, and of the relationship between the author and his son, as it is spontaneously revealed in these memoirs written for that son. I do not wish to dwell here on matters of detail.

I have received a certain retrospective confirmation of this view of your Judaism from your attitude in recent years, when it seemed to you that I was taking more interest in Jewish matters. As you have in advance an aversion to every one of my activities and especially to the nature of my interest, so you have had it here too. But in spite of this, one could have expected that in this case you would make a little exception. It was, after all, Judaism of your Judaism that was coming to life here, and with it also the possibility of entering into a new relationship between us. I do not deny that, had you shown interest in them, these things might, for that very reason, have become suspect in my eyes. I do not even dream of asserting that I am in this respect any better than you are. But it never came to the test. Through my intervention Judaism became abhorrent to you, Jewish writings unreadable; they "nauseated" you.—This may have meant you insisted that only that Judaism which you had shown me in my childhood was the right one, and beyond it there was nothing. Yet that you should insist on it was really hardly thinkable. But then the "nausea" (apart from the fact that it was directed primarily not against Judaism but against me personally) could only mean that unconsciously you did acknowledge the weakness of your Judaism and of my Jewish upbringing, did not wish to be reminded of it in any way, and reacted to any reminder with frank hatred. Incidentally, your negative high esteem of my new Judaism was much exaggerated; first of all, it bore your curse within it, and secondly, in its development the fundamental relationship to one's fellow men was decisive, in my case that is to say fatal.

You struck closer to home with your aversion to my writing and to everything that, unknown to you, was connected with it. Here I had, in fact, got some distance away from you by my own efforts, even if it was slightly reminiscent of the worm that, when a foot treads on its tail end, breaks loose with its front part and drags itself aside. To a certain extent

I was in safety; there was a chance to breathe freely. The aversion you naturally and immediately took to my writing was, for once, welcome to me. My vanity, my ambition did suffer under your soon proverbial way of hailing the arrival of my books: “Put it on my bedside table!” (usually you were playing cards when a book came), but I was really quite glad of it, not only out of rebellious malice, not only out of delight at a new confirmation of my view of our relationship, but quite spontaneously, because to me that formula sounded something like: “Now you are free!” Of course it was a delusion; I was not, or, to put it most optimistically, was not yet, free. My writing was all about you; all I did there, after all, was to bemoan what I could not bemoan upon your breast. It was an intentionally long and drawn-out leave-taking from you, yet, although it was enforced by you, it did take its course in the direction determined by me. But how little all this amounted to! It is only worth talking about because it happened in my life, otherwise it would not even be noted; and also because in my childhood it ruled my life as a premonition, later as a hope, and still later often as despair, and it dictated—yet again in your shape, it may be said—my few small decisions.

For instance, the choice of a career. True, here you gave me complete freedom, in your magnanimous and, in this regard, even indulgent manner. Although here again you were conforming to the general method of treating sons in the Jewish middle class, which was the standard for you, or at least to the values of that class. Finally, one of your misunderstandings concerning my person played a part in this too. In fact, out of paternal pride, ignorance of my real life, and conclusions drawn from my feebleness, you have always regarded me as particularly diligent. As a child I was, in your view, always studying, and later always writing. This does not even remotely correspond to the facts. It would be more correct, and much less exaggerated, to say that I studied little and learned nothing; that something did stick in my mind after those many years is, after all, not very remarkable, since I did have a moderately good memory and a not too inferior capacity for learning; but the sum total of knowledge and especially of a solid grounding of knowledge is extremely pitiable in comparison with the expenditure of time and money in the course of an outwardly untroubled, calm life, particularly also in comparison with almost all the people I know. It is pitiable, but to me understandable. Ever since I could think, I have had

such profound anxieties about asserting my spiritual and intellectual existence that I was indifferent to everything else. Jewish schoolboys in our country often tend to be odd; among them one finds the most unlikely things; but something like my cold indifference, scarcely disguised, indestructible, childishly helpless, approaching the ridiculous, and brutishly complacent, the indifference of a self-sufficient but coldly imaginative child, I have never found anywhere else; to be sure, it was the sole defense against destruction of the nerves by fear and by a sense of guilt. All that occupied my mind was worry about myself, and this in various ways. There was, for instance, the worry about my health; it began imperceptibly enough, with now and then a little anxiety about digestion, hair falling out, a spinal curvature, and so on; intensifying in innumerable gradations, it finally ended with a real illness. But since there was nothing at all I was certain of, since I needed to be provided at every instant with a new confirmation of my existence, since nothing was in my very own, undoubted, sole possession, determined unequivocally only by me—in sober truth a disinherited son—naturally I became unsure even to the thing nearest to me, my own body. I shot up, tall and lanky, without knowing what to do with my lankiness, the burden was too heavy, the back became bent; I scarcely dared to move, certainly not to exercise, I remained weakly; I was amazed by everything I could still command as by a miracle, for instance, my good digestion; that sufficed to lose it, and now the way was open to every sort of hypochondria; until finally under the strain of the superhuman effort of wanting to marry (of this I shall speak later), blood came from the lung, something in which the apartment in the Schönbornpalais—which, however, I needed only because I believed I needed it for my writing, so that even this belongs here under the same heading—may have had a fair share. So all this did not come from excessive work, as you always imagine. There were years in which, in perfectly good health, I lazed away more time on the sofa than you in all your life, including all your illnesses. When I rushed away from you, frightfully busy, it was generally in order to lie down in my room. My total achievement in work done, both at the office (where laziness is, of course, not particularly striking, and besides, mine was kept in bounds by my anxiety) and at home, is minute; if you had any real idea of it, you would be aghast. Probably I am constitutionally not lazy at all, but there

was nothing for me to do. In the place where I lived I was spurned, condemned, fought to a standstill; and to escape to some other place was an enormous exertion, but that was not work, for it was something impossible, something that was, with small exceptions, unattainable for me.

This was the state in which I was given the freedom of choice of a career. But was I still capable of making any use of such freedom? Had I still any confidence in my own capacity to achieve a real career? My valuation of myself was much more dependent on you than on anything else, such as some external success. *That* was strengthening for a moment, nothing more, but on the other side your weight always dragged me down much more strongly. Never shall I pass the first grade in grammar school, I thought, but I succeeded, I even got a prize; but I shall certainly not pass the entrance exam for the Gymnasium, but I succeeded; but now I shall certainly fail in the first year at the Gymnasium; no, I did not fail, and I went on and on succeeding. This did not produce any confidence, however; on the contrary, I was always convinced—and I had positive proof of it in your forbidding expression—that the more I achieved, the worse the final outcome would inevitably be. Often in my mind's eye I saw the terrible assembly of the teachers (the Gymnasium is only the most obvious example, but it was the same all around me), as they would meet, when I had passed the first class, and then in the second class, when I had passed that, and then in the third, and so on, meeting in order to examine this unique, outrageous case, to discover how I, the most incapable, or at least the most ignorant of all, had succeeded in creeping up so far as this class, which now, when everybody's attention had at last been focused on me, would of course instantly spew me out, to the jubilation of all the righteous liberated from this nightmare. To live with such fantasies is not easy for a child. In these circumstances, what could I care about my lessons? Who was able to strike a spark of real interest in me? Lessons, and not only lessons but everything around me, interested me as much, at that decisive age, as an embezzling bank clerk, still holding his job and trembling at the thought of discovery, is interested in the petty ongoing business of the bank, which he still has to deal with as a clerk. That was how small and faraway everything was in comparison to the main thing. So it went on up to the qualifying exams which I really

passed partly only through cheating, and then everything came to a standstill, for now I was free. If I had been concerned only with myself up to now, despite the discipline of the Gymnasium, how much more so now that I was free. So there was actually no such thing for me as freedom to choose my career, for I knew: compared to the main thing everything would be exactly as much a matter of indifference to me as all the subjects taught at school, and so it was a matter of finding a profession that would let me indulge this indifference without injuring my vanity too much. Law was the obvious choice. Little contrary attempts on the part of vanity, of senseless hope, such as a fortnight's study of chemistry, or six months' German studies, only reinforced that fundamental conviction. So I studied law. This meant that in the few months before the exams, and in a way that told severely on my nerves, I was positively living, in an intellectual sense, on sawdust, which had moreover already been chewed for me in thousands of other people's mouths. But in a certain sense this was exactly to my taste, as in a certain sense the Gymnasium had been earlier, and later my job as a clerk, for it all suited my situation. At any rate, I did show astonishing foresight; even as a small child I had had fairly clear premonitions about my studies and my career. From this side I did not expect rescue; here I had given up long ago.

But I showed no foresight at all concerning the significance and possibility of a marriage for me; this up to now greatest terror of my life has come upon me almost completely unexpectedly. The child had developed so slowly, these things were outwardly all too remote; now and then the necessity of thinking of them did arise; but the fact that here a permanent, decisive and indeed the most grimly bitter ordeal loomed was impossible to recognize. In reality, however, the marriage plans turned out to be the most grandiose and hopeful attempts at escape, and, consequently, their failure was correspondingly grandiose.

I am afraid that, because in this sphere everything I try is a failure, I shall also fail to make these attempts to marry comprehensible to you. And yet the success of this whole letter depends on it, for in these attempts there was, on the one hand, concentrated everything I had at my disposal in the way of positive forces, and, on the other hand, there also accumulated, and with downright fury, all the negative forces that I have described as being the result in part of your method of upbringing,

that is to say, the weakness, the lack of self-confidence, the sense of guilt, and they positively drew a cordon between myself and marriage. The explanation will be hard for me also because I have spent so many days and nights thinking and burrowing through the whole thing over and over again that now even I myself am bewildered by the mere sight of it. The only thing that makes the explanation easier for me is your—in my opinion—complete misunderstanding of the matter; to correct slightly so complete a misunderstanding does not seem excessively difficult.

First of all you rank the failure of the marriages with the rest of my failures; I should have nothing against this, provided you accepted my previous explanation of my failure as a whole. It does, in fact, form part of the same series, only you underrate the importance of the matter, underrating it to such an extent that whenever we talk of it we are actually talking about quite different things. I venture to say that nothing has happened to you in your whole life that had such importance for you as the attempts at marriage have had for me. By this I do not mean that you have not experienced anything in itself as important; on the contrary, your life was much richer and more care-laden and more concentrated than mine, but for that very reason nothing of this sort has happened to you. It is as if one person had to climb five low steps and another person only one step, but one that is, at least for him, as high as all the other five put together; the first person will not only manage the five, but hundreds and thousands more as well, he will have led a great and very strenuous life, but none of the steps he has climbed will have been of such importance to him as for the second person that one, first, high step, that step which it is impossible for him to climb even by exerting all his strength, that step which he cannot get up on and which he naturally cannot get past either.

Marrying, founding a family, accepting all the children that come, supporting them in this insecure world and perhaps even guiding them a little, is, I am convinced, the utmost a human being can succeed in doing at all. That so many seem to succeed in this is no evidence to the contrary; first of all, there are not many who do succeed, and second, these not-many usually don't "do" it, it merely "happens" to them; although this is not that *utmost*, it is still very great and very honorable (particularly since "doing" and "happening" cannot be kept clearly

distinct). And finally, it is not a matter of this Utmost at all, anyway, but only of some distant but decent approximation; it is, after all, not necessary to fly right into the middle of the sun, but it is necessary to crawl to a clean little spot on Earth where the sun sometimes shines and one can warm oneself a little.

How was I prepared for this? As badly as possible. This is apparent from what has been said up to now. In so far as any direct preparation of the individual and any direct creation of the general basic conditions exist, you did not intervene much outwardly. And it could not be otherwise; what is decisive here are the general sexual customs of class, nation, and time. Yet you did intervene here too—not much, for such intervention must presuppose great mutual trust, and both of us had been lacking in this even long before the decisive time came—and not very happily, because our needs were quite different; what grips me need hardly touch you at all, and vice versa; what is innocence in you may be guilt in me, and vice versa; what has no consequences for you may be the last nail in my coffin.

I remember going for a walk one evening with you and Mother; it was on Josephsplatz near where the Länderbank is today; and I began talking about these interesting things, in a stupidly boastful, superior, proud, detached (that was spurious), cold (that was genuine), and stammering manner, as indeed I usually talked to you, reproaching the two of you with having left me uninstructed; with the fact that my schoolmates first had to take me in hand, that I had been close to great dangers (here I was brazenly lying, as was my way, in order to show myself brave, for as a consequence of my timidity I had, except for the usual sexual misdemeanors of city children, no very exact notion of these “great dangers”); but finally I hinted that now, fortunately, I knew everything, no longer needed any advice, and that everything was all right. I had begun talking about all this mainly because it gave me pleasure at least to talk about it, and also out of curiosity, and finally to avenge myself somehow on the two of you for something or other. In keeping with your nature you took it quite simply, only saying something to the effect that you could give me advice about how I could go in for these things without danger. Perhaps I did want to lure just such an answer out of you; it was in keeping with the prurience of a child overfed with meat and all good things, physically inactive, everlastingly occupied with

himself; but still, my outward sense of shame was so hurt by this—or I believed it ought to be so hurt—that against my will I could not go on talking to you about it and, with arrogant impudence, cut the conversation short.

It is not easy to judge the answer you gave me then; on the one hand, it had something staggeringly frank, sort of primeval, about it; on the other hand, as far as the lesson itself is concerned, it was uninhibited in a very modern way. I don't know how old I was at the time, certainly not much over sixteen. It was, nevertheless, a very remarkable answer for such a boy, and the distance between the two of us is also shown in the fact that it was actually the first direct instruction bearing on real life I ever received from you. Its real meaning, however, which sank into my mind even then, but which came partly to the surface of my consciousness only much later, was this: what you advised me to do was in your opinion and even more in my opinion at that time, the filthiest thing possible. That you wanted to see to it that I should not bring any of the physical filth home with me was unimportant, for you were only protecting yourself, your house. The important thing was rather that you yourself remained outside your own advice, a married man, a pure man, above such things; this was probably intensified for me at the time by the fact that even marriage seemed to me shameless; and hence it was impossible for me to apply to my parents the general information I had picked up about marriage. Thus you became still purer, rose still higher. The thought that you might have given yourself similar advice before your marriage was to me utterly unthinkable. So there was hardly any smudge of earthly filth on you at all. And it was you who pushed me down into this filth—just as though I were predestined to it—with a few frank words. And so, if the world consisted only of me and you (a notion I was much inclined to have), then this purity of the world came to an end with you and, by virtue of your advice, the filth began with me. In itself it was, of course, incomprehensible that you should thus condemn me; only old guilt, and profoundest contempt on your side, could explain it to me. And so again I was seized in my innermost being—and very hard indeed.

Here perhaps both our guiltlessness becomes most evident. A gives B a piece of advice that is frank, in keeping with his attitude to life, not very lovely but still, even today perfectly usual in the city, a piece of advice

that might prevent damage to health. This piece of advice is for B morally not very invigorating—but why should he not be able to work his way out of it, and repair the damage in the course of the years? Besides, he does not even have to take the advice; and there is no reason why the advice itself should cause B's whole future world to come tumbling down. And yet something of this kind does happen, but only for the very reason that A is you and B is myself.

This guiltlessness on both sides I can judge especially well because a similar clash between us occurred some twenty years later, in quite different circumstances—horrible in itself but much less damaging—for what was there in me, the thirty-six-year-old, that could still be damaged? I am referring to a brief discussion on one of those few tumultuous days that followed the announcement of my latest marriage plans. You said to me something like this: "She probably put on a fancy blouse, something these Prague Jewesses are good at, and right away, of course, you decided to marry her. And that as fast as possible, in a week, tomorrow, today. I can't understand you: after all, you're a grown man, you live in the city, and you don't know what to do but marry the first girl who comes along. Isn't there anything else you can do? If you're frightened, I'll go with you." You put it in more detail and more plainly, but I can no longer recall the details, perhaps too things became a little vague before my eyes, I paid almost more attention to Mother who, though in complete agreement with you, took something from the table and left the room with it.

You have hardly ever humiliated me more deeply with words and shown me your contempt more clearly. When you spoke to me in a similar way twenty years earlier, one might, looking at it through your eyes, have seen in it some respect for the precocious city boy, who in your opinion could already be initiated into life without more ado. Today this consideration could only intensify the contempt, for the boy who was about to make his first start got stuck halfway and today does not seem richer by any experience, only more pitiable by twenty years. My choice of a girl meant nothing at all to you. You had (unconsciously) always suppressed my power of decision and now believed (unconsciously) that you knew what it was worth. Of my attempts at escape in other directions you knew nothing, thus you could not know anything either of the thought processes that had led me to this attempt

to marry, and had to try to guess at them, and in keeping with your general opinion of me, you interpreted them in the most abominable, crude, and ridiculous light. And you did not for a moment hesitate to tell me this in just such a manner. The shame you inflicted on me with this was nothing to you in comparison to the shame that I would, in your opinion, inflict on your name by this marriage.

Now, regarding my attempts at marriage there is much you can say in reply, and you have indeed done so: you could not have much respect for my decision since I had twice broken the engagement with F. and had twice renewed it, since I had needlessly dragged you and Mother to Berlin to celebrate the engagement, and the like. All this is true—but how did it come about?

The fundamental thought behind both attempts at marriage was quite sound: to set up house, to become independent. An idea that does appeal to you, only in reality it always turns out like the children's game in which one holds and even grips the other's hand, calling out: "Oh, go away, go away, why don't you go away?" Which in our case happens to be complicated by the fact that you have always honestly meant this "go away!" and have always unknowingly held me, or rather held me down, only by the strength of your personality.

Although both girls were chosen by chance, they were extraordinarily well chosen. Again a sign of your complete misunderstanding, that you can believe that I—timid, hesitant, suspicious—can decide to marry in a flash, out of delight over a blouse. Both marriages would rather have been commonsense marriages, in so far as that means that day and night—the first time for years, the second time for months—all my power of thought was concentrated on the plan.

Neither of the girls disappointed me, only I disappointed both of them. My opinion of them is today exactly the same as when I wanted to marry them.

It is not true either that in my second marriage attempt I disregarded the experience gained from the first attempt, that I was rash and careless. The cases were quite different; precisely the earlier experience held out a hope for the second case, which was altogether much more promising. I do not want to go into details here.

Why then did I not marry? There were certainly obstacles, as there always are, but then, life consists in confronting such obstacles. The

essential obstacle, however, which is, unfortunately, independent of the individual case, is that obviously I am mentally incapable of marrying. This manifests itself in the fact that from the moment I make up my mind to marry I can no longer sleep, my head burns day and night, life can no longer be called life, I stagger about in despair. It is not actually worries that bring this about; true, in keeping with my sluggishness and pedantry countless worries are involved in all this, but they are not decisive; they do, like worms, complete the work on the corpse, but the decisive blow has come from elsewhere. It is the general pressure of anxiety, of weakness, of self-contempt.

I will try to explain it in more detail. Here, in the attempt to marry, two seemingly antagonistic elements in my relations with you unite more intensely than anywhere else. Marriage certainly is the pledge of the most acute form of self-liberation and independence. I would have a family, in my opinion the highest one can achieve, and so too the highest you have achieved; I would be your equal; all old and ever new shame and tyranny would be mere history. It would be like a fairy tale, but precisely there lies the questionable element. It is too much; so much cannot be achieved. It is as if a person were a prisoner, and he had not only the intention to escape, which would perhaps be attainable, but also, and indeed simultaneously, the intention to rebuild the prison as a pleasure dome for himself. But if he escapes, he cannot rebuild, and if he rebuilds, he cannot escape. If I, in the particular unhappy relationship in which I stand to you, want to become independent, I must do something that will have, if possible, no connection with you at all; though marrying is the greatest thing of all and provides the most honorable independence, it also stands at the same time in the closest relation to you. To try to get out of this quandary has therefore a touch of madness about it, and every attempt is punished by being driven almost mad.

It is precisely this close relation that partly lures me toward marrying. I picture the equality which would then arise between us—and which you would be able to understand better than any other form of equality —as so beautiful because then I could be a free, grateful, guiltless, upright son, and you could be an untroubled, untyrannical, sympathetic, contented father. But to this end everything that ever happened would have to be undone, that is, we ourselves should have to be canceled out.

But we being what we are, marrying is barred to me because it is your

very own domain. Sometimes I imagine the map of the world spread out and you stretched diagonally across it. And I feel as if I could consider living in only those regions that either are not covered by you or are not within your reach. And, in keeping with the conception I have of your magnitude, these are not many and not very comforting regions—and marriage is not among them.

This very comparison proves that I certainly do not mean to say that you drove me away from marriage by your example, as you had driven me away from your business. Quite the contrary, despite the remote similarity. In your marriage I had before me what was, in many ways, a model marriage, a model in constancy, mutual help, number of children; and even when the children grew up and increasingly disturbed the peace, the marriage as such remained undisturbed. Perhaps I formed my high idea of marriage on this model; the desire for marriage was powerless for other reasons. Those lay in your relation to your children, which is, after all, what this whole letter is about.

There is a view according to which fear of marriage sometimes has its source in a fear that one's children would some day pay one back for the sins one has committed against one's own parents. This, I believe, has no very great significance in my case, for my sense of guilt actually originates in you, and is filled with such conviction of its uniqueness—indeed, this feeling of uniqueness is an essential part of its tormenting nature—that any repetition is unthinkable. All the same, I must say that I would find such a mute, glum, dry, doomed son unbearable; I daresay that, if there were no other possibility, I would flee from him, emigrate, as you had planned to do if I had married. And this may also have had some influence on my incapacity to marry.

What is much more important in all this, however, is the anxiety about myself. This has to be understood as follows: I have already indicated that in my writing, and in everything connected with it, I have made some attempts at independence, attempts at escape, with the very smallest of success; they will scarcely lead any farther; much confirms this for me. Nevertheless it is my duty or, rather, the essence of my life, to watch over them, to let no danger that I can avert, indeed no possibility of such a danger, approach them. Marriage bears the possibility of such a danger, though also the possibility of the greatest help; for me, however, it is enough that there is the possibility of a

danger. What should I do if it did turn out to be a danger! How could I continue living in matrimony with the perhaps unprovable, but nevertheless irrefutable feeling that this danger existed? Faced with this I may waver, but the final outcome is certain: I must renounce. The simile of the bird in the hand and the two in the bush has only a very remote application here. In my hand I have nothing, in the bush is everything, and yet—so it is decided by the conditions of battle and the exigency of life—I must choose the nothing. I had to make a similar choice when I chose my profession.

The most important obstacle to marriage, however, is the no longer eradicable conviction that what is essential to the support of a family and especially to its guidance, is what I have recognized in you; and indeed everything rolled into one, good and bad, as it is organically combined in you—strength, and scorn of others, health, and a certain immoderation, eloquence and inadequacy, self-confidence and dissatisfaction with everyone else, a worldly wisdom and tyranny, knowledge of human nature and mistrust of most people; then also good qualities without any drawback, such as industry, endurance, presence of mind, and fearlessness. By comparison I had almost nothing or very little of all this; and was it on this basis that I wanted to risk marrying, when I could see for myself that even you had to fight hard in marriage and, where the children were concerned, had even failed? Of course, I did not put this question to myself in so many words and I did not answer it in so many words; otherwise everyday thinking would have taken over and shown me other men who are different from you (to name one, near at hand, who is very different from you: Uncle Richard) and yet have married and have at least not collapsed under the strain, which is in itself a great deal and would have been quite enough for me. But I did not ask this question, I lived it from childhood on. I tested myself not only when faced with marriage, but in the face of every trifle; in the face of every trifle you by your example and your method of upbringing convinced me, as I have tried to describe, of my incapacity; and what turned out to be true of every trifle and proved you right, had to be fearfully true of the greatest thing of all: of marriage. Up to the time of my marriage attempts I grew up more or less like a businessman who lives from day to day, with worries and forebodings, but without keeping proper accounts. He makes a few small profits—which he

constantly pampers and exaggerates in his imagination because of their rarity—but otherwise he has daily losses. Everything is entered, but never balanced. Now comes the necessity of drawing a balance, that is, the attempt at marriage. And with the large sums that have to be taken into account here it is as though there had never been even the smallest profit, everything one single great liability. And now marry without going mad!

That is what my life with you has been like up to now, and these are the prospects inherent in it for the future.

If you look at the reasons I offer for the fear I have of you, you might answer: “You maintain I make things easy for myself by explaining my relation to you simply as being your fault, but I believe that despite your outward effort, you do not make things more difficult for yourself, but much more profitable. At first you too repudiate all guilt and responsibility; in this our methods are the same. But whereas I then attribute the sole guilt to you as frankly as I mean it, you want to be ‘overly clever’ and ‘overly affectionate’ at the same time and acquit me also of all guilt. Of course, in the latter you only seem to succeed (and more you do not even want), and what appears between the lines, in spite of all the ‘turns of phrase’ about character and nature and antagonism and helplessness, is that actually I have been the aggressor, while everything you were up to was self-defense. By now you would have achieved enough by your very insincerity, for you have proved three things: first, that you are not guilty; second, that I am the guilty one; and third, that out of sheer magnanimity you are ready not only to forgive me but (what is both more and less) also to prove and be willing to believe yourself that—contrary to the truth—I also am not guilty. That ought to be enough for you now, but it is still not enough. You have put it into your head to live entirely off me. I admit that we fight with each other, but there are two kinds of combat. The chivalrous combat, in which independent opponents pit their strength against each other, each on his own, each losing on his own, each winning on his own. And there is the combat of vermin, which not only sting but, on top of it, suck your blood in order to sustain their own life. That’s what the real professional soldier is, and that’s what you are. You are unfit for life; to make life comfortable for yourself, without worries and without self-reproaches, you prove that I have taken your fitness for life away

from you and put it in my own pocket. Why should it bother you that you are unfit for life, since I have the responsibility for it, while you calmly stretch out and let yourself be hauled through life, physically and mentally, by me. For example: when you recently wanted to marry, you wanted—and this you do, after all, admit in this letter—at the same time not to marry, but in order not to have to exert yourself you wanted me to help you with this not-marrying, by forbidding this marriage because of the 'disgrace' this union would bring upon my name. I did not dream of it. First, in this as in everything else I never wanted to be 'an obstacle to your happiness,' and second, I never want to have to hear such a reproach from my child. But did the self-restraint with which I left the marriage up to you do me any good? Not in the least. My aversion to your marriage would not have prevented it; on the contrary, it would have been an added incentive for you to marry the girl, for it would have made the 'attempt at escape,' as you put it, complete. And my consent to your marriage did not prevent your reproaches, for you prove that I am in any case to blame for your not marrying. Basically, however, in this as in everything else you have only proved to me that all my reproaches were justified, and that one especially justified charge was still missing: namely, the charge of insincerity, obsequiousness, and parasitism. If I am not very much mistaken, you are preying on me even with this letter itself."

My answer to this is that, after all, this whole rejoinder—which can partly also be turned against you—does not come from you, but from me. Not even your mistrust of others is as great as my self-mistrust, which you have bred in me. I do not deny a certain justification for this rejoinder, which in itself contributes new material to the characterization of our relationship. Naturally things cannot in reality fit together the way the evidence does in my letter; life is more than a Chinese puzzle. But with the correction made by this rejoinder—a correction I neither can nor will elaborate in detail—in my opinion something has been achieved which so closely approximates the truth that it might reassure us both a little and make our living and our dying easier.

FRANZ

* *Pavlatche* is the Czech word for the long balcony in the inner courtyard of old houses in Prague. *(Ed.)*

* Refers to his sister Ottla's taking over the management of a farm in the German-Bohemian town of Zürau. Kafka spent time with her there during his illness in 1917–18. (*Ed.*)

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