

# The Metamorphosis



## INTRODUCTION

World War II, but all three of his sisters perished in the Holocaust.

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FRANZ KAFKA

Kafka was born in Prague, the first of six children in a family of middle-class Jews. He preferred to speak and write German, as his family did, though most residents of Prague spoke Czech, a significant division both culturally and politically. He attended elementary school, gymnasium, and university within a few blocks of his birthplace. He studied law and got a job at an insurance company at age 24, though he resented having to work to pay the bills. Kafka's letters and journals reveal that he was tortured by a sense of his own inadequacy, sexually and socially, though to others he came off as quiet and intelligent. He had several passionate love affairs but never married. During his lifetime, Kafka is estimated to have burned at least 90% of everything he wrote, though he consented to publish *The Metamorphosis* at age 32. At 34, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, which would lead to his death seven years later. When he died, he left a note for his friend, Max Brod, to destroy his remaining works. Fortunately, Brod disregarded this request, and published "The Trial," "The Castle," and "Amerika." Despite Kafka's relatively small body of work, he has become one of the titans of world literature, and the adjective form of his name, "Kafkaesque," has come to signify the frustrations of modern existence.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Kafka lived at a time of enormous tension in Austria-Hungary and in all of Europe. During his formative years, nationalism (a desire for independence and self-control along ethnic or national lines) was on the rise within the pan-national Austro-Hungarian Empire, leading to the hostility that exploded into war when Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated in 1914. 70 million people participated in the war, 9 million of whom died, and by its end in 1918, the Austro-Hungarian, Russian, German and Ottoman empires had dissolved. The war was also significant because so many technologies were used for the first time, such as tanks, airplanes, poison gases, and new forms of artillery, resulting in a previously unimaginable scale of destruction. Kafka did not fight in World War I, first because his job was considered essential, and later because of his tuberculosis, although he wanted to enlist. After the war, Hungary split off from Austria and became Communist. Scholars still argue about whether Kafka's writings support Communism or malign it, or even if Kafka is political at all. As for his religion, Kafka wrote that he felt separate from his Jewish heritage, though some scholars define him as an exemplar of Jewish literature. He died before

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Kafka is associated with Existentialism, a philosophical and artistic movement in the 19th and 20th century whose foundational idea is that each individual human is responsible for creating their own meaning. To paraphrase Sartre, "existence precedes essence"—life is what we make of it. As simple as it seems, this concept boldly defied the conventional thinking that meaning stems from religion or society. Existentialist works are characterized by a sense of confusion and despair in response to an absurd, unfair world. Along with *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka's [The Trial](#) demonstrates this stance, as a mysterious authority arrests a hapless man, Josef K., who doesn't even know what crime he's committed. [Crime and Punishment](#) by Fyodor Dostoyevsky is a 19th-century novel that deals with typical Kafka themes such as guilt and self-loathing. Existentialism became even more influential during and after World War II, and classic works from that later period include *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre, [The Stranger](#) by Albert Camus, and "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett. Both Sartre and Camus acknowledged that Kafka's work had influenced their own.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Metamorphosis*
- **When Written:** Over a three-week period in 1912
- **Where Written:** Prague
- **When Published:** 1915
- **Literary Period:** World War I
- **Genre:** Existentialism/Absurdism/Modernism
- **Setting:** An apartment in an unnamed European city
- **Climax:** During Grete's violin concert for the boarders, Gregor emerges from his room
- **Antagonist:** Grete, Gregor's father, and the lodgers can all be seen as antagonists at different moments, but Gregor's greatest enemy is his own changed body and personality.
- **Point of View:** Third person, limited to Gregor's point of view with some exceptions

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Cockroach or not?** Kafka never specifies what kind of insect Gregor becomes. He uses a German word that roughly translates to "vermin," then describes Gregor's many small legs, hard rounded shell, and antennae, suggesting a cockroach.

Scholars have put forward other theories over the years, the most interesting of which comes from Vladimir Nabokov, who was convinced that Gregor actually became a winged beetle, capable of but never achieving flight.

**Gregor on stage** Many theater groups have attempted to adapt *The Metamorphosis* for the stage or screen—no easy feat, considering the main character. In a recent, critically acclaimed production, actor-director Gisli Orn Gardasson got around this issue by rejecting costume pieces or body paint in favor of contorting himself into insectlike positions, physically illustrating Gregor's mental anguish of being a human mind in a bug's body.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman, wakes up one morning and discovers that he's transformed into a giant cockroach (or some similar oversized, insect-like vermin). He realizes he's missed his train, and gets acquainted with his awkward new body as he worries about his stressful salesman job. His mother, father, and sister Grete realize something's amiss and knock at his door, but he finds he can't produce human speech and also can't open the door. His boss, the Chief Clerk, arrives, and scolds him for his tardiness and strange behavior, even suggesting that his job might be in danger. Gregor finally opens his door with difficulty and gives the Chief Clerk a long speech about his dutifulness to his job. But no one understands the speech, his family is shocked at his appearance, and the Chief Clerk runs away. Gregor injures himself when he squeezes back through the doorway into his bedroom.

Gregor finds that Grete has brought him some fresh food, which doesn't appeal to him. Gregor resolves to help his family deal with the trouble he's causing them with his metamorphosis. The following morning Grete brings Gregor rotting food, and he eats hungrily. Gregor overhears the family talking about their finances, and determining that they will have to go back to work, now that he can no longer provide for them. Gregor feels upset and sorry that he can't support them anymore. About a month passes, with Grete taking care of Gregor less and less attentively. One day Grete sees Gregor out of his hiding place and is disturbed. Another month passes, then Gregor's mother wants to come help Grete and support Gregor. Grete and the mother plan to move Gregor's old furniture out so he can crawl more freely, but Gregor decides that he wants to keep his furniture, which links him to his humanity. He climbs the wall and places himself over his **print of the lady with the muff**, which shocks his mother when she returns to the room, causing her to faint. Gregor's father returns home and finds Gregor panicking in the dining room. Gregor's father pelts Gregor with apples, one of which severely injures him.

Another month passes while Gregor recovers from his injury. His family members are exhausted from working, and Gregor feels neglected. The family takes on three lodgers for additional income, and Gregor feels even more ignored. One night Grete plays her **violin** for the lodgers. Though the lodgers seem bored, Gregor is profoundly affected, and crawls out of his room, enjoying the beautiful music and optimistic that he'll be able to help his family and become close to Grete again. The lodgers notice Gregor with disgust, and decide that they'll leave and not even pay for the time they'd stayed so far. Grete tells her mother and father that the cockroach, which she can't even believe is Gregor, has ruined their lives. Gregor feebly returns to his room, thinks of his family with love, and dies. The charwoman who cleans the house discovers his body the next morning. Grete, her mother and father decide to take off work. They go to the countryside by tram, and talk happily about future plans, and finding a new apartment. Gregor's mother and father realize that it is time to find a husband for Grete.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Gregor Samsa** – Gregor is a young traveling salesman who suddenly transforms into a giant cockroach. Before his transformation, his main concern is providing for his family. He resents the stresses of traveling for work, and dislikes his coworkers, but he is devoted to his work and hopes to even earn enough to pay for his sister Grete's **violin** lessons at the Conservatorium, as well as the living expenses of his feeble, sedentary mother and father. When Gregor physically transforms, his personality gradually transforms as well. He becomes unable to understand his family's behaviors or motivations, and fails to communicate or even interact with them without causing them panic. Gregor becomes much more focused on bodily concerns such as his crawling, his appetite, and his aches and pains, even as he attempts to retain a connection to his humanity, through his memories, his love of his **print of the lady with the muff**, and his appreciation for Grete's music. Though he comes to resent his family for neglecting him, Gregor continues to love them and want the best for them, all the way to his tragic demise.

**Grete Samsa** – Gregor's beloved 17-year-old sister. After the transformation, Grete takes care of Gregor, cleaning his room and bringing him food, at first with great kindness and attention, and then, after some months, quickly and carelessly. She takes on a job as a salesgirl to help support the family. Despite all her helpfulness to Gregor and his deep love of her, after the violin concert fiasco, she is the first to demand that he go.

**Father** – Gregor's father is mistrustful and unsympathetic towards Gregor after the transformation, though his

unkindness may stem from a desire to protect his family. The father's attack with apples causes an injury that bothers Gregor for the rest of his life. During the course of the story, the father undergoes several transformations. First, he returns to work, as an assistant to small clerks at a bank. At first the job seems to make him healthier and more energetic than his former state as a tired and lazy old man, but as time wears on and he refuses to take off his dirty **uniform**, he becomes even more exhausted and pathetic than before.

**Mother** – Gregor's mother, like Gregor's father, is elderly and sick (she has asthma), but she also returns to work, as an underwear seamstress, when he transforms. Her attitude towards Gregor is both horrified and loving: she faints when she first sees him, and later has an asthma attack after Grete's violin concert, but also she wants to help tidy and clean Gregor's room, and when his father attacks Gregor with apples, she pleads for Gregor's life.

**The lodgers** – Several months after Gregor's transformation, the family takes on three lodgers, to whom they provide room and board. Gregor resents the lodgers for the attention they receive from the family, and for their lack of appreciation of Grete's **violin** playing. The lodgers always move as a unit in the story, though "the middle lodger" is the most decisive. After Gregor shows himself at Grete's concert, the middle lodger declares that he won't pay for the Samsas' services, and the other two lodgers follow suit.

**Charwoman** – A few months after Gregor's transformation, his family hires the Charwoman to replace the servant girl and the cook. She is large, white-haired, and crude. Of all the characters, she is the least disgusted and frightened by Gregor, though she is not particularly nice either. She likes to look in on him and make fun of him.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Chief Clerk** – Gregor's boss at his sales job. The Chief Clerk comes to Gregor's house on the morning of his transformation, to tell him that he hasn't been doing a good job, and leaves in alarm when he sees Gregor's new state.

**Servant Girl** – The servant girl doesn't quit after Gregor's transformation, but always keeps the kitchen door locked when she's in the house. Eventually the family has to lay her off because of financial concerns, and they hire the charwoman instead.

**Cook** – The household cook quits a few days after Gregor's transformation. As a result, Gregor's mother and Grete have to take over the cooking.

coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### MIND VS. BODY

When Gregor first wakes up as a cockroach, he's more concerned about how his transformation will affect his ability to carry out his duties than the actual physical fact of having turned into a repulsive insect. At first, it seems as though Kafka is making a funny, absurdist allegory about the disconnect between the way we perceive ourselves and the way others perceive us. This is true on some level, but the mind vs. body theme in the story is deeper and more complex. Crucially, the difference between Gregor's human mind and animal body begins to fade as Gregor spends more time as a cockroach. Eventually, such as when he scuttles around frantically when his father frightens him, his thought processes seem human, but his conclusions are decisively insect-like. He struggles when his sister removes his furniture, which linked him to his humanity, but ultimately prefers the comfort of a bare room.

Gregor's mind follows his body in its descent into insect-hood—his physical shape determines his behaviors and preferences. *The Metamorphosis*, as a whole, makes a case not just that the body and mind are linked, but also that the body is the more powerful of the two. In Kafka's view, human reasoning is feeble and easily overcome by bodily realities.



### FAMILY

After Gregor's transformation, he becomes entirely reliant on his family, in the way that they, before his transformation, relied on his wages. His feelings of duty and responsibility toward his family concern him much more than his bizarre physical predicament. Yet his sister Grete, mother, and father are unable to think of him or treat him in the same way as before. Much of their change in attitude is due to their profound interest in conforming to the norm of the society around them. Grete is the most thoughtful, putting aside her preconceptions to bring him the rotten food he likes. But, though Gregor imagines guarding the family, he's unable to repay her for her help. When he becomes a cockroach, his relationship with his family becomes unequal, about dependence rather than cooperation. His lack of freedom to act, as well as his family's growing frustrations toward him, are factors that play into his listlessness and eventual death.

Gregor's father may bear the major responsibility for his death because of injuring him with the apple, but no one in the family is blameless. At the story's end, Grete, the mother and father feel happier and freer once they no longer have to worry about Gregor. In the world of the story, even close family bonds can't



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-

triumph over the unequal relationship (and the disgust) caused by having a cockroach as a son.



## MONEY

Money (more accurately, the lack of it) hangs over the story, forming the major pressure on the family.

Gregor, once transformed, can no longer be his family's income source, which makes his transformation more difficult for his family to bear. He also blocks his family from making income from taking on boarders when he creeps up on the boarders during Grete's concert. Part of the story's humor comes from the fact that the lowest-class character, the charwoman, is the most at ease with the cockroach. In contrast with the boarders, the poor charwoman is equipped to deal with absurdity and grubbiness, and treats Gregor with humor and interest, if not real kindness.

Even as he becomes more and more cockroach-like, Gregor spends a huge amount of time worrying about his family's financial situation, demonstrating how fundamental money is. Even an insect can understand that abundance is better than scarcity. He does his best to eavesdrop on his family's conversations so that he can understand their finances, and his inability to do anything for them, more than his physical situation or the inconvenience he's caused his sister, contributes to his "shame and grief."



## INTENTIONS VS. OUTCOMES

Gregor always has the best intentions, but he fails to communicate them effectively, and always makes blunders that increase his family's difficulties. The

most heart-wrenching example of a well-intentioned, failed gesture comes during Grete's violin concert for the boarders. Gregor wants to prove that he's not a mere animal, and feels that the music will offer him the "unknown nourishment" he's lacking (which suggests that a lack of art and beauty contribute to his death, shortly after the concert). He creeps forward in a fit of optimism and affection, but of course his actions ruin the concert and destroy his family's attempt to make money. In this situation and in the many other moments of failed good intentions, Gregor's problem is his inability to communicate. Even without talking, he ought to be able to use body language to show what he intends, but his insect-like brain prevents him from acting in an understandable way.

This theme demonstrates the extreme importance of effective communication, as well as the way that people's preconceptions and opinions create walls. To take another example, Gregor's father's certainty that Gregor's scuttling is threatening, not just nervous, leads him to attack his son.



## SYMPATHY, DEPENDENCE, RESPONSIBILITY

Though Gregor's family first deals with his metamorphosis with concern and sympathy, by the story's end they're actually happier after his death. The story demonstrates the shifting roles of dependence and sympathy: at first, the dependent Gregor gains the sympathy of his family, who attempt to be responsible for him; later, they grow weary, even angered, by their responsibilities towards him. The family's loss of sympathy for Gregor stems from the trouble he's caused them financially and the ways he's embarrassed them in front of guests, but the biggest block to their sympathy is his loss of his human shape and behavior. Grete is the character with the most sympathy for Gregor, but even she reaches her limit after the disastrous violin concert. She tells her mother and father, "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..." She justifies this position by choosing not to believe that the cockroach is her brother anymore, and characterizes him as selfish and rude. The readers, on the other hand, are aligned with Gregor, since we see the story from his head. As he runs back and forth in dismay, we feel his pain, even as we wish that he could reassure his family by acting a little more human, or by being more responsible and independent.

Still, Grete's assumption may be true—Gregor in this new shape might *not* be her brother anymore. By the end of the story, he's not so much a human trapped in an insect's body, as a very thoughtful insect, which to all outward appearances acts like an insect. But even though he's not really human anymore, does he deserve the same amount of sympathy as a human? The story suggests that he does, but it also demonstrates how that's impossible.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



## THE PRINT OF THE LADY IN THE MUFF

Shortly before his metamorphosis, Gregor framed an **advertisement of a lady** wearing furs and holding out a large fur muff on her arm. When he wakes up on the fateful morning as an insect, this image is one of the first things he notices. Later, when his mother and sister work to remove his furniture from his room to give him more space to crawl, an action that makes him upset and angry because it reminds him of his lost humanity and his past life, he rushes to protect the print above any other possession. The lady in the muff

represents Gregor's humanity, but it means more than just that: it's an image of beauty, romance and glamour, Gregor's sole attempt at making his life more beautiful, and one of the rare hints at Gregor's possible interest in eventually finding a wife and family. Yet it's also an advertisement, tying back to Gregor's job as a traveling salesman, and to the story's concerns with appearances and superficiality.



### FATHER'S UNIFORM

After the metamorphosis, Gregor can no longer support his family financially, which used to be his main focus in life and a source of pride. Gregor's father, mother and sister Grete must return to work, and the father gets a job as a banker's assistant, which requires a sharp-looking **uniform**. At first, Gregor's father looks youthful and trim in the uniform, but then the uniform begins to look decrepit and overused, and the father never takes it off, demonstrating both his age and exhaustion, and hinting at the lazy life he used to lead when Gregor provided for the family. The uniform is a complex symbol. It demonstrates how Gregor is less essential to his family than he'd thought, and links to the story's end, when Grete, the father and mother go on a pleasant outing, already moving past the tragedy of Gregor's death. The uniform also demonstrates how, with passing time, attitudes change. Nothing holds steady in this world—neither the family's affection for Gregor, nor Gregor's father's newfound productiveness and vitality.



### GRETE'S VIOLIN

**Grete's violin**, like the **print of the lady with the muff**, is one of the story's few objects of beauty.

Gregor's deepest desire before his transformation was to pay for Grete to study violin at the Conservatorium. The violin symbolizes their loving bond and shows Gregor's altruistic, sympathetic character. Yet the violin also leads to Gregor's biggest mistake, the night before his death. While Grete plays for the lodgers, Gregor gets so excited and hopeful that he crawls too close. The others misread his gesture as threatening, and his intentions completely fail—though he wanted to enjoy the music and support his sister, he ends up destroying both the evening and the family's income from the lodgers. The violin is closely linked to the themes of family and of intentions vs. outcomes, and it represents both the best parts of Gregor's character, namely his love and support of Grete and his desire to take part in a beautiful experience, and the sad truth that he can never communicate such things again. Trapped in a cockroach body, unable to share the moment of beauty, his life is not worth living.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Schocken Books edition of *The Metamorphosis & Other Stories* published in 1995.

### Section 1 Quotes

☞ As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 67

#### Explanation and Analysis

The beginning of *The Metamorphosis* is famously unsettling. Apart from a vague mention of "uneasy dreams," Kafka gives us no reason for why or how the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, was transformed into an insect. This might be simply a standard attention-grabbing opening if we were to learn afterwards what led to this state of affairs. But we never do get an answer: the book simply proceeds from this set of assumptions, as we, together with Gregor, must scramble to deal with its consequences.

Indeed, even the way the beginning is phrased removes agency or motivation from Gregor's metamorphosis: "he found himself transformed" focuses only on the end result. From the very beginning, then, the book proposes a way of storytelling in which events unfold with little guiding, consciously driven motivation. Instead, Gregor's body seems to change of its own will, with his mind hurrying to catch up with this transformation and to grapple with what it means for his sense of self and for his family.

☞ 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.

**Related Characters:** Chief Clerk (speaker), Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 77

#### Explanation and Analysis

The chief clerk is on the other side of Gregor's locked door,

as he and the rest of Gregor's family beg Gregor to unlock it and let them in. As Gregor frantically attempts to deal with his new physical reality, the clerk grows frustrated and begins to criticize Gregor for failing to live up to his responsibilities. As we can see from the clerk's implications, Gregor has always been dutiful and responsible: he is the family's major breadwinner, and takes this role seriously. It is thanks to him that the family can get by at all.

Here, though, this strange event means that all Gregor's diligence and responsibility, carefully cultivated over a long period of time, are in danger of suddenly unraveling. What makes the scene even more excruciating is that there is nothing Gregor can do about it: he is trapped within his new body, unable even to defend himself with language to the clerk. At the same time, the quickness with which the Chief Clerk turns on Gregor, who has always been such a good employee, indicates both an incredible lack of compassion and suggests how quickly someone who has ceased to conform to the expectations of society, even through no fault of their own, is quickly shamed and discarded.

☞ The chief clerk must be detained, soothed, persuaded and finally won over; the whole future of Gregor and his family depended on it!

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa, Chief Clerk

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 84

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor has finally gotten the door to his room unlocked, but he seems curiously to underestimate the distress and shock that are affecting both his family and the clerk at the moment. Instead, he congratulates himself on knowing exactly what must be done in his situation: he must calm down the clerk enough that he won't go back to the office in hysterics and ruin Gregor's job prospects. Such logic might seem flawless to Gregor, although to us it smacks of absurdity as well – how has Gregor not realized that his transformation has quite seriously jeopardized his job already? And that he no longer can be understood in order to explain himself?

Still, Gregor's insistence on soothing the clerk reflects his continued sense of obligation to his family, as he knows he is the sole source of income in the family and must make sure that they will be financially stable. It is the disconnect between Gregor's serious, responsible intentions and the

disastrous effects his new body creates that will come to characterize much of the rest of the book.

## Section 2 Quotes

☞ "What a quiet life our family has been leading," 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 flat. But what if all the quiet, the comfort, the contentment were now to end in horror?

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa (speaker), Grete Samsa, Father, Mother

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 89

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor, listening from his room, has realized that his father is not reading to Grete as usual, and his thoughts turn to the great disruption that his transformation has surely made in his family's daily life – perhaps the first time that he fully realizes how significant a change has taken place. Still, he continues to focus on the pride and self-confidence that he feels as an independent young man whose family burdens rest on his shoulders. They have long depended on him to lead the family, financially and otherwise, and he has happily taken on this duty, enabling them to live in peace.

However, now he begins to recognize that such peace and quiet may not last forever. Indeed, he himself might be the cause of his family's greatest destruction, even though that is not at all his intention. Once again, the phrasing of this passage's last line suggests that consequences might unfold without anyone consciously desiring or promoting them – instead, events will simply take place on their own, following the logic of physical reality rather than complex mental desires.

☞ ...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.

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 90

### Explanation and Analysis

As Gregor continues to struggle to bear this new burden – the reality that his family now has been thrown into disruption because of his transformation – his thoughts turn once again to his responsibility in taking care of them. Gregor is used to acting in such a way that his family is able to remain dependent on him. This is precisely how he has led his life as his family's primary breadwinner until now. Yet again, the apparent logic of Gregor's thoughts is, upon closer examination, suspect. This time it is Gregor himself who has caused the family's disruption, so it is strange for him to commit himself to helping the family deal with it.

Gregor seems to reconcile this contradiction by insisting, at least implicitly, that he had nothing to do with his own transformation, and so he cannot really be said to have caused his family's "inconvenience" in a meaningful sense of the term. But as a result of this confusion, the passage remains uncertain regarding whether Gregor will truly be able to direct his own circumstances, or whether he will have to submit to the necessities of his new reality.

☝ At first whenever the need for earning money was mentioned Gregor let go his hold on the door and threw himself down on the cool leather sofa beside it, he felt so hot with shame and grief.

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 97

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor has been listening to his family discuss financial matters, and as he realizes that, although they are thrifty, the only way they can stay afloat is by his father returning to work, he feels ashamed at no longer being able to support them. Gregor's feelings here seem deeply human: "shame and grief" both stem from a sense of responsibility and care towards his family. Gregor recognizes, at the same time, that it was he himself who was able to ease his family's difficulties earlier in his life – even though at the time, his family seemed to take his efforts for granted. Still, Gregor had embraced his role, and now it seems that the identity that he developed for himself as a responsible family man is unraveling, without any legitimate identity to replace it.

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

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa, Grete Samsa

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 98

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor is used to being able to provide for Grete as for the rest of his family: he is used to this position and the dynamics that result from this relationship. Now, in addition to his physical metamorphosis, he must undergo a transformation regarding his and his family's expectations about their proper roles. In particular, here, Grete's dependence on Gregor has reversed such that Gregor is now dependent on his sister.

However, it is not merely that Gregor feels uncomfortable and ill at ease because of the way the family dynamics have shifted. In addition, he is unable to communicate with Grete, using the power of language to make her comfortable again, and to communicate how he feels to her. As she grows increasingly nervous around him, Gregor becomes correspondingly more frustrated, and the chance for true feelings of sympathy and understanding becomes ever more remote.

☝ Do let me in to Gregor, he is my unfortunate son! Can't you understand that I must go to him?

**Related Characters:** Mother (speaker), Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 100

### Explanation and Analysis

Grete has been taking care of Gregor during the past two months. Finally, Gregor's mother wants to come in and see him. Here, she seems to reclaim her role as his mother, even though he has changed beyond all recognition, and even though she has not exactly been playing the role of the devoted mother in recent weeks. Nevertheless, this passage suggests that one way his mother seeks to understand what has happened is within the framework of a family tragedy – an "unfortunate" event that happened to her beloved son, whom she now must look after. Even though the reality of the situation makes such cries seem senseless or silly,

Mother, along with other characters in the story, can only rely on existing codes of family behavior in order to seek to understand this new reality.

☞ Nothing should be taken out of his room; everything must stay as it was; he could not dispense with the good influence of the furniture on his state of mind; and even if the furniture did hamper him in his senseless crawling round and round, that was no drawback but a great advantage.

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 103

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor's mother has asked Grete not to move any of the other furniture in the room out of the way. Grete has been doing so so that Gregor has greater freedom to move around, something which, as an insect, he appreciates. However, upon hearing his mother's opinion, Gregor realizes that he has been wrong – or, at least, that he has been thinking like a bug and not like the human he once was. The presence of the furniture, he now reasons, will force him to continue to think like a human: in general, it will force him to continue to use his mind to direct his circumstances, rather than being guided by his feelings alone.

Grete has seemed to gain a level of sympathy for Gregor in sensing what he, as an animal, wants: but Gregor must balance his sense of gratefulness to Grete with the constant struggle going on between his mind and his body. As his mother notes, if they move all the furniture away, it's as good as accepting that Gregor will never change back: for Gregor, this would mean conceding victory to his bodily instincts.

## Section 3 Quotes

☞ The serious injury done to Gregor, which disabled him for more than a month—the apple went on sticking in his body as a visible reminder, since no one ventured 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 the suppression of disgust and the exercise of patience, nothing but patience.

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa, Father

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 110

### Explanation and Analysis

In a moment of anger and fear, Gregor's father had thrown an apple at him – ceding to the sense, even if unconscious, that this insect was not really a member of their family but only a repulsive nuisance. Now, however, he and the other members of the family seem to have regained, if not clarity, at least a sense of responsibility and uncertain sympathy towards Gregor. They are all still confused regarding whether or not Gregor is "there," his mind trapped inside the cockroach, or if not, what precise relation exists between the Gregor that was once a part of their family and the new being that has replaced him.

Still, the family seems to accept that, even if they cannot understand what the insect is, the creature still belongs to them, and they must treat it accordingly. Once again, without any satisfying answers to guide their actions, the family falls back on customary codes of behavior rather than attempting to solve the mystery of Gregor's metamorphosis.

☞ Instead of being allowed to disturb him so senselessly whenever the whim took her, she should rather have been ordered to clean out his room daily, that charwoman!

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa, Charwoman

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 116

### Explanation and Analysis

The charwoman has taken to poking her head into Gregor's room and laughing at him every so often, calling him names and bothering him. He never knows when exactly the charwoman will enter, so he always has to be prepared to deal with her intrusions. Here Gregor seems to consider himself once again the head of the family, responsible for the others and capable of deciding what should and should not take place within the household. Now, of course, his insistence contrasts deeply with the actual state of vulnerability in which he finds himself.

The charwoman's constant intrusions, in addition, create a notable contrast to the way the family treats Gregor. She

has no memory of Gregor as a human: to her he is just a huge bug, a nuisance, to be sure, but nothing to be afraid of. Her casual attitude suggests that she is less bothered by such a "repulsive" creature than the family, which is striving towards the middle class and the stability and propriety that comes with it. But her attitude also reminds us that the true mystery and difficulty of the family's situation is not that they have to deal with a large insect, but that they have witnessed a senseless transformation and cannot find a way to resolve the inevitable problems of selfhood and responsibility that arise.

☞ "I'm hungry enough," said Gregor sadly to himself, "but not for that kind of food. How these lodgers are stuffing themselves, and here I am dying of starvation!"

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa (speaker), Gregor Samsa, The lodgers

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 119

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor watches how his family carefully looks after the feeding and well-being of the lodgers that they have taken on. Another stage in the family's development has taken place: while initially Gregor provided financially for the family, they were then forced to take care of Gregor. Now, with Gregor transformed, the family has replaced Gregor as a dependent with lodgers who can pay them.

Gregor contrasts his own sorry state with that of the lodgers, even though what they are given to eat no longer appeals to him. Gregor has slipped further into the habits and desires of the body he inhabits. At the same time, however, his mind continues, through memory, to connect his past with his present, as he is able to recognize how much his family's attitude towards him has changed.

☞ 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.

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 120

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor has heard Grete playing the violin and has crept into the room while the family and their lodgers are gathered for her recital. He hasn't taken the time to clean himself, and he knows that he will only be more repulsive to the family. Here, though, he finds himself affected by a different set of pressures. Gregor seems to have lost the sense of responsibility and care for his family that had long continued to be present even in his new state. It was that sense of responsibility that caused him those feelings of "shame and grief," for instance, and made him frustrated that he can no longer fulfill the role that was always his in the family. But now, this loss of a sense of responsibility seems to suggest that Gregor is allowing his body to dictate what he does.

☞ Was he an animal, that music had such an effect on him?

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 121

### Explanation and Analysis

Moments earlier, Gregor scuttled into the room where his sister was playing violin as if drawn there without his will. In an earlier passage this movement is described as a triumph of Gregor's bodily instincts over the emotional factors of responsibility and thoughtfulness that defined his character as a human. Now, however, we see the attraction of the concert to him in a different light. What draws him to the room is, of course, Grete's music: he is unable to stop himself because he is so enraptured by her playing.

Such an overwhelming feeling as a result of a musical or artistic experience is familiar to many people: indeed, one might call it a particularly human trait. As a result, Gregor begins to wonder whether or not "he" is truly an insect – a question that implies a more fundamental question, whether or not he is the same person that he once was, and what it means for the "he" that is Gregor's consciousness to survive through different physical realities. While the book

will never answer this question, here it particularly complicates the possibility of making a strong contrast between thinking human and instinctual animal.

☞ 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.

**Related Characters:** Grete Samsa (speaker), Grete Samsa, Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 124

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor has ruined the family's concert, and now with the horrified lodgers moving out they find themselves in even more dire financial straits than before. This time it is Grete, not Gregor's father, who expresses the most extreme views regarding their responsibility towards Gregor – all the more striking, since she is the one to have taken on the care of him most thoughtfully over the past several months.

Nonetheless, the way Grete frames her argument does not really suggest that she thinks it is justifiable to abandon *her brother Gregor*. While she has referred to the insect as Gregor before, now she characterizes him as "it," as a foreign intruder in the household who can only be managed. He has been changed, and she no longer sees him as Gregor. Further, she argues that the family has met its social obligations to this "it," and that they wouldn't be acting in a way that could cause them social shame if they ceased to care for "it".

Grete's quote raises the question of whether all of her care for Gregor was always little more than a sense of social obligation – something she did because she felt she had to in order to be socially acceptable rather than something she wanted to do out of love. More likely, though, it indicates the way that as a dreadful situation ceases to change even those who respond initially with love can grow weary and then find ways to justify their desire to escape from that weariness. It also indicates just how heartless "society" can be.

☞ 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 on his own accord.

**Related Characters:** Grete Samsa (speaker), Grete Samsa, Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 125

### Explanation and Analysis

Here, Grete uses a peculiar kind of logic to justify why she believes that this creature is no longer Gregor – and since it is no longer her brother, all the bonds of care, love, and responsibility that ensure are broken. Her hypothetical statement suggests that if there were a thinking mind inside this creature, the insect never would have remained to bother them in the first place. As a result, she believes the family is justified in abandoning it.

Of course, at a different moment, Gregor could have used such feelings of resentment to justify abandoning his own family – also because they were so dependent on him and didn't think that their dependence might be a problem. But Gregor's repulsive physical state enables Grete to not have to grapple with such thoughts of equivalence, such that the family bonds can now begin to unravel.

☞ He thought of his family with tenderness and love.

**Related Characters:** Gregor Samsa

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 127

### Explanation and Analysis

Gregor's final thoughts before he dies are of his family. Even though they have contributed to his death, and although even Grete has abandoned him, he still cannot fully let go of the feelings that have directed him for so long. Earlier in the book, it was Gregor's duty and role as breadwinner that helped to define him – leading to his confusion and discomfort when he could no longer fulfill this identity. Here, however, it is not exactly a certain identity but rather a certain sentiment towards others that defines Gregor's final moments.

This is certainly the passage in the book that does the most to portray Gregor as a kind of martyr, dying so that his family can be free, even though he never questioned the burden he had to carry when he had to support the family. Here we are meant to see that even many of Gregor's actions that proved the most damaging to his family – the

intrusion on the concert foremost among them – were prompted by feelings of love. Gregor may no longer inhabit a human body, and indeed it's still up for debate whether he is exactly still "Gregor" at all, but this passage suggests that that almost doesn't matter. Still, it would probably be a mistake to consider this passage as proving that love conquers all or can win out against fear and suspicion. If anything, it's tragically ironic that Gregor feels this way as he dies alone and abandoned by his family.

●● And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and excellent intentions that at the end of their journey their daughter sprang to her feet first and stretched her young body.

**Related Characters:** Grete Samsa, Father, Mother

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 132

**Explanation and Analysis**

Although much of the book has followed Gregor's point of view, *The Metamorphosis* ends not with Gregor's pitiful death but with the sense of freedom and possibility that the family embraces after he dies. As they travel into the countryside, the future seems to open up for them: no longer must they bear the terrible burden of their strange, transformed son.

While this passage paints a portrait of a happy family, we are meant to remember that this portrait depends on exclusion and suspicion more than it does on mutual respect and responsibility, seen most clearly in the way that Grete's lithe, young body contrasts sharply with the decaying, disgusting beetle that Gregor had become. At the same time, the book shows how both these physical realities end up affecting, if not determining, the possibilities for each of the siblings. Gregor's transformed body caused him to be eventually abandoned by his family. Grete's body leads her parents to see how she might be married off, and in being married off ensure financial security for the whole family. The parents continue to depend on (or, perhaps, exploit?) their children, relying on social norms and expectations to do so.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## SECTION 1

Gregor wakes up and finds that he's turned into a huge cockroach (or other vermin—the text doesn't specify exactly, though the descriptions match a cockroach's). The famous opening line: "As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect."

Gregor examines his body, immediately understanding that he isn't dreaming. He looks around his room, containing the cloth samples for his job as a traveling salesman, and a framed **print of a lady wearing a muff**. He looks out the window at the gray day and feels sad. He wants to go back to sleep, but his awkward new body prevents him from getting into a comfortable position. He tries a hundred times to roll onto his side and each time can't maintain the position.

Gregor frets about his exhausting job. He notices that his belly itches, but when he touches the area with a leg he feels "a cold shiver." He ruminates on the importance of sleep, and thinks about how he'd like to criticize his boss to his face, except for the fact that he has to keep working to support his parents. In a few years he will have paid off his parents' debt. Gregor notices that he slept through his alarm and now he's missed his five a.m. train. He worries about missing work, and doesn't think he can take a sick day, since he hasn't taken one in five years.

Gregor's mother knocks to wake him, and Gregor thanks her in a strangely squeaky voice. Gregor's father begins to knock to ask what's wrong, and then his sister Grete asks him if he needs anything and tells him to open the door. Gregor is glad that he locked the door the previous night.

Gregor expects that once he gets up he'll feel better. However, he finds it hard to control his new body, and injures himself attempting to get out of bed. He pauses and rationally decides that he simply can't stay in bed, then makes a new effort to get up.

*The text never explains why Gregor transforms, fitting with Kafka's profound interest in the random, tragic absurdity of life. The sudden transformation also shows the weakness of the mind, which can't control the physical reality of the body.*



*The story may be surreal, but Kafka demonstrates early on that this isn't a magical dream, but rather, a heightened reflection of reality. Though his body has changed, Gregor's concerns remain focused on pragmatic, everyday things: finances and his responsibility to his family.*



*Gregor's new body intrudes on his thoughts about his human life, already showing how body and mind are not separate, but closely linked, with the body influencing the mind. We see Gregor's selfless side and devotion to his family—he's working not just to support his family, but to make up his parents' debt. He's taken on extra responsibility, and given up his own life to the needs of his family.*



*Gregor's ability to speak has been impaired by his metamorphosis—little by little he's coming to realize his new limitations. In this first scene with his family, their concern and love for him is evident. Though one might also note more cynically that their concern may depend in part on the fact that they depend on Gregor's income to support them.*



*Though Gregor's previous life was devoted to the routines of responsibility to others, now he has a new burden of responsibility—his own body makes him work and hinders him.*



Gregor's boss, the Chief Clerk, arrives at the door, just as Gregor falls to the carpet. Gregor hates that his absence has been noted so quickly, and feels that he should be given a break, especially in front of his family. Grete and Gregor's father tell Gregor that the clerk has arrived. Gregor hears his mother defending him to the clerk, saying that Gregor is always dutiful and singularly focused on work.

Gregor refuses to open his door for the Chief Clerk, and Grete begins to cry. The clerk calls Gregor "incredibly obstinate" and explains that Gregor's job may be in jeopardy. Gregor gives a long, polite speech, attempting to defend himself, then tries unsuccessfully to open the door.

The Chief Clerk doesn't understand Gregor's speech, and exclaims that a human couldn't have made such noises. Gregor's mother begins to cry, along with Grete, and calls for a doctor. In all the hubbub, Gregor is calm and optimistic that his family now realizes something is wrong and will take steps to help him. He awkwardly attempts to unlock the door with his mouth, drooling a brown liquid as he does so.

Gregor finally gets the door open, shocking the Chief Clerk, his father and mother. His father weeps. Gregor stays halfway in his room, noticing the rainy weather, the breakfast plates laid out, and a photo of himself when he was in the army.

In a long speech, Gregor states his loyalty to his company and asks the Chief Clerk, "Stand up for me in the firm." The horrified clerk backs out of the room. Gregor knows he can't let the clerk leave the house in such a state, so he approaches the clerk, finally dropping from an upright position onto his many legs, which he finds much more comfortable. Gregor underestimates the alarm he's causing his mother and the clerk, only noticing that his mother has spilled the coffee and that the clerk has fled the house.

Gregor's father tries to force Gregor back into his bedroom with a cane and newspaper. Gregor has trouble backing up, especially since his father keeps irritating him by saying "shoo." Gregor can't fit through the doorway, but understands that his father wants him in as quickly as possible. He painfully wedges himself into the doorway, staining it, and his father pushes him the rest of the way in and slams the door.

*Gregor's family demonstrates loyalty to Gregor, with the added complexity that they depend on Gregor for their livelihood. As is often the case in the story, intentions are complicated—a positive-seeming surface can mask a harsher reality, and vice versa.*



*This scene vividly illustrates both Gregor's lack of understanding about himself, and, on a larger level, the failure of words and the mind to overcome physical realities.*



*All three sections of the story reach a climax in a moment where intentions are harshly different from outcomes. In this first instance, the crisis occurs because Gregor doesn't yet realize exactly how grotesque and horrible he's become in others' eyes. He's earnestly trying to open the door to explain himself without realizing that his appearance will shock and horrify those he is trying to calm, and that he can't even speak to communicate the things he wants to.*



*Gregor behaves in a surprising way. If he were fully human, he'd understand the others' reactions and try to minimize them. Instead, he's distracted by tiny details.*



*We see how Gregor's brain, as well as his body, has separated him from humanity. He hasn't put two and two together and understood that no one can comprehend his speech. He doesn't even realize that he's scaring the others, and thinks more of his own comfort. He's not a man's a brain in a cockroach's body, but a merging of the two.*



*Gregor's father's attitude has also changed remarkably from the beginning of the scene, when he wept in sadness at seeing Gregor. Likely stemming from both prejudices about cockroaches, and from Gregor's irrational, non-human behavior, the father no longer treats him like a son but rather more like he would treat the insect that Gregor now appears to be (and is).*



## SECTION 2

Gregor wakes up at nightfall. He notices that his side and one of his legs still hurt from the morning. He finds milk and bread by the door, and hungrily attempts to eat them, but despite the fact that milk used to be his favorite drink he finds it distasteful.

Gregor notices that his father isn't reading to Grete, though it is a nighttime tradition. Gregor is concerned, but he thinks about how his family has been able to live in peace and quiet since he's been providing for them, and he's happy that he's been able to give them this comfortable lifestyle. His thoughts turn to concerns about whether "all the quiet, the comfort, the contentment were now to end in horror." He calms himself by crawling around his room. He hears his family going quietly to bed, then settles under the couch to rest. He barely sleeps, and plans to "help the family to bear the inconvenience he was bound to cause them in his present condition."

In the morning, Grete checks on Gregor, and is still shocked by his state. She notices the uneaten milk and bread and removes them, bringing instead rotting vegetables and other old food. She leaves, locking the door. Gregor ravenously eats the food, particularly enjoying the moldiest portions. When Grete returns to remove the leftovers, he hides under the couch so as not to disturb her.

Grete covertly feeds Gregor again in the afternoon, when their father, mother, and the servant girl won't notice. Gregor isn't sure why his family didn't ever bring a doctor in. His family members talk freely around him because they don't realize he can understand. He overhears their conversations in the dining room, including the cook's desperate request to quit her job. The family releases the cook, and Grete and her mother must cook instead.

*His appetite, or lack thereof, recurs often in the text, showing a connection between his body and his emotional life. Here the aspect of Gregor's mind that is still human continues to associate these fresh foods as things he would like to eat, but his body rejects these foods as they don't appeal to an insect. But it isn't so simple to say that there is a strict split between mind/body here, as what seems appetizing is a function of both body and mind, or of body influencing mind.*



*Unlike in the morning, when Gregor seemed confused or even distracted while he inadvertently terrorized his family, now Gregor shows some understanding about the horror (and possible financial difficulty) that his metamorphosis has caused, how it has upended his family's routine and future. But he deals with this very human thought process in a decidedly cockroach-like way—crawling around and going under the bed—showing his inability to change himself to fit a more human mold.*



*Grete's attentiveness seems to nourish Gregor as much as the food. Where he once planned to pay for her schooling, now the only thing he can do for her is hide—but for once, his intentions match his outcomes, and Grete is not disturbed. Meanwhile, Gregor hungrily eats things that once would have disgusted him. His body's needs is changing his mind's perceptions.*



*Grete's kindness, and the special bond she shares with Gregor, stands out even more clearly now that we know she's hiding her actions from the rest of the family. Gregor's concerns about the doctor show his aversion to accepting his new condition, hint that he's feeling neglected, and suggest that he doesn't understand the shame his family feels about him—they don't bring in a doctor because they don't want anyone else to know. The cook, for instance, quits her job because she can't stand to be in the house around Gregor.*



Gregor overhears his father explaining the family's financial position, which is fairly stable because of their thriftiness. Gregor ponders how, at first, the family greatly appreciated all of Gregor's hard work as a commercial traveler, and then how they got used to it. Gregor also recalls how he'd hoped to support Grete's future studies in **violin** at the Conservatorium. Gregor's father decides that he must go back to work, as old as he is. Gregor's mother seems too old and unhealthy, and Grete is only 17. Gregor feels "shame and grief" thinking about his family having to work.

*Gregor's feeling of neglect strengthens as he thinks about the way his family came to take him for granted when he was still human. The story is always concerned with the limits of sympathy: before Gregor's transformation, the family quickly came to take him for granted and to depend on him without gratitude (much as their sympathy for his plight as an insect will slowly erode). Still, Gregor feels responsible for them, and the shame he feels at their having to go to work shows how his self-worth came from living up to that responsibility, to meeting the expectations of their dependence.*



Gregor often has trouble sleeping, and his eyesight worsens, so he can barely make out anything outside the window. Grete is both attentive to his desires (leaving the chair by the window for him to sit), and abrupt and frantic when she cleans his room. Gregor wishes he could thank her for her work, but also feels upset about her behavior.

*Gregor's body transforms into an insect over night, but his full metamorphosis doesn't happen in an instant, as his cockroach body and tendencies continue to develop. Grete's patience diminishes on a parallel path. One might say that Grete too undergoes a metamorphosis—Gregor from man to insect; Grete from sympathetic to weary and uncaring.*



A month after Gregor's transformation, Grete enters to find Gregor on the chair instead of under the couch as usual, and gets so scared she leaves and doesn't come back for hours. Gregor knows he is "repulsive" and spends hours setting up a sheet to cover the couch so she won't see any of him.

*Though Gregor is irritated about Grete's hastiness, he now understands it. He has internalized the shame and disgust his family feels for him and now feels it himself. His only ideas for coping are passive—but if he tried to communicate, his family might be too scared to understand.*



Gregor's mother and father don't enter with Grete but they are curious about him. After two months, Gregor's mother wants to come in to see him. In the meantime Gregor has been amusing himself walking on the ceiling, and Grete has moved the furniture around so he has easier access. Gregor's mother enters the room to help Grete move a chest, but they are unable to do so. Gregor's mother says that moving all the furniture might suggest to Gregor that they never expect him to get better. With her words, Gregor realizes how close he'd come to forgetting his humanity.

*Gregor's hope that the presence of furniture will hamper his crawling and help him retain his humanity echoes the story's larger concerns with the interaction between physical and mental. Just as Gregor's body has influenced his mental state, he hopes his furniture will influence him in the opposite direction. Gregor's mother seems to understand this.*



Grete disagrees with Gregor's mother and they work to remove the chest. Gregor feels agitated by all the movement in his room, and sad that they're removing his possessions, including the desk he'd used since he was a child. While Grete and his mother are out of the room, Gregor runs out from under the couch and scuttles onto the **print of the lady with the muff** to protect it from being removed.

*Grete's reaction to her mother's plan shows that Grete cares more about being the one responsible for Gregor than actually considering what he might want. There is a sense in which Grete likes being the one upon whom Gregor is dependent (just as Gregor's self-conception when he was human was built around his family being dependent on him), and puts her feelings about that before his own.*



Grete returns, sees Gregor on the wall, and attempts to get their mother from the room without her noticing. However, Gregor's mother looks up, screams, and faints. Grete runs out to look for some smelling salts, and Gregor unsticks himself from the **print** and runs after her, hoping to help somehow. Grete is terrified to see him, drops some bottles, then runs back to his room, closing the door behind her so he can't enter. In desperation, Gregor climbs all over the ceiling and walls until he dizzily falls onto the table.

Gregor's father returns. Grete calls from Gregor's bedroom that Gregor has escaped, and Gregor's father responds that he expected such a thing all along. Gregor thinks that his father is assuming that Gregor committed some violent act, so Gregor goes to sit outside his bedroom door to demonstrate his good intentions.

Gregor's father, however, is "not in the mood to perceive such fine distinctions," and excitedly yells at Gregor. Gregor notices that his father looks livelier and younger than before he took his new job, and is well-dressed in his bank attendant's **uniform**. Gregor's father seems to want to stomp on Gregor, and Gregor flees from him, though neither of them seems quite sure if it's really a chase.

As Gregor gets tired of running, Gregor's father begins to throw apples at him. One apple hits Gregor's back and gets embedded, causing Gregor massive pain. Gregor notices, as he passes out, his mother running out of his room, half-undressed because of her fainting fit earlier, and begging Gregor's father not to kill Gregor. Gregor faints.

*Gregor has again underestimated the horror his shape causes—which means he's also underestimated the bravery and care that his mother showed by trying to help him. This scene vividly shows how trapped he is in his own body—even when he tries nonverbal communication, he only causes panic, and his own panicked reaction to the panic he causes in others is an insect-like skittering.*



*Though Gregor's father may seem villainous, as always in the story, no one is entirely good or evil. The father can't imagine that the cockroach is in fact his son, and on some level, he's right.*



*Yet his father's perceptions of Gregor are so based on his disgust at how Gregor looks that he can't even begin to empathize with Gregor or recognize Gregor's nonverbal cues. Even in this moment of hysteria, Gregor notes how his family is coping well without him—which is both a positive development and a blow to Gregor's self-esteem, since Gregor cared so much about being the one responsible for the family.*



*Why is the father so aggressive? The answer must relate both to the father's preconceptions about cockroaches, and to his misinterpretation of Gregor's actions. Certainly no one in the family has tried their hardest to keep an open mind, though Gregor's mother does still see Gregor as her son. All of Gregor's family eventually follow in his father's path, coming to see Gregor based on his appearance, as an insect who could no longer possibly have anything Gregor-like about him. His father just moves down the path faster.*



## SECTION 3

Gregor's injury incapacitates him for more than a month, and the apple remains embedded in his back. The wound reminds his family to treat him better: "family duty required the suppression of disgust and the exercise of patience." The family now leaves the living room door open so that he can see them as they eat dinner. The dinners tend to be quiet, as all three family members are now employed, Grete as a salesgirl and Gregor's mother at an underwear manufacturer. Gregor's father is constantly exhausted, won't even remove his increasingly dirty **work uniform**, and complains about his life. Gregor learns that the family has been selling off jewels to get some income, and soon they replace their servant girl with an older and less expensive charwoman.

Gregor understands that the stresses on his family have made Grete, his mother and father less attentive to him. His family members spend all day working for other people. They seem exhausted and hopeless, and upset that they are so unfortunate compared to everyone else that they know.

Gregor imagines returning to work and being able to help his family, thinks about his friends, the chief clerk, even a few love affairs, but ultimately he's happy when he stops thinking about these people. He sometimes is "filled with rage" because of his family's neglect and Grete's careless cleaning. He barely eats, but Grete doesn't seem to notice. Still, she wants to be the only one to take care of Gregor, and fights with their mother for sometimes trying to help him.

The charwoman finds Gregor one day and is neither disgusted nor frightened by him. In fact, she likes to check on him from time to time, bothering him. When he tries to run threateningly towards her, she calmly keeps him away with a chair.

*The family can't figure out how to relate to the cockroach. Is Gregor inside that body? Or has Gregor transformed in both body and mind? And, most important: even if Gregor is 100% cockroach, does the cockroach still deserve some respect because he was once Gregor? No one believes that some monster cockroach ate Gregor—on some level, everyone knows that he is the cockroach, and therefore is a part of their family. As such, the family struggles with their responsibilities towards him, as all humans struggle with responsibility towards those different from us. Meanwhile, the responsibilities of work that at first enlivened his father now merely exhaust him, just as Gregor's own work seemed to have been exhausting him when he was human. And the family's financial fortune's continue to falter with Gregor's income gone.*



*The family cares a lot about how they measure up to other people, and their desire to conform and fit in with society's expectations also limits their sympathy for Gregor—he is a source of shame.*



*This passage shows Gregor's descent into indignation about what he perceives as his family ignoring him. Before his transformation, he was motivated both by being responsible, and by earning recognition for it. Now his family's ignoring him pushes him further into roach-like self-centeredness. He is happier when not thinking about human things.*



*The amusing character of the charwoman provides a contrast to the family. She's less concerned with class and etiquette, and therefore feels no shame or disgust regarding Gregor—and so is more capable of dealing with Gregor. She also lacks any memory of him as a human, and so she feels no conflict about how to treat or think about him.*



The family takes on three lodgers to supplement their income. To make things comfortable for the lodgers, the family dumps clutter and trash in Gregor's room. Gregor barely eats and feels sad and tired even though he enjoys climbing around the junk. Gregor longingly notices the care with which his mother and Grete feed the lodgers, and the attention that his father lavishes upon them.

*Though in Section 2 the family paid a lot of attention to Gregor's room, wanting to clear it out to make him comfortable, now they completely disregard his preferences. As his dependence on them has become a burden, their sympathy has faded. In addition, there is a sense that the lodgers have partially taken the place of Gregor's former human role. It used to be that he provided financial support and then his family would manage he home (clean his room, make his bed, etc.). But now they do that for the lodgers.*



One night, for the first time since the transformation as far as Gregor knows, Grete begins to play the **violin**. The lodgers ask her to come play for them in the living room. Gregor's mother and father awkwardly and formally come to watch as well.

*Grete resuming her playing of the violin seems to suggest some return of normality Gregor's family (at least for everyone but him). Though her playing also suggests that she and her parents are trying to make the lodgers happy, to "earn" their money and stay afloat. Even as the family pays more attention to the lodgers and less to Gregor, the family's awkward striving paints them in a sympathetic light, preventing them from seeming intentionally evil.*



Gregor creeps into the living room, though he is filthy and can't be bothered to clean himself: "He hardly felt any surprise at his growing lack of consideration for the others; there had been a time when he prided himself on being considerate." No one notices as he crawls closer and closer. The lodgers seem bored but polite, yet Gregor profoundly feels the beauty of the music. He wonders, "Was he an animal, that music had such an effect on him?"

*While the family cares passionately about appearances, part of Gregor's transformation is his unconcern with manners. Yet the question he poses about his deep feelings for Grete's playing is essential to the story. By genuinely appreciating the art in a way the other's don't, is he truly more human than the others?*



Gregor wants to come closer so that he can indicate to Grete how much he loves her playing. He imagines that he could be useful to the family, even as a cockroach, by guarding and protecting them. He imagines that he and Grete will be close again, and he can tell her that he wanted to send her to the conservatorium. When she hears him saying that, he imagines she will cry and kiss him.

*As he experiences the music, and also perhaps as he experiences the "normality" of the scene of Grete playing for her family, Gregor returns to desires that he cared about while he was still a human. He's able to envision a new life, where he could communicate and take on new responsibilities. This is the story's most optimistic point.*



The lodgers notice Gregor and alert Gregor's father. At first, the lodgers are amused, but then they become concerned. Grete gives the **violin** to her mother and runs to make the lodgers' beds. Gregor's father tries to push the lodgers to their bedroom.

*The lodgers' changing attitudes demonstrate the importance of conformity. They move as a unit to condemn an unusual event, though they were originally individually amused by it.*



One of the lodgers announces that, because of "disgusting conditions," he will not pay the family, and that he might sue. The other lodgers follow suit. Gregor's father and mother are extremely upset, and Gregor's mother drops the **violin**. Gregor stays still on the floor.

*There are two disasters in this moment—the disaster of losing the money, and the disaster of the dropped violin, which has taken on a symbolic significance representing the family's vision of a beautiful future and the deep humanity of appreciating art. Gregor's most positive moment while an insect has, it turned out, ruined everything—destroyed his family's dreams and finances just as they were on the verge of being recovered.*



Grete announces that she wants to get rid of "this creature," whom she no longer thinks of as Gregor. She thinks the family has done as much as they could. Grete says that "it," meaning Gregor, will cause her parents' deaths. She weeps. Gregor's father says that he wishes Gregor could understand them, because then they could maybe find a solution.

*Unexpectedly, Grete, the one who cared most for Gregor, is the first to explicitly give up on him. But maybe the strength of her love makes it harder for her to cope with the outcomes of his behavior. She asserts that the cockroach is no longer Gregor, and implies that therefore she no longer has any responsibilities toward him. For once, the father is the most patient—though no one has an open enough mind to actually try to comprehend Gregor. They simply assume he can't.*



Grete again asserts that the cockroach can't understand them and is no longer 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 on his own accord." She blames Gregor not just for destroying their relationship with the lodgers, but for wanting to drive them out of their house. As Gregor attempts to turn to go back to his room, Grete sees him moving and panics.

*Grete's assertion that Gregor's noblest action would have been to disappear is another way of saying that because he placed such a burden on the family he could have best helped the family by removing that burden—removing himself. While Grete originally seemed to enjoy the responsibility of caring for Gregor, that enjoyment has turned to resentment. It is fair to note, though, at this point that Gregor is now no more dependent on his family than they used to be on him (though he is more disgusting-looking), and his resentment never led him to try to abandon them. Regardless, Grete now no longer sees Gregor as anything but an insect—and a hostile insect at that—and interprets everything he does as hostile.*



Gregor goes back to his room with extreme difficulty because of his injuries and weakness. His family watches him go silently, but as soon as he enters his room, Grete shuts and locks the door behind him. In his room, Gregor can't move. He thinks "of his family with tenderness and love," and dies.

*Though his family's neglect contributed to Gregor's death, his life ends on a note of love for them. Maybe this animal is more human than those in his family who are to still in their human bodies—willing to be sympathetic, overlook cruelties, and forgive.*



The charwoman comes the following morning and thinks Gregor is trying to trick her. She pokes him with a broom before realizing that he's died, then she calls to the family. Grete notes how thin Gregor had become. Grete, her mother and father go to the parents' room.

*Once Gregor has died, Grete, along with her mother and father, are remorseful. When Gregor is not moving, is not threatening them simply through his living presence, they can again think of him as their son. When they no longer have to think about the burden of caring for him, their sympathy returns.*



The lodgers come out confused that there's no breakfast available, but the charwoman shows them to Gregor's room. The Samsa family tearfully emerges, and the father orders the lodgers to leave. At first, the lodgers gear up for a fight, but then they realize how serious the father is, and leave. The family watches them go.

Grete, her mother and father all write to their bosses to take work off for the day. The charwoman leaves, excitedly mentioning that the family doesn't need to worry about disposing of the carcass, implying that she's enjoyed the surely grotesque process of getting rid of it. The family doesn't care to hear her story, and she leaves in a huff. The father says he plans to fire her. Grete and her mother sadly stand together for a moment, then the father urges them to "let bygones be bygones."

Grete, her mother and father leave the house and take the tram to the countryside. They talk optimistically about their future careers and their plans to move away from their current apartment, which Gregor picked, to a cheaper and better located one. Grete's mother and father both realize that Grete looks mature and beautiful and it's time for them to find her a husband. As they arrive at their stop, Grete stands and stretches.

*The family drops its concerns about correct behavior, and freely expose their emotions about Gregor. The lodgers' quick departure shows how strong emotions overpower the rules of society and to have regained a sense of dignity in refusing to serve the lodgers any longer. At the same time, they may order the lodgers out because the lodgers own behavior toward Gregor now shamefully reminds them of their own behavior toward the insect who they now acknowledge again as their beloved son.*



*The charwoman's most unattractive trait is her lack of sympathy and respect towards Gregor. However, with her nosy, goofy, and lower-class attitude, she was more interested in him and less disgusted by him when he was alive than any of his family, who don't want to hear the details of Gregor's insect-hood. The father's comment about bygones suggests that after this brief period of mourning the family is already forgiving itself for their treatment of Gregor, are already moving on.*



*The family quickly returns to balance. Inevitably, discontent will follow, as it always seems to. But for now in the rush of their freedom from the burdens of caring for Gregor they demonstrate how little they needed or cared about Gregor after all and how much promise has returned to their family now that he is gone. The final moments link to the larger concerns of conformity, beauty, and the way the body determines the kind of life a person can lead, while the suggestion of finding Grete a husband is a hint of a total replacement of Gregor—the husband offers the prospect of a new man in the prime of his life for them all to depend on.*





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