

	LITERATURA e INGLÊS				
	SÉRIE: 2EM	COLETÂNEA DE TEXTOS	ETAPA: 1ª	2011	

The Metamorphosis

Franz Kafka

One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in his bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug. He lay on his armour-hard back and saw, as he lifted his head up a little, his brown, arched abdomen divided up into rigid bow-like sections. From this height the blanket, just about ready to slide off completely, could hardly stay in place. His numerous legs, pitifully thin in comparison to the rest of his circumference, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

"What's happened to me," he thought. It was no dream. His room, a proper room for a human being, only somewhat too small, lay quietly between the four well-known walls. Above the table, on which an unpacked collection of sample cloth goods was spread out—Samsa was a travelling salesman—hung the picture which he had cut out of an illustrated magazine a little while ago and set in a pretty gilt frame. It was a picture of a woman with a fur hat and a fur boa. She sat erect there, lifting up in the direction of the viewer a solid fur muff into which her entire forearm had disappeared.

Gregor's glance then turned to the window. The dreary weather—the rain drops were falling audibly down on the metal window ledge—made him quite melancholy. "Why don't I keep sleeping for a little while longer and forget all this foolishness," he thought. But this was entirely impractical, for he was used to sleeping on his right side, but in his present state he could not get himself into this position. No matter how hard he threw himself onto his right side, he always rolled onto his back again. He must have tried it a hundred times, closing his eyes so that he would not have to see the wriggling legs, and gave up only when he began to feel a light, dull pain in his side which he had never felt before.

"O God," he thought, "what a demanding job I've chosen! Day in, day out, on the road. The stresses of selling are much greater than the actual work going on at head office, and, in addition to that, I still have to cope with the problems of travelling, the worries about train connections, irregular bad food, temporary and constantly changing human relationships, which never come from the heart. To hell with it all!" He felt a slight itching on the top of his abdomen. He slowly pushed himself on his back closer to the bed post so that he could lift his head more easily, found the itchy part, which was entirely covered with small white spots—he did not know what to make of them and wanted to feel the place with a leg. But he retracted it immediately, for the contact felt like a cold shower all over him.

He slid back again into his earlier position. "This getting up early," he thought, "makes a man quite idiotic. A man must have his sleep. Other travelling salesmen live like harem women. For instance, when I come back to the inn during the course of the morning to write up the necessary orders, these gentlemen are just sitting down to breakfast. If I were to try that with my boss, I'd be thrown out on the spot. Still, who knows whether that mightn't be really good for me. If I didn't hold back for my parents' sake, I'd have quit ages ago. I would've gone to the boss and told him just what I think from the bottom of my heart. He would've fallen right off his desk! How weird it is to sit up at that desk and talk down to the employee from way up there. What's more, the boss has trouble hearing, so the employee has to step up quite close to him. Anyway, I haven't completely given up that hope yet. Once I've got together the money to pay off my parents' debt to him—that should take another five or six years—I'll do it for sure. Then I'll make the big break. In any case, right now I have to get up. My train leaves at five o'clock."

He looked over at the alarm clock ticking away by the chest of drawers. "Good God!" he thought. It was half past six, and the hands were going quietly on. It was even past the half hour, already nearly quarter to. Could the alarm have failed to ring? One saw from the bed that it was properly set for four o'clock. Certainly it had rung. Yes, but was it possible to sleep peacefully through that noise which made the furniture shake? Now, it is true he had not slept peacefully, but evidently he had slept all the more deeply. Still, what should he do now? The next train left at seven o'clock. To catch that one, he would have to go in a mad rush. The sample collection was not packed up yet, and he really did not feel particularly fresh and active. And even if he caught the train, there was no avoiding a blow-up with the boss, because the firm's errand boy would have waited for the five o'clock train and reported the news of his absence long ago. He was the boss's minion, without backbone and intelligence. Well then, what if he reported in sick? But that would be extremely embarrassing and suspicious, because during his five years' service Gregor had not been sick even once. The boss would certainly come with the doctor from the health insurance company and would reproach his parents for their lazy son and cut short all objections with the insurance doctor's comments; for him everyone was completely healthy but really lazy about work. And besides, would the doctor in this case be totally wrong? Apart from a really excessive drowsiness after the long sleep, Gregor, in fact, felt quite well and even had a really strong appetite.

As he was thinking all this over in the greatest haste, without being able to make the decision to get out of bed—the alarm clock was indicating exactly quarter to seven—there was a cautious knock on the door by the head of

the bed. "Gregor," a voice called—it was his mother—"it's quarter to seven. Don't you want to be on your way?" The soft voice! Gregor was startled when he heard his voice answering. It was clearly and unmistakably his earlier voice, but in it was intermingled, as if from below, an irrepressible, painful squeaking, which left the words positively distinct only in the first moment and distorted them in the reverberation, so that one did not know if one had heard correctly. Gregor wanted to answer in detail and explain everything, but in these circumstances he confined himself to saying, "Yes, yes, thank you mother. I'm getting up right away." Because of the wooden door the change in Gregor's voice was not really noticeable outside, so his mother calmed down with this explanation and shuffled off. However, as a result of the short conversation, the other family members became aware that Gregor was unexpectedly still at home, and already his father was knocking on one side door, weakly but with his fist. "Gregor, Gregor," he called out, "what's going on?" And, after a short while, he urged him on again in a deeper voice: "Gregor! Gregor!" At the other side door, however, his sister knocked lightly. "Gregor? Are you all right? Do you need anything?" Gregor directed answers in both directions, "I'll be ready right away." He made an effort with the most careful articulation and inserted long pauses between the individual words to remove everything remarkable from his voice. His father turned back to his breakfast. However, the sister whispered, "Gregor, open the door—I beg you." Gregor had no intention of opening the door, but congratulated himself on his precaution, acquired from travelling, of locking all doors during the night, even at home.

First he wanted to stand up quietly and undisturbed, get dressed, above all have breakfast, and only then consider further action, for—he noticed this clearly—by thinking things over in bed he would not reach a reasonable conclusion. He remembered that he had already often felt some light pain or other in bed, perhaps the result of an awkward lying position, which later, once he stood up, turned out to be purely imaginary, and he was eager to see how his present fantasies would gradually dissipate. That the change in his voice was nothing other than the onset of a real chill, an occupational illness of commercial travellers, of that he had not the slightest doubt.

It was very easy to throw aside the blanket. He needed only to push himself up a little, and it fell by itself. But to continue was difficult, particularly because he was so unusually wide. He needed arms and hands to push himself upright. Instead of these, however, he had only many small limbs, which were incessantly moving with very different motions and which, in addition, he was unable to control. If he wanted to bend one of them, then it was the first to extend itself, and if he finally succeeded doing what he wanted with this limb, in the meantime all the others, as if left free, moved around in an excessively painful agitation. "But I must not stay in bed uselessly," said Gregor to himself.

At first he wanted to get out of bed with the lower part of his body, but this lower part—which, by the way, he had not yet looked at and which he also could not picture clearly—proved itself too difficult to move. The attempt went so slowly. When, having become almost frantic, he finally hurled himself forward with all his force and without thinking, he chose his direction incorrectly, and he hit the lower bedpost hard. The violent pain he felt revealed to him that the lower part of his body was at the moment probably the most sensitive.

Thus, he tried to get his upper body out of the bed first and turned his head carefully toward the edge of the bed. He managed to do this easily, and in spite of its width and weight his body mass at last slowly followed the turning of his head. But as he finally raised his head outside the bed in the open air, he became anxious about moving forward any further in this manner, for if he allowed himself eventually to fall by this process, it would really take a miracle to prevent his head from getting injured. And at all costs he must not lose consciousness right now. He preferred to remain in bed.

However, after a similar effort, while he lay there again, sighing as before, and once again saw his small limbs fighting one another, if anything even worse than earlier, and did not see any chance of imposing quiet and order on this arbitrary movement, he told himself again that he could not possibly remain in bed and that it might be the most reasonable thing to sacrifice everything if there was even the slightest hope of getting himself out of bed in the process. At the same moment, however, he did not forget to remind himself from time to time of the fact that calm—indeed the calmest—reflection might be much better than confused decisions. At such moments, he directed his gaze as precisely as he could toward the window, but unfortunately there was little confident cheer to be had from a glance at the morning mist, which concealed even the other side of the narrow street. "It's already seven o'clock," he told himself at the latest sounds from the alarm clock, "already seven o'clock and still such a fog." And for a little while longer he lay quietly with weak breathing, as if perhaps waiting for normal and natural conditions to re-emerge out of the complete stillness.

But then he said to himself, "Before it strikes a quarter past seven, whatever happens I must be completely out of bed. Besides, by then someone from the office will arrive to inquire about me, because the office will open before seven o'clock." And he made an effort then to rock his entire body length out of the bed with a uniform motion. If he let himself fall out of the bed in this way, his head, which in the course of the fall he intended to lift up sharply, would probably remain uninjured. His back seemed to be hard; nothing would really happen to that as a result of the fall onto the carpet. His greatest reservation was a worry about the loud noise which the fall must create and which presumably would arouse, if not fright, then at least concern on the other side of all the doors. However, he had to take that chance.

As Gregor was already in the process of lifting himself half out of bed—the new method was more of a game than an effort; he needed only to rock with a series of jerks—it struck him how easy all this would be if someone were to come to his aid. Two strong people—he thought of his father and the servant girl—would have been quite sufficient. They would only have had to push their arms under his arched back to get him out of the bed, to bend down with their load, and then merely to exercise patience so that he could complete the flip onto the floor, where his diminutive legs would then, he hoped, acquire a purpose. Now, quite apart from the fact that the doors were locked, should he really call out for help? In spite of all his distress, he was unable to suppress a smile at this idea.

He had already got to the point where, by rocking more strongly, he maintained his equilibrium with difficulty, and very soon he would finally have to make a final decision, for in five minutes it would be a quarter past seven.

Then there was a ring at the door of the apartment. "That's someone from the office," he told himself, and he almost froze, while his small limbs only danced around all the faster. For one moment everything remained still. "They aren't opening," Gregor said to himself, caught up in some absurd hope. But of course then, as usual, the servant girl with her firm tread went to the door and opened it. Gregor needed to hear only the first word of the visitor's greeting to recognize immediately who it was, the manager himself. Why was Gregor the only one condemned to work in a firm where, at the slightest lapse, someone at once attracted the greatest suspicion? Were all the employees then collectively, one and all, scoundrels? Among them was there then no truly devoted person who, if he failed to use just a couple of hours in the morning for office work, would become abnormal from pangs of conscience and really be in no state to get out of bed? Was it really not enough to let an apprentice make inquiries, if such questioning was even generally necessary? Must the manager himself come, and in the process must it be demonstrated to the entire innocent family that the investigation of this suspicious circumstance could be entrusted only to the intelligence of the manager? And more as a consequence of the excited state in which this idea put Gregor than as a result of an actual decision, he swung himself with all his might out of the bed. There was a loud thud, but not a real crash. The fall was absorbed somewhat by the carpet and, in addition, his back was more elastic than Gregor had thought. For that reason the dull noise was not quite so conspicuous. But he had not held his head up with sufficient care and had hit it. He turned his head, irritated and in pain, and rubbed it on the carpet.

"Something has fallen in there," said the manager in the next room on the left. Gregor tried to imagine to himself whether anything similar to what was happening to him today could have also happened at some point to the manager. At least one had to concede the possibility of such a thing. However, as if to give a rough answer to this question, the manager now, with a squeak of his polished boots, took a few determined steps in the next room. From the neighbouring room on the right the sister was whispering to inform Gregor: "Gregor, the manager is here." "I know," said Gregor to himself. But he did not dare make his voice loud enough so that his sister could hear.

"Gregor," his father now said from the neighbouring room on the left, "Mr. Manager has come and is asking why you have not left on the early train. We don't know what we should tell him. Besides, he also wants to speak to you personally. So please open the door. He will be good enough to forgive the mess in your room." In the middle of all this, the manager called out in a friendly way, "Good morning, Mr. Samsa." "He is not well," said his mother to the manager, while his father was still talking at the door, "He is not well, believe me, Mr. Manager. Otherwise how would Gregor miss a train? The young man has nothing in his head except business. I'm almost angry that he never goes out in the evening. Right now he's been in the city eight days, but he's been at home every evening. He sits here with us at the table and reads the newspaper quietly or studies his travel schedules. It's a quite a diversion for him to busy himself with fretwork. For instance, he cut out a small frame over the course of two or three evenings. You'd be amazed how pretty it is. It's hanging right inside the room. You'll see it immediately, as soon as Gregor opens the door. Anyway, I'm happy that you're here, Mr. Manager. By ourselves, we would never have made Gregor open the door. He's so stubborn, and he's certainly not well, although he denied that this morning." "I'm coming right away," said Gregor slowly and deliberately and didn't move, so as not to lose one word of the conversation. "My dear lady, I cannot explain it to myself in any other way," said the manager; "I hope it is nothing serious. On the other hand, I must also say that we business people, luckily or unluckily, however one looks at it, very often simply have to overcome a slight indisposition for business reasons." "So can Mr. Manager come in to see you now?" asked his father impatiently and knocked once again on the door. "No," said Gregor. In the neighbouring room on the left an awkward stillness descended. In the neighbouring room on the right the sister began to sob.

Why did his sister not go to the others? She had probably just got up out of bed now and had not even started to get dressed yet. Then why was she crying? Because he was not getting up and letting the manager in, because he was in danger of losing his position, and because then his boss would badger his parents once again with the old demands? Those were probably unnecessary worries right now. Gregor was still here and was not thinking at all about abandoning his family. At the moment he was lying right there on the carpet, and no one who knew about his condition would have seriously demanded that he let the manager in. But Gregor would not be casually dismissed right away because of this small discourtesy, for which he would find an easy and suitable excuse later on. It seemed to Gregor that it might be far more reasonable to leave him in peace at the moment, instead of disturbing him with crying and conversation. But it was the very uncertainty which distressed the others and excused their behaviour.

"Mr. Samsa," the manager was now shouting, his voice raised, "what's the matter? You are barricading yourself there in your room, answering with only a yes and a no, are making serious and unnecessary trouble for your parents, and neglecting—I mention this only incidentally—your commercial duties in a truly unheard of manner. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and your employer, and I am requesting you in all seriousness for an immediate and clear explanation. I am amazed. I am amazed. I thought I knew you as a calm, reasonable person, and now you appear suddenly to want to start parading around in weird moods. The Chief indicated to me earlier this very day a possible explanation for your neglect—it concerned the collection of cash entrusted to you a short while ago—but in truth I almost gave him my word of honour that this explanation could not be correct. However, now I see here your unimaginable pig headedness, and I am totally losing any desire to speak up for you in the slightest. And your position is not at all the most secure. Originally I intended to mention all this to you privately, but since you are letting me waste my time here uselessly, I don't know why the matter shouldn't come to the attention of your parents as well. Your productivity has also been very unsatisfactory recently. Of course, it's not the time of year to conduct exceptional business, we recognize that, but a time of year for conducting no business, there is no such thing at all, Mr. Samsa, and such a thing must not be permitted."

"But Mr. Manager," called Gregor, beside himself and, in his agitation, forgetting everything else, "I'm opening the door immediately, this very moment. A slight indisposition, a dizzy spell, has prevented me from getting up. I'm still lying in bed right now. But I'm quite refreshed once again. I'm in the midst of getting out of bed. Just have patience for a short moment! Things are not yet going as well as I thought. But things are all right with me. How suddenly this can

overcome someone! Only yesterday evening everything was fine with me. My parents certainly know that. Actually just yesterday evening I had a small premonition. People must have seen that in me. Why have I not reported that to the office? But people always think that they'll get over sickness without having to stay at home. Mr. Manager! Take it easy on my parents! There is really no basis for the criticisms which you're now making against me. Nobody has said a word to me about that. Perhaps you have not read the latest orders which I sent in. Besides, now I'm setting out on my trip on the eight o'clock train; the few hours' rest have made me stronger. Mr. Manager, do not stay. I will be at the office in person right away. Please have the goodness to say that and to convey my respects to the Chief."

While Gregor was quickly blurting all this out, hardly aware of what he was saying, he had moved close to the chest of drawers without effort, probably as a result of the practice he had already had in bed, and now he was trying to raise himself up on it. Actually, he wanted to open the door. He really wanted to let himself be seen and to speak with the manager. He was keen to witness what the others now asking about him would say when they saw him. If they were startled, then Gregor had no more responsibility and could be calm. But if they accepted everything quietly, then he would have no reason to get excited and, if he got a move on, could really be at the station around eight o'clock. At first he slid down a few times on the smooth chest of drawers. But at last he gave himself a final swing and stood upright there. He was no longer at all aware of the pains in his lower body, no matter how they might still sting. Now he let himself fall against the back of a nearby chair, on the edge of which he braced himself with his small limbs. By doing this he gained control over himself and kept quiet, for he could now hear the manager.

"Did you understand even a single word?" the manager asked the parents, "Is he playing the fool with us?" "For God's sake," cried the mother, already in tears, "perhaps he's very ill, and we're upsetting him. Grete! Grete!" she yelled at that point. "Mother?" called the sister from the other side. They were making themselves understood through Gregor's room. "You must go to the doctor right away. Gregor is sick. Hurry to the doctor. Did you hear Gregor speak just now?" "That was an animal's voice," said the manager, remarkably quiet in comparison to the mother's cries. "Anna! Anna!" yelled the father through the hall into the kitchen, clapping his hands, "Fetch a locksmith right away!" The two young women were already running through the hall with swishing skirts—how had his sister dressed herself so quickly?—and pulled open the doors of the apartment. One could not hear the doors closing at all. They probably had left them open, as is customary in an apartment where a huge misfortune has taken place.

However, Gregor had become much calmer. All right, people did not understand his words any more, although they seemed clear enough to him, clearer than previously, perhaps because his ears had got used to them. But at least people now thought that things were not completely all right with him and were prepared to help him. The confidence and assurance with which the first arrangements had been carried out made him feel good. He felt himself included once again in the circle of humanity and was expecting from both the doctor and the locksmith, without differentiating between them with any real precision, splendid and surprising results. In order to get as clear a voice as possible for the critical conversation which was imminent, he coughed a little, and certainly took the trouble to do this in a really subdued way, since it was possible that even this noise sounded like something different from a human cough. He no longer trusted himself to decide any more. Meanwhile in the next room it had become really quiet. Perhaps his parents were sitting with the manager at the table whispering; perhaps they were all leaning against the door and listening.

Gregor pushed himself slowly towards the door, with the help of the easy chair, let go of it there, threw himself against the door, held himself upright against it—the balls of his tiny limbs had a little sticky stuff on them—and rested there momentarily from his exertion. Then he made an effort to turn the key in the lock with his mouth. Unfortunately it seemed that he had no real teeth. How then was he to grab hold of the key? But to make up for that his jaws were naturally very strong; with their help he managed to get the key really moving. He did not notice that he was obviously inflicting some damage on himself, for a brown fluid came out of his mouth, flowed over the key, and dripped onto the floor. "Just listen," said the manager in the next room. "He's turning the key." For Gregor that was a great encouragement. But they should all have called out to him, including his father and mother, "Come on, Gregor," they should have shouted. "Keep going, keep working on the lock!" Imagining that all his efforts were being followed with suspense, he bit down frantically on the key with all the force he could muster. As the key turned more, he danced around the lock. Now he was holding himself upright only with his mouth, and he had to hang onto the key or then press it down again with the whole weight of his body, as necessary. The quite distinct click of the lock as it finally snapped really woke Gregor up. Breathing heavily he said to himself, "So I didn't need the locksmith," and he set his head against the door handle to open the door completely.

Because he had to open the door in this way, it was already open really wide without him yet being visible. He first had to turn himself slowly around the edge of the door, very carefully, of course, if he did not want to fall awkwardly on his back right at the entrance into the room. He was still preoccupied with this difficult movement and had no time to pay attention to anything else, when he heard the manager exclaim a loud "Oh!"—it sounded like the wind whistling—and now he saw him, nearest to the door, pressing his hand against his open mouth and moving slowly back, as if an invisible constant force was pushing him away. His mother—in spite of the presence of the manager she was standing here with her hair sticking up on end, still a mess from the night—first looked at his father with her hands clasped, then went two steps towards Gregor and collapsed right in the middle of her skirts, which were spread out all around her, her face sunk on her breast, completely concealed. His father clenched his fist with a hostile expression, as if he wished to push Gregor back into his room, then looked uncertainly around the living room, covered his eyes with his hands, and cried so that his mighty breast shook.

At this point Gregor did not take one step into the room, but leaned his body from the inside against the firmly bolted wing of the door, so that only half his body was visible, as well as his head, tilted sideways, with which he peeped over at the others. Meanwhile it had become much brighter. Standing out clearly from the other side of the street was a section of the endless gray-black house situated opposite—it was a hospital—with its severe regular windows breaking up the facade. The rain was still coming down, but only in large individual drops visibly and firmly

thrown down one by one onto the ground. Countless breakfast dishes were standing piled around on the table, because for his father breakfast was the most important meal time in the day, which he prolonged for hours by reading various newspapers. Directly across on the opposite wall hung a photograph of Gregor from the time of his military service; it was a picture of him as a lieutenant, as he, smiling and worry free, with his hand on his sword, demanded respect for his bearing and uniform. The door to the hall was ajar, and since the door to the apartment was also open, one could see out into the landing of the apartment and the start of the staircase going down.

"Now," said Gregor, well aware that he was the only one who had kept his composure. "I'll get dressed right away, pack up the collection of samples, and set off. You'll allow me to set out on my way, will you not? You see, Mr. Manager, I am not pig-headed, and I am happy to work. Travelling is exhausting, but I couldn't live without it. Where are you going, Mr. Manager? To the office? Really? Will you report everything truthfully? A person can be incapable of work momentarily, but that's precisely the best time to remember the earlier achievements and to consider that later, after the obstacles have been shoved aside, the person will certainly work all the more diligently and intensely. I am really so indebted to Mr. Chief—you know that perfectly well. On the other hand, I am concerned about my parents and my sister. I'm in a fix, but I'll work myself out of it again. Don't make things more difficult for me than they already are. Speak up on my behalf in the office! People don't like travelling salesmen. I know that. People think they earn pots of money and thus lead a fine life. People don't even have any special reason to think through this judgment more clearly. But you, Mr. Manager, you have a better perspective on what's involved than other people, even, I tell you in total confidence, a better perspective than Mr. Chief himself, who in his capacity as the employer may easily let his judgment make mistakes at the expense of an employee. You also know well enough that the travelling salesman who is outside the office almost the entire year can become so easily a victim of gossip, coincidences, and groundless complaints, against which it's totally impossible for him to defend himself, since for the most part he doesn't hear about them at all and only then when he's exhausted after finishing a trip and at home gets to feel in his own body the nasty consequences, which can't be thoroughly explored back to their origins. Mr. Manager, don't leave without speaking a word indicating to me that you'll at least concede that I'm a little in the right!"

But at Gregor's first words the manager had already turned away, and now he looked back with pursed lips at Gregor over his twitching shoulders. During Gregor's speech he was not still for a moment but kept moving away towards the door, without taking his eyes off Gregor, but really gradually, as if there was a secret ban on leaving the room. He was already in the hall, and given the sudden movement with which he finally pulled his foot out of the living room, one could have believed that he had just burned the sole of his foot. In the hall, however, he stretched his right hand out away from his body towards the staircase, as if some truly supernatural relief was waiting for him there.

Gregor realized that he must not under any circumstances allow the manager to go away in this frame of mind, especially if his position in the firm was not to be placed in the greatest danger. His parents did not understand all this very well. Over the long years, they had developed the conviction that Gregor was set up for life in this firm and, in addition, they had so much to do nowadays with their present troubles that all foresight was foreign to them. But Gregor had this foresight. The manager must be held back, calmed down, convinced, and finally won over. The future of Gregor and his family really depended on it! If only the sister had been there! She was clever. She had already cried while Gregor was still lying quietly on his back. And the manager, this friend of the ladies, would certainly let himself be guided by her. She would have closed the door to the apartment and talked him out of his fright in the hall. But the sister was not even there. Gregor must deal with it himself. And without thinking that as yet he did not know anything about his present ability to move and without thinking that his speech possibly—indeed probably—had once again not been understood, he left the wing of the door, pushed himself through the opening, and wanted to go over to the manager, who was already holding tight with both hands gripping the handrail on the landing in a ridiculous way. But as Gregor looked for something to steady himself, with a small scream he immediately fell down onto his numerous little legs. Scarcely had this happened, when he felt for the first time that morning a general physical well being. The small limbs had firm floor under them; they obeyed perfectly, as he noticed to his joy, and even strove to carry him forward in the direction he wanted. Right away he believed that the final amelioration of all his suffering was immediately at hand. But at the very moment when he lay on the floor rocking in a restrained manner quite close and directly across from his mother, who had apparently totally sunk into herself, she suddenly sprang right up with her arms spread far apart and her fingers extended and cried out, "Help, for God's sake, help!" She held her head bowed down, as if she wanted to view Gregor better, but ran senselessly back, contradicting that gesture, forgetting that behind her stood the table with all the dishes on it. When she reached the table, she sat down heavily on it, as if absent-mindedly, and did not appear to notice at all that next to her coffee was pouring out onto the carpet in a full stream from the large, overturned container.

"Mother, mother," said Gregor quietly and looked over towards her. The manager had momentarily vanished completely from his mind. On the other hand, when he saw the flowing coffee Gregor could not stop himself snapping his jaws in the air a few times. At that his mother screamed all over again, hurried from the table, and collapsed into the arms of his father, who was rushing towards her. But Gregor had no time right now for his parents—the manager was already on the staircase. With his chin on the bannister, the manager looked back for the last time. Gregor took an initial movement to catch up to him if possible. But the manager must have suspected something, because he made a leap down over a few stairs and disappeared, still shouting "Huh!" The sound echoed throughout the entire stairwell.

But now unfortunately this flight of the manager seemed to bewilder his father completely. Earlier he had been relatively calm. For instead of running after the manager himself or at least not hindering Gregor from his pursuit, with his right hand he grabbed hold of the manager's cane, which he had left behind on a chair with his hat and overcoat. With his left hand, his father grabbed a large newspaper from the table and, stamping his feet on the floor, he set out to drive Gregor back into his room by waving the cane and the newspaper. No request of Gregor's was of any use; no request would even be understood. No matter how willing he was to turn his head respectfully, his father just stomped

all the harder with his feet. Across the room from him his mother had pulled open a window, in spite of the cool weather, and leaning out with her hands on her cheeks, she pushed her face far outside the window. Between the lane and the stairwell a strong draught came up, the curtains on the window flew around, the newspapers on the table rustled, and individual sheets fluttered down over the floor. The father relentlessly pushed his way forward, hissing like a wild man. Now, Gregor still had no practice at all in going backwards—it was really very slow going. If Gregor only had been allowed to turn himself around, he would have been in his room right away, but he was afraid to make his father impatient by the time-consuming process of turning around, and each moment he faced the threat of a mortal blow on his back or his head from the cane in his father's hand. Finally Gregor had no other option, for he noticed with horror that he did not understand yet how to maintain his direction going backwards. And so he began, amid constantly anxious sideways glances in his father's direction, to turn himself around as quickly as possible, although in truth this was only done very slowly. Perhaps his father noticed his good intentions, for he did not disrupt Gregor in this motion, but with the tip of the cane from a distance he even directed Gregor's rotating movement now and then. If only his father had not hissed so unbearably! Because of that Gregor totally lost his head. He was already almost totally turned around, when, always with this hissing in his ear, he just made a mistake and turned himself back a little. But when he finally was successful in getting his head in front of the door opening, it became clear that his body was too wide to go through any further. Naturally his father, in his present mental state, had no idea of, say, opening the other wing of the door a bit to create a suitable passage for Gregor to get through. His single fixed thought was that Gregor must get into his room as quickly as possible. He would never have allowed the elaborate preparations that Gregor required to orient himself and thus perhaps in this way to get through the door. Perhaps with his excessive noise he was now driving Gregor forwards as if there were no obstacle. Behind Gregor the sound at this point was no longer like the voice of only a single father. Now it was really no longer a joke, and Gregor forced himself, come what might, into the door. One side of his body was lifted up. He lay at an angle in the door opening. His one flank was really sore from the scraping. On the white door ugly blotches were left. Soon he was stuck fast and would not have been able to move any more on his own. The tiny legs on one side hung twitching in the air above, and the ones on the other side were pushed painfully into the floor. Then his father gave him one really strong liberating push from behind, and he scurried, bleeding severely, far into the interior of his room. The door was slammed shut with the cane, and then finally it was quiet.

II

Gregor first woke up from his heavy swoon-like sleep in the evening twilight. He would certainly have woken up soon afterwards even without any disturbance, for he felt himself sufficiently rested and wide awake, although it appeared to him as if a hurried step and a cautious closing of the door to the hall had roused him. Light from the electric streetlamps lay pale here and there on the ceiling of his room and on the higher parts of the furniture, but underneath around Gregor it was dark. He pushed himself slowly toward the door, still groping awkwardly with his feelers, which he now learned to value for the first time, to check what was happening there. His left side seemed one single long unpleasantly stretched scar, and he really had to hobble on his two rows of legs. In addition, one small leg had been seriously wounded in the course of the morning incident—it was almost a miracle that only one had been hurt—and dragged lifelessly behind.

By the door he first noticed what had really lured him there: it was the smell of something to eat. For a bowl stood there, filled with sweetened milk, in which swam tiny pieces of white bread. He almost laughed with joy, for he had an even greater hunger than in the morning, and he immediately dipped his head almost up to and over his eyes down into the milk. But he soon drew it back again in disappointment, not just because it was difficult for him to eat on account of his delicate left side—he could eat only if his entire panting body worked in a coordinated way—but also because the milk, which otherwise was his favourite drink and which his sister had certainly placed there for that reason, did not appeal to him at all. He turned away from the bowl almost with aversion and crept back into the middle of the room.

In the living room, as Gregor saw through the crack in the door, the gas was lit, but where, on other occasions at this time of day, his father was accustomed to read the afternoon newspaper in a loud voice to his mother and sometimes also to his sister, at the moment no sound was audible. Now, perhaps this reading aloud, about which his sister had always spoken and written to him, had recently fallen out of their general routine. But it was so still all around, in spite of the fact that the apartment was certainly not empty. "What a quiet life the family leads," said Gregor to himself, and, as he stared fixedly out in front of him into the darkness, he felt a great pride that he had been able to provide such a life for his parents and his sister in such a beautiful apartment. But how would things go if now all tranquillity, all prosperity, all contentment should come to a horrible end? In order not to lose himself in such thoughts, Gregor preferred to set himself moving, so he crawled up and down in his room.

Once during the long evening one side door and then the other door were opened just a tiny crack and quickly closed again. Someone presumably needed to come in but had then thought better of it. Gregor immediately took up a position by the living room door, determined to bring in the hesitant visitor somehow or other or at least to find out who it might be. But now the door was not opened any more, and Gregor waited in vain. Earlier, when the door had been barred, they had all wanted to come in to him; now, when he had opened one door and when the others had obviously been opened during the day, no one came any more, and now the keys were stuck in the locks on the outside.

The light in the living room was turned off only late at night, and it was now easy to establish that his parents and his sister had stayed awake all this time, for one could hear them clearly as all three moved away on tiptoe. Now it was certain that no one would come in to Gregor any more until the morning. Thus, he had a long time to think undisturbed about how he should reorganize his life from scratch. But the high, open room, in which he was compelled to lie flat on the floor, made him anxious, without his being able to figure out the reason, for he had lived in the room for five years. With a half-unconscious turn and not without a little shame he scurried under the couch,

where, in spite of the fact that his back was a little cramped and he could no longer lift up his head, he felt very comfortable right away and was sorry only that his body was too wide to fit completely under the couch.

There he remained the entire night, which he spent partly in a state of semi-sleep, out of which his hunger constantly woke him with a start, but partly in a state of worry and murky hopes, which all led to the conclusion that for the time being he would have to keep calm and with patience and the greatest consideration for his family tolerate the troubles which in his present condition he was now forced to cause them.

Already early in the morning—it was still almost night—Gregor had an opportunity to test the power of the decisions he had just made, for his sister, almost fully dressed, opened the door from the hall into his room and looked eagerly inside. She did not find him immediately, but when she noticed him under the couch—God, he had to be somewhere or other, for he could hardly fly away—she got such a shock that, without being able to control herself, she slammed the door shut once again from the outside. However, as if she was sorry for her behaviour, she immediately opened the door again and walked in on her tiptoes, as if she was in the presence of a serious invalid or a total stranger. Gregor had pushed his head forward just to the edge of the couch and was observing her. Would she really notice that he had left the milk standing, not indeed from any lack of hunger, and would she bring in something else to eat more suitable for him? If she did not do it on her own, he would sooner starve to death than call her attention to the fact, although he had a really powerful urge to move beyond the couch, throw himself at his sister's feet, and beg her for something or other good to eat. But his sister noticed right away with astonishment that the bowl was still full, with only a little milk spilled around it. She picked it up immediately, although not with her bare hands but with a rag, and took it out of the room. Gregor was extremely curious what she would bring as a substitute, and he pictured to himself very different ideas about it. But he never could have guessed what his sister, out of the goodness of her heart, in fact, did. To test his taste, she brought him an entire selection, all spread out on an old newspaper. There were old half-rotten vegetables, bones from the evening meal, covered with a white sauce which had almost solidified, some raisins and almonds, cheese which Gregor had declared inedible two days earlier, a slice of dry bread, a slice with butter, and a slice of salted bread smeared with butter. In addition to all this, she put down the bowl—probably designated once and for all as Gregor's—into which she had poured some water. And out of her delicacy of feeling, since she knew that Gregor would not eat in front of her, she went away very quickly and even turned the key in the lock, so that Gregor could now know that he might make himself as comfortable as he wished. Gregor's small limbs buzzed now that the time for eating had come. His wounds must, in any case, have already healed completely. He felt no handicap on that score. He was astonished at that and thought about how more than a month ago he had cut his finger very slightly with a knife and how this wound had hurt enough even the day before yesterday. "Am I now going to be less sensitive?" he thought, already sucking greedily on the cheese, which had strongly attracted him right away, more than all the other foods. Quickly and with his eyes watering with satisfaction, he ate one after the other the cheese, the vegetables, and the sauce. The fresh food, by contrast, did not taste good to him. He could not even bear the smell and carried the things he wanted to eat a little distance away. By the time his sister slowly turned the key as a sign that he should withdraw, he was long finished with everything and now lay lazily in the same spot. The noise immediately startled him, in spite of the fact that he was already almost asleep, and he scurried back again under the couch. But it cost him great self-control to remain under the couch, even for the short time his sister was in the room, because his body had filled out somewhat on account of the rich meal and in the narrow space there he could scarcely breathe. In the midst of minor attacks of asphyxiation, he looked at her with somewhat protruding eyes, as his unsuspecting sister swept up with a broom, not just the remnants, but even the foods which Gregor had not touched at all, as if these were also now useless, and as she dumped everything quickly into a bucket, which she closed with a wooden lid, and then carried all of it out of the room. She had hardly turned around before Gregor had already dragged himself out from under the couch, stretched out, and let his body expand.

In this way Gregor now got his food every day, once in the morning, when his parents and the servant girl were still asleep, and a second time after the common noon meal, for his parents were asleep then for a little while, and the servant girl was sent off by his sister on some errand or other. They certainly would not have wanted Gregor to starve to death, but perhaps they could not have endured finding out what he ate other than by hearsay. Perhaps his sister also wanted to spare them what was possibly only a small grief, for they were really suffering quite enough already.

What sorts of excuses people had used on that first morning to get the doctor and the locksmith out of the house again Gregor was completely unable to ascertain. Since they could not understand him, no one, not even his sister, thought that he might be able to understand others, and thus, when his sister was in his room, he had to be content with listening now and then to her sighs and invocations to the saints. Only later, when she had grown somewhat accustomed to everything—naturally there could never be any talk of her growing completely accustomed to it—Gregor sometimes caught a comment which was intended to be friendly or could be interpreted as such. "Well, today it tasted good to him," she said, if Gregor had really cleaned up what he had to eat; whereas, in the reverse situation, which gradually repeated itself more and more frequently, she used to say almost sadly, "Now everything has been left again."

But while Gregor could get no new information directly, he did hear a good deal from the room next door, and as soon as he heard voices, he scurried right away to the appropriate door and pressed his entire body against it. In the early days especially, there was no conversation which was not concerned with him in some way or other, even if only in secret. For two days at all meal times discussions of that subject could be heard on how people should now behave; but they also talked about the same subject in the times between meals, for there were always at least two family members at home, since no one really wanted to remain in the house alone and people could not under any circumstances leave the apartment completely empty. In addition, on the very first day the servant girl—it was not completely clear what and how much she knew about what had happened—on her knees had begged his mother to let her go immediately, and when she said good bye about fifteen minutes later, she thanked them for the dismissal

with tears in her eyes, as if she was receiving the greatest favour which people had shown her there, and, without anyone demanding it from her, she swore a fearful oath not to reveal anything to anyone, not even the slightest detail.

Now his sister had to team up with his mother to do the cooking, although that did not create much trouble because people were eating almost nothing. Again and again Gregor listened as one of them vainly invited another one to eat and received no answer other than "Thank you. I've had enough" or something like that. And perhaps they had stopped having anything to drink, too. His sister often asked his father whether he wanted to have a beer and gladly offered to fetch it herself, and when his father was silent, she said, in order to remove any reservations he might have, that she could send the caretaker's wife to get it. But then his father finally said a resounding "No," and nothing more would be spoken about it.

Already during the first day his father laid out all the financial circumstances and prospects to his mother and to his sister as well. From time to time he stood up from the table and pulled out of the small lockbox salvaged from his business, which had collapsed five years previously, some document or other or some notebook. The sound was audible as he opened up the complicated lock and, after removing what he was looking for, locked it up again. These explanations by his father were, in part, the first enjoyable thing that Gregor had the chance to listen to since his imprisonment. He had thought that nothing at all was left over for his father from that business; at least his father had told him nothing to contradict that view, and Gregor in any case had not asked him about it. At the time Gregor's only concern had been to use everything he had in order to allow his family to forget as quickly as possible the business misfortune which had brought them all into a state of complete hopelessness. And so at that point he had started to work with a special intensity and from a minor assistant had become, almost overnight, a travelling salesman, who naturally had entirely different possibilities for earning money and whose successes at work were converted immediately into the form of cash commissions, which could be set out on the table at home for his astonished and delighted family. Those had been beautiful days, and they had never come back afterwards, at least not with the same splendour, in spite of the fact that Gregor later earned so much money that he was in a position to bear the expenses of the entire family, costs which he, in fact, did bear. They had become quite accustomed to it, both the family and Gregor as well. They took the money with thanks, and he happily surrendered it, but a special warmth was no longer present. Only the sister had remained still close to Gregor, and it was his secret plan to send her next year to the Conservatory, regardless of the great expense which that necessarily involved and which would be made up in other ways. In contrast to Gregor, she loved music very much and knew how to play the violin charmingly. Now and then during Gregor's short stays in the city the Conservatory was mentioned in conversations with his sister, but always merely as a beautiful dream, whose realization was unimaginable, and their parents never listened to these innocent expectations with pleasure. But Gregor thought about them with scrupulous consideration and intended to explain the matter in all seriousness on Christmas Eve.

In his present situation, such completely futile ideas went through his head, while he pushed himself right up against the door and listened. Sometimes in his general exhaustion he could not listen any more and let his head bang listlessly against the door, but he immediately pulled himself together once more, for even the small sound which he made by this motion was heard near by and silenced everyone. "There he goes on again," said his father after a while, clearly turning towards the door, and only then would the interrupted conversation gradually be resumed again.

Now, Gregor found out clearly enough—for his father tended to repeat himself from time to time in his explanations, partly because he had not personally concerned himself with these matters for a long time now, and partly because his mother did not understand everything right away the first time—that, in spite all bad luck, an amount of money, although a very small one, was still available from the old times and that the interest, which had not been touched, had in the intervening time allowed it to increase a little. Furthermore, in addition to this, the money which Gregor had brought home every month—he had kept only a few crowns for himself—had not been completely spent and had grown into a small capital amount. Gregor, behind his door, nodded eagerly, rejoicing over this unanticipated foresight and frugality. True, with this excess money, he could really have paid off more of his father's debt to his employer and the day on which he could be rid of this position would have been a lot closer, but now things were doubtless better the way his father had arranged them.

At the moment, however, this money was not nearly sufficient to permit the family to live on the interest payments. Perhaps it would be enough to maintain the family for one or at most two years, that was all. Thus, it only added up to an amount which one should not really draw upon and which must be set aside for an emergency. But they had to earn money to live on. Now, it's true his father was indeed a healthy man, but he was old and had not worked for five years and thus could not be counted on for very much. He had in these five years, the first holidays of his laborious but unsuccessful life, put on a good deal of fat and thus had become really heavy. And should his old mother now perhaps work for money, a woman who suffered from asthma, for whom wandering through the apartment even now was a great strain and who spent every second day on the sofa by the open window having trouble with her breathing? Should his sister earn money, a girl who was still a seventeen-year-old child and whose earlier life style had been so very delightful that it had consisted of dressing herself nicely, sleeping in late, helping around the house, taking part in a few modest enjoyments and, above all, playing the violin? When it came to talking about this need to earn money, at first Gregor went away from the door and threw himself on the cool leather sofa beside the door, for he was quite hot from shame and sorrow.

Often he lay there all night long, not sleeping at all, just scratching on the leather for hours at a time. Or he undertook the very difficult task of pushing a chair over to the window. Then he crept up on the window sill and, braced on the chair, leaned against the window to look out, obviously with some memory or other of the liberating sense which looking out the window used to bring him in earlier times. For, in fact, from day to day he perceived things with less and less clarity, even those only a short distance away: the hospital across the street, the all-too-frequent sight of which he had previously cursed, was not visible at all any more, and if he had not been very well

aware that he lived in the quiet but completely urban Charlotte Street, he could have believed that from his window he was peering out at a featureless wasteland, in which the gray heaven and the gray earth had merged and were indistinguishable. His observant sister only had to notice a couple of times that the chair stood by the window; then, after cleaning up the room, each time, she pushed the chair back right against the window again and from now on she even left the inner casements open.

If Gregor had only been able to speak to his sister and thank her for everything that she had to do for him, he would have tolerated her service more easily. As it was, he suffered under it. The sister admittedly sought to cover up the awkwardness of everything as much as possible, and, as time went by, she naturally became more successful at it. But with the passing of time Gregor also came to understand everything much more clearly. Even her entrance was terrible for him. As soon as she came in, she ran straight to the window, without taking the time to shut the door, in spite of the fact that she was otherwise very considerate in sparing anyone the sight of Gregor's room, and yanked the window open with eager hands, as if she was almost suffocating, and remained for a while by the window breathing deeply, even when it was still so cold. With this running and noise she frightened Gregor twice every day. The entire time he trembled under the couch, and yet he knew very well that she would certainly have spared him gladly if it had only been possible to remain with the window closed in a room where Gregor lived.

On one occasion—about one month had already gone by since Gregor's transformation, and there was now no particular reason any more for his sister to be startled at Gregor's appearance—she arrived a little earlier than usual and came upon Gregor as he was still looking out the window, immobile and well positioned to frighten someone. It would not have come as a surprise to Gregor if she had not come in, since his position was preventing her from opening the window immediately. But not only did she not step inside; she even retreated and shut the door. A stranger really could have concluded from this that Gregor had been lying in wait for her and wanted to bite her. Of course, Gregor immediately concealed himself under the couch, but he had to wait until noon before his sister returned, and she seemed much less calm than usual. From this he realized that his appearance was still intolerable to her and must remain intolerable to her in future, and that she really had to exert a lot of self-control not to run away from a glimpse of only the small part of his body which stuck out from under the couch. In order to spare her even this sight, one day he dragged the sheet on his back and onto the couch—this task took him four hours—and arranged it in such a way that he was now completely concealed and his sister, even if she bent down, could not see him. If this sheet was not necessary as far as she was concerned, then she could remove it, for it was clear enough that Gregor could not derive any pleasure from isolating himself away so completely. But she left the sheet just as it was, and Gregor believed he even caught a look of gratitude when, on one occasion, he carefully lifted up the sheet a little with his head to check, as his sister took stock of the new arrangement.

In the first two weeks his parents could not bring themselves to visit him, and he often heard how they fully acknowledged his sister's present work; whereas, earlier they had often got annoyed at his sister because she had seemed to them a somewhat useless young woman. However, now both his father and his mother frequently waited in front of Gregor's door while his sister cleaned up inside, and as soon as she came out, she had to explain in great detail how things looked in the room, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether perhaps a slight improvement was perceptible. In any event, his mother comparatively soon wanted to visit Gregor, but his father and his sister restrained her, at first with reasons which Gregor listened to very attentively and which he completely endorsed. Later, however, they had to hold her back forcefully, and when she then cried "Let me go to Gregor. He's my unfortunate son! Don't you understand that I have to go to him?" Gregor then thought that perhaps it would be a good thing if his mother came in, not every day, of course, but maybe once a week. She understood everything much better than his sister, who, in spite of all her courage, was still merely a child and, in the last analysis, had perhaps undertaken such a difficult task only out of childish recklessness.

Gregor's wish to see his mother was soon realized. While during the day Gregor, out of consideration for his parents, did not want to show himself by the window, he could not crawl around very much on the few square metres of the floor. He found it difficult to bear lying quietly during the night, and soon eating no longer gave him the slightest pleasure. So for diversion he acquired the habit of crawling back and forth across the walls and ceiling. He was especially fond of hanging from the ceiling. The experience was quite different from lying on the floor. It was easier to breathe, a slight vibration went through his body, and in the midst of the almost happy amusement which Gregor found up there, it could happen that, to his own surprise, he let go and hit the floor. However, now he naturally controlled his body quite differently than before, and he did not injure himself in such a great fall. Now, his sister noticed immediately the new amusement which Gregor had found for himself—for as he crept around he left behind here and there traces of his sticky stuff—and so she got the idea of making the area where Gregor could creep around as large as possible and thus of removing the furniture which got in the way, especially the chest of drawers and the writing desk. But she was in no position to do this by herself. She did not dare to ask her father to help, and the servant girl would certainly not have assisted her, for although this girl, about sixteen years old, had courageously remained since the dismissal of the previous cook, she had begged for the privilege of being allowed to stay permanently confined to the kitchen and of having to open the door only in answer to a special summons. Thus, his sister had no other choice but to involve his mother at a time when his father was absent. His mother approached Gregor's room with cries of excited joy, but she fell silent at the door. Of course, his sister first checked whether everything in the room was in order. Only then did she let his mother enter. Gregor had drawn the sheet down with the greatest haste even further and wrinkled it more. The whole thing really looked just like a coverlet thrown carelessly over the couch. On this occasion, Gregor also held back from spying out from under the sheet. He refrained from looking at his mother this time and was merely happy that she had now come. "Come on; you can't see him," said his sister and evidently led his mother by the hand. Now Gregor listened as these two weak women shifted the still heavy old chest of drawers from its position and as his sister constantly took on herself the greatest part of the work, without listening to the warnings of his mother, who was afraid that she would strain herself. The work lasted a very long time.

After about a quarter of an hour had already gone by, his mother said it would be better if they left the chest of drawers where it was, because, in the first place, it was too heavy: they would not be finished before his father's arrival, and leaving the chest of drawers in the middle of the room would block all Gregor's pathways, but, in the second place, they could not be at all certain that Gregor would be pleased with the removal of the furniture. To her the reverse seemed to be true; the sight of the empty walls pierced her right to the heart, and why should Gregor not feel the same, since he had been accustomed to the room furnishings for a long time and would therefore feel himself abandoned in an empty room. "And is it not the case," his mother concluded very quietly, almost whispering, as if she wished to prevent Gregor, whose exact location she really did not know, from hearing even the sound of her voice—for she was convinced that he did not understand her words—"and isn't it a fact that by removing the furniture we're showing that we're giving up all hope of an improvement and are leaving him to his own resources without any consideration? I think it would be best if we tried to keep the room exactly in the condition it was in before, so that, when Gregor returns to us, he finds everything unchanged and can forget the intervening time all the more easily."

As he heard his mother's words Gregor realized that the lack of all immediate human contact, together with the monotonous life surrounded by the family over the course of these two months, must have confused his understanding, because otherwise he could not explain to himself how he, in all seriousness, could have been so keen to have his room emptied. Was he really eager to let the warm room, comfortably furnished with pieces he had inherited, be turned into a cavern in which he would, of course, then be able to crawl about in all directions without disturbance, but at the same time with a quick and complete forgetting of his human past as well? Was he then at this point already on the verge of forgetting and was it only the voice of his mother, which he had not heard for a long time, that had aroused him? Nothing was to be removed—everything must remain. In his condition he could not function without the beneficial influences of his furniture. And if the furniture prevented him from carrying out his senseless crawling about all over the place, then there was no harm in that, but rather a great benefit.

But his sister unfortunately thought otherwise. She had grown accustomed, certainly not without justification, so far as the discussion of matters concerning Gregor was concerned, to act as an special expert with respect to their parents, and so now the mother's advice was for his sister sufficient reason to insist on the removal, not only of the chest of drawers and the writing desk, which were the only items she had thought about at first, but also of all the furniture, with the exception of the indispensable couch. Of course, it was not only childish defiance and her recent very unexpected and hard won self-confidence which led her to this demand. She had also actually observed that Gregor needed a great deal of room to creep about; the furniture, on the other hand, as far as one could see, was not the slightest use. But perhaps the enthusiastic sensibility of young women of her age also played a role. This feeling sought release at every opportunity, and with it Grete now felt tempted to want to make Gregor's situation even more terrifying, so that then she would be able to do even more for him than she had up to now. For surely no one except Grete would ever trust themselves to enter a room in which Gregor ruled the empty walls all by himself.

And so she did not let herself be dissuaded from her decision by her mother, who in this room seemed uncertain of herself in her sheer agitation and soon kept quiet, helping his sister with all her energy to get the chest of drawers out of the room. Now, Gregor could still do without the chest of drawers if need be, but the writing desk really had to stay. And scarcely had the women left the room with the chest of drawers, groaning as they pushed it, when Gregor stuck his head out from under the sofa to see how he could intervene, cautiously and with as much consideration as possible. But unfortunately it was his mother who came back into the room first, while Grete had her arms wrapped around the chest of drawers in the next room and was rocking it back and forth by herself, of course without moving it from its position. But his mother was not used to the sight of Gregor; he could have made her ill, and so, frightened, Gregor scurried backwards right to the other end of the sofa. However, he could no longer prevent the sheet from moving forward a little. That was enough to catch his mother's attention. She came to a halt, stood still for a moment, and then went back to Grete.

Although Gregor kept repeating to himself over and over that really nothing unusual was going on, that only a few pieces of furniture were being rearranged, he soon had to admit to himself that the movements of the women to and fro, their quiet conversations, and the scraping of the furniture on the floor affected him like a great commotion stirred up on all sides, and, so firmly was he pulling in his head and legs and pressing his body into the floor, he had to tell himself unequivocally that he would not be able to endure all this much longer. They were cleaning out his room, taking away from him everything he cherished; they had already dragged out the chest of drawers in which the fret saw and other tools were kept, and they were now loosening the writing desk which was fixed tight to the floor, the desk on which he, as a business student, a school student, indeed even as an elementary school student, had written out his assignments. At that moment he really did not have any more time to check the good intentions of the two women, whose existence he had in any case almost forgotten, because in their exhaustion they were working really silently, and the heavy stumbling of their feet was the only sound to be heard.

And so he scuttled out—the women were just propping themselves up on the writing desk in the next room in order to take a short breather. He changed the direction of his path four times. He really did not know what he should rescue first. Then he saw hanging conspicuously on the wall, which was otherwise already empty, the picture of the woman dressed in nothing but fur. He quickly scurried up over it and pressed himself against the glass which held it in place and which made his hot abdomen feel good. At least this picture, which Gregor at the moment completely concealed, surely no one would now take away. He twisted his head towards the door of the living room to observe the women as they came back in.

They had not allowed themselves very much rest and were coming back right away. Grete had placed her arm around her mother and held her tightly. "So what shall we take now?" said Grete and looked around her. Then her glance met Gregor's from the wall. She kept her composure only because her mother was there. She bent her face towards her mother in order to prevent her from looking around, and said, although in a trembling voice and too quickly, "Come, wouldn't it be better to go back to the living room for just another moment?" Grete's purpose was

clear to Gregor: she wanted to bring his mother to a safe place and then chase him down from the wall. Well, let her just try! He squatted on his picture and did not hand it over. He would sooner spring into Grete's face.

But Grete's words had immediately made the mother very uneasy. She walked to the side, caught sight of the enormous brown splotch on the flowered wallpaper, and, before she became truly aware that what she was looking at was Gregor, screamed out in a high-pitched raw voice "Oh God, oh God" and fell with outstretched arms, as if she was surrendering everything, down onto the couch and lay there motionless. "Gregor, you. . ." cried out his sister with a raised fist and an urgent glare. Since his transformation these were the first words which she had directed right at him. She ran into the room next door to bring some spirits or other with which she could revive her mother from her fainting spell. Gregor wanted to help as well—there was time enough to save the picture—but he was stuck fast on the glass and had to tear himself loose forcibly. Then he also scurried into the next room, as if he could give his sister some advice, as in earlier times, but then he had to stand there idly behind her, while she rummaged about among various small bottles. Still, she was frightened when she turned around. A bottle fell onto the floor and shattered. A splinter of glass wounded Gregor in the face, and some corrosive medicine or other dripped over him. Now, without lingering any longer, Grete took as many small bottles as she could hold and ran with them in to her mother. She slammed the door shut with her foot. Gregor was now shut off from his mother, who was perhaps near death, thanks to him. He could not open the door; he did not want to chase away his sister, who had to remain with her mother. At this point he had nothing to do but wait, and, overwhelmed with self-reproach and worry, he began to creep and crawl over everything: walls, furniture, and ceiling. Finally, in his despair, as the entire room started to spin around him, he fell onto the middle of the large table.

A short time elapsed. Gregor lay there limply. All around was still. Perhaps that was a good sign. Then there was ring at the door. The servant girl was naturally shut up in her kitchen, and therefore Grete had to go to open the door. The father had arrived. "What's happened?" were his first words. Grete's appearance had told him everything. Grete replied with a dull voice; evidently she was pressing her face against her father's chest: "Mother fainted, but she's getting better now. Gregor has broken loose." "Yes, I have expected that," said his father, "I always warned you of that, but you women don't want to listen." It was clear to Gregor that his father had badly misunderstood Grete's all-too-brief message and was assuming that Gregor had committed some violent crime or other. Thus, Gregor now had to find his father to calm him down, for he had neither the time nor the ability to explain things to him. And so he rushed away to the door of his room and pushed himself against it, so that his father could see right away as he entered from the hall that Gregor fully intended to return at once to his room, that it was not necessary to drive him back, but that one only needed to open the door, and he would disappear immediately.

But his father was not in the mood to observe such niceties. "Ah!" he yelled as soon as he entered, with a tone as if he were at once angry and pleased. Gregor pulled his head back from the door and raised it in the direction of his father. He had not really pictured his father as he now stood there. Of course, what with his new style of creeping all around, he had in the past while neglected to pay attention to what was going on in the rest of the apartment, as he had done before, and really should have grasped the fact that he would encounter different conditions. And yet, and yet, was that still his father? Was that the same man who had lain exhausted and buried in bed in earlier days when Gregor was setting out on a business trip, who had received him on the evenings of his return in a sleeping gown and arm chair, totally incapable of standing up, who had only lifted his arm as a sign of happiness, and who in their rare strolls together a few Sundays a year and on the most important holidays made his way slowly forwards between Gregor and his mother—who themselves moved slowly—always a bit more slowly than them, bundled up in his old coat, working hard to move forwards and always setting down his walking stick carefully, and who, when he had wanted to say something, almost always stood still and gathered his entourage around him? But now he was standing up really straight, dressed in a tight-fitting blue uniform with gold buttons, like the ones servants wear in a banking company. Above the high stiff collar of his jacket his firm double chin stuck out prominently, beneath his bushy eyebrows the glance of his black eyes was fresh and alert, and his usually dishevelled white hair was combed down into a shining and carefully exact parting. He threw his cap, on which a gold monogram, probably the symbol of a bank, was affixed, in an arc across the entire room onto the sofa and, thrusting back the edges of the long coat of his uniform, with his hands in his trouser pockets and a grim face, moved right up to Gregor. He really did not know what he had in mind, but he raised his foot uncommonly high anyway, and Gregor was astonished at the gigantic size of the sole of his boot. However, he did not linger on that point, for he had known even from the first day of his new life that, as far as he was concerned, his father considered the only appropriate response to be the greatest force. And so he scurried away from his father, stopped when his father remained standing, and scampered forward again when his father merely stirred. In this way they made their way around the room repeatedly, without anything decisive taking place. In fact, because of the slow pace, it did not look like a chase. So Gregor remained on the floor for the time being, especially since he was afraid that his father could interpret a flight up onto the wall or the ceiling as an act of real malice. At any event, Gregor had to tell himself that he could not keep up this running around for a long time, because whenever his father took a single step, he had to go through a large number of movements. Already he was starting to feel a shortage of breath, just as in his earlier days when his lungs had been quite unreliable. As he now staggered around in this way in order to gather all his energies for running, hardly keeping his eyes open and feeling so listless that he had no notion at all of any escape other than by running and had almost already forgotten that the walls were available to him, although here they were obstructed by carefully carved furniture full of sharp points and spikes, at that moment something or other thrown casually flew close by and rolled in front of him. It was an apple. Immediately a second one flew after it. Gregor stood still in fright. Further running away was useless, for his father had decided to bombard him. From the fruit bowl on the sideboard his father had filled his pockets, and now, without for the moment taking accurate aim, he was throwing apple after apple. These small red apples rolled around on the floor, as if electrified, and collided with each other. A weakly thrown apple grazed Gregor's back but skidded off harmlessly. However, another thrown immediately after that one drove into Gregor's

back really hard. Gregor wanted to drag himself off, as if he could make the unexpected and incredible pain go away if he changed his position. But he felt as if he was nailed in place and lay stretched out completely confused in all his senses. Only with his final glance did he notice how the door of his room was pulled open and how, right in front of his screaming sister, his mother ran out in her underbodice, for his sister had loosened her clothing in order to give her some freedom to breathe in her fainting spell, and how his mother then ran up to his father—on the way her loosened petticoats slipped toward the floor one after the other—and how, tripping over them, she hurled herself onto his father and, throwing her arms around him, in complete union with him—but at this moment Gregor's powers of sight gave way—as her hands reached around his father's neck, and she begged him to spare Gregor's life.

III

Gregor's serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month—since no one ventured to remove the apple, it remained in his flesh as a visible reminder—seemed by itself to have reminded the father that, in spite of Gregor's present unhappy and hateful appearance, he was a member of the family and should not be treated as an enemy, but that it was, on the contrary, a requirement of family duty to suppress one's aversion and to endure—nothing else, just endure.

And if through his wound Gregor had now also apparently lost for good his ability to move and for the time being needed many, many minutes to crawl across his room, like an aged invalid—so far as creeping up high was concerned, that was unimaginable—nevertheless, for this worsening of his condition, in his view he did get completely satisfactory compensation, because every day towards evening the door to the living room, which he was in the habit of keeping a sharp eye on even one or two hours beforehand, was opened, so that he, lying down in the darkness of his room, invisible from the living room, could see the entire family at the illuminated table and listen to their conversation, to a certain extent with their common permission, a situation quite different from what had happened before.

Of course, it was no longer the animated social interaction of former times, which in small hotel rooms Gregor had always thought about with a certain longing, when, tired out, he had had to throw himself into the damp bedclothes. For the most part what went on now was only very quiet. After the evening meal, the father soon fell asleep in his arm chair. The mother and sister warned each other to be quiet. Bent far over the light, the mother sewed fine undergarments for a fashion shop. The sister, who had taken on a job as a salesgirl, in the evening studied stenography and French, so as perhaps to obtain a better position later on. Sometimes the father woke up and, as if he was quite ignorant that he had been asleep, said to the mother "How long you have been sewing again today!" and went right back to sleep, while the mother and the sister smiled tiredly to each other.

With a sort of stubbornness the father refused to take off his servant's uniform even at home, and while his sleeping gown hung unused on the coat hook, the father dozed completely dressed in his place, as if he was always ready for his responsibility and even here was waiting for the voice of his superior. As a result, in spite of all the care from the mother and sister, his uniform, which even at the start was not new, grew dirty, and Gregor looked, often for the entire evening, at this clothing, with stains all over it and with its gold buttons always polished, in which the old man, although very uncomfortable, nonetheless was sleeping peacefully.

As soon as the clock struck ten, the mother tried gently encouraging the father to wake up and then persuading him to go to bed, on the ground that he could not get a proper sleep here and that the father, who had to report for service at six o'clock, really needed a good sleep. But in his stubbornness, which had gripped him since he had become a servant, he always insisted on staying even longer by the table, although he regularly fell asleep and then could be prevailed upon only with the greatest difficulty to trade his chair for the bed. No matter how much the mother and sister might at that point work on him with small admonitions, for a quarter of an hour he would remain shaking his head slowly, his eyes closed, without standing up. The mother would pull him by the sleeve and speak flattering words into his ear; the sister would leave her work to help her mother, but that would not have the desired effect on the father. He would merely settle himself even more deeply into his arm chair. Only when the two women grabbed him under the armpits would he throw his eyes open, look back and forth at the mother and sister, and habitually say "This is a life. This is the peace and quiet of my old age." And propped up by both women, he would heave himself up elaborately, as if for him it was the greatest trouble, allow himself to be led to the door by the women, wave them away there, and proceed on his own from that point, while the mother quickly threw down her sewing implements and the sister her pen in order to run after the father and help him some more.

In this overworked and exhausted family who had time to worry any longer about Gregor more than was absolutely necessary? The household was constantly getting smaller. The servant girl was now let go. A huge bony cleaning woman with white hair flying all over her head came in the morning and evening to do the heaviest work. The mother took care of everything else, in addition to her considerable sewing work. It even happened that various pieces of family jewellery, which previously the mother and sister had been overjoyed to wear on social and festive occasions, were sold, as Gregor found out in the evening from the general discussion of the prices they had fetched. But the greatest complaint was always that they could not leave this apartment, which was much too big for their present means, since it was impossible to imagine how Gregor might be moved. But Gregor fully recognized that it was not just consideration for him which was preventing a move, for he could have been transported easily in a suitable box with a few air holes. The main thing holding the family back from a change in living quarters was far more their complete hopelessness and the idea that they had been struck by a misfortune like no one else in their entire circle of relatives and acquaintances. What the world demands of poor people they now carried out to an extreme degree. The father bought breakfast to the petty officials at the bank, the mother sacrificed herself for the undergarments of strangers, the sister behind her desk was at the beck and call of customers, but the family's energies did not extend any further. And the wound in his back began to pain Gregor all over again, when his mother and sister, after they had escorted the father to bed, now came back, let their work lie, moved close together, and sat cheek to cheek and when his mother would now say, pointing to Gregor's room, "Close the door, Grete," and when

Gregor was again in the darkness, while close by the women mingled their tears or, quite dry eyed, stared at the table.

Gregor spent his nights and days with hardly any sleep. Sometimes he thought that the next time the door opened he would take over the family arrangements just as he had earlier. In his imagination appeared again, after a long time, his boss and the manager, the chief clerk and the apprentices, the excessively spineless custodian, two or three friends from other businesses, a chambermaid from a hotel in the provinces, a loving, fleeting memory, a female cashier from a hat shop, whom he had seriously but too slowly courted—they all appeared mixed in with strangers or people he had already forgotten, but instead of helping him and his family, they were all unapproachable, and he was happy to see them disappear. But then again he was in no mood to worry about his family. He was filled with sheer anger over the wretched care he was getting, even though he could not imagine anything which he might have an appetite for. Still, he made plans about how he could get into the larder to take there what he at all accounts deserved, even if he was not hungry. Without thinking any more about how they might be able to give Gregor special pleasure, the sister very quickly kicked some food or other, whatever she felt like, into his room in the morning and at noon, before she ran off to her shop. And in the evening, quite indifferent to whether the food had perhaps only been tasted or, what happened most frequently, remained entirely undisturbed, she whisked it out with one sweep of her broom. The task of cleaning his room, which she now always carried out in the evening, could not have been done any more quickly. Streaks of dirt ran along the walls; here and there lay tangles of dust and garbage. At first, when his sister arrived, Gregor positioned himself in a particularly filthy corner in order with this posture to make something of a protest. But he could well have stayed there for weeks without his sister's doing the job any better. In fact, she perceived the dirt as much as he did, but she had decided just to let it stay. In this business, with a touchiness which was quite new to her and which had generally taken over the entire family, she kept watch to see that the cleaning of Gregor's room remained reserved for her. His mother had once undertaken a major clean up of his room, which she had only completed successfully after using a few buckets of water. But the extensive dampness made Gregor sick, and he lay spread out, embittered and immobile, on the couch. However, the mother's punishment did not fail to materialize. For in the evening the sister had hardly observed the change in Gregor's room before she ran into the living room mightily offended and, in spite of her mother's hand lifted high in entreaty, broke out in a fit of crying. Her parents—the father had, of course, woken up with a start in his arm chair—at first looked at her astonished and helpless, until they started to get agitated. Turning to his right, the father heaped reproaches on the mother that she had not left the cleaning of Gregor's room to the sister and, turning to his left, he shouted at the sister that she would no longer be allowed to clean Gregor's room ever again, while the mother tried to pull the father, beside himself in his excitement, into the bed room. The sister, shaken by her crying fit, pounded on the table with her tiny fists, and Gregor hissed at all this, angry that no one thought about shutting the door and sparing him the sight of this commotion.

But even when the sister, exhausted from her daily work, had grown tired of caring for Gregor as she had before, even then the mother did not have to come at all in her place. And Gregor did not have to be neglected. For now the cleaning woman was there. This old widow, whose bony frame had enabled her to survive the worst a long life can offer, had no real horror of Gregor. Without being in the least curious, she had once accidentally opened Gregor's door. At the sight of Gregor, who, totally surprised, began to scamper here and there, although no one was chasing him, she remained standing with her hands folded across her stomach staring at him. Since then she did not fail to open the door furtively a little every morning and evening and look in on Gregor. At first, she also called him to her with words which she probably thought were friendly, like "Come here for a bit, old dung beetle!" or "Hey, look at the old dung beetle!" Addressed in such a manner, Gregor made no answer, but remained motionless in his place, as if the door had not been opened at all. If only, instead of allowing this cleaning woman to disturb him uselessly whenever she felt like it, they had given her orders to clean up his room every day! Once in the early morning—a hard downpour, perhaps already a sign of the coming spring, struck the window panes—when the cleaning woman started up once again with her usual conversation, Gregor was so bitter that he turned towards her, as if for an attack, although slowly and weakly. But instead of being afraid of him, the cleaning woman merely lifted up a chair standing close by the door and, as she stood there with her mouth wide open, her intention was clear: she would close her mouth only when the chair in her hand had been thrown down on Gregor's back. "This goes no further, all right?" she asked, as Gregor turned himself around again, and she placed the chair calmly back in the corner.

Gregor ate hardly anything any more. Only when he chanced to move past the food which had been prepared did he, as a game, take a bit into his mouth, hold it there for hours, and generally spit it out again. At first he thought it might be his sadness over the condition of his room which kept him from eating, but he very soon became reconciled to the alterations in his room. People had grown accustomed to discard in there things which they could not put anywhere else, and at this point there were many such items, now that they had rented one room of the apartment to three lodgers. These solemn gentlemen—all three had full beards, as Gregor once found out through a crack in the door—were meticulously intent on tidiness, not only in their own room but, since they had now rented a room here, in the entire household, particularly in the kitchen. They simply did not tolerate any useless or shoddy stuff. Moreover, for the most part they had brought with them their own pieces of furniture. Thus, many items had become superfluous, and these were not really things one could sell or things people wanted to throw out. All these pieces ended up in Gregor's room, even the box of ashes and the garbage pail from the kitchen. The cleaning woman, always in a great hurry, simply flung anything that was for the moment useless into Gregor's room. Fortunately Gregor generally saw only the relevant object and the hand which held it. The cleaning woman perhaps was intending, when time and opportunity allowed, to take the stuff out again or to throw everything out all at once, but in fact the things remained lying there, wherever they had ended up at the first throw, unless Gregor squirmed his way through the accumulation of junk and moved it. At first he was forced to do this because otherwise there was no room for him to creep around, but later he did it with a growing pleasure, although after such movements, tired to death and feeling wretched, he did not budge again for hours.

Because the lodgers sometimes also took their evening meal at home in the common living room, the door to it stayed shut on many evenings. But Gregor had no trouble at all going without the open door. Already on many evenings when it was open he had not availed himself of it, but, without the family noticing, was stretched out in the darkest corner of his room. However, on one occasion the cleaning woman had left the door to the living room slightly ajar, and it remained open even when the lodgers came in as evening fell and the lights were put on. They sat down at the head of the table, where in earlier days the mother, the father, and Gregor had eaten, unfolded their serviettes, and picked up their knives and forks. The mother immediately appeared in the door with a dish of meat and right behind her the sister with a dish piled high with potatoes. The food gave off a lot of steam. The gentlemen lodgers bent over the plates set before them, as if they wanted to check them before eating, and in fact the one who sat in the middle—for the other two he seemed to serve as the authority—cut off a piece of meat still on the dish, obviously to establish whether it was sufficiently tender and whether or not it should be sent back to the kitchen. He was satisfied, and mother and sister, who had looked on in suspense, began to breathe easily and to smile.

The family itself ate in the kitchen. In spite of that, before the father went into the kitchen, he came into the living room and with a single bow, cap in hand, made a tour of the table. The lodgers rose up collectively and murmured something into their beards. Then, when they were alone, they ate almost in complete silence. It seemed odd to Gregor that, out of all the many different sorts of sounds of eating, what was always audible was their chewing teeth, as if by that Gregor should be shown that people needed their teeth to eat and that nothing could be done even with the most handsome toothless jawbone. "I really do have an appetite," Gregor said to himself sorrowfully, "but not for these things. How these lodgers stuff themselves, and I am dying of hunger!"

On this very evening the violin sounded from the kitchen. Gregor did not remember hearing it all through this period. The lodgers had already ended their night meal, the middle one had pulled out a newspaper and had given each of the other two a page, and they were now leaning back, reading and smoking. When the violin started playing, they became attentive, got up, and went on tiptoe to the hall door, at which they remained standing pressed up against one another. They must have been audible from the kitchen, because the father called out, "Perhaps the gentlemen don't like the playing? It can be stopped at once." "On the contrary," stated the lodger in the middle, "might the young woman not come into us and play in the room here, where it is really much more comfortable and cheerful?" "Oh, certainly," cried the father, as if he were the one playing the violin. The men stepped back into the room and waited. Soon the father came with the music stand, the mother with the sheet music, and the sister with the violin. The sister calmly prepared everything for the recital. The parents, who had never previously rented a room and therefore exaggerated their politeness to the lodgers, dared not sit on their own chairs. The father leaned against the door, his right hand stuck between two buttons of his buttoned-up uniform. The mother, however, accepted a chair offered by one of the lodgers. Since she let the chair stay where the gentleman had chanced to put it, she sat to one side in a corner.

The sister began to play. The father and mother, one on each side, followed attentively the movements of her hands. Attracted by the playing, Gregor had ventured to advance a little further forward, and his head was already in the living room. He scarcely wondered about the fact that recently he had had so little consideration for the others. Earlier this consideration had been something he was proud of. And for that very reason he would have had at this moment more reason to hide away, because as a result of the dust which lay all over his room and flew around with the slightest movement, he was totally covered in dirt. On his back and his sides he carted around with him threads, hair, and remnants of food. His indifference to everything was much too great for him to lie on his back and scour himself on the carpet, as he had done earlier several times a day. In spite of this condition he had no timidity about inching forward a bit on the spotless floor of the living room.

In any case, no one paid him any attention. The family was all caught up in the violin playing. The lodgers, by contrast, who for the moment had placed themselves, hands in their trouser pockets, behind the music stand much too close to the sister, so that they could all see the sheet music, something that must certainly have bothered the sister, soon drew back to the window conversing in low voices with bowed heads, where they then remained, anxiously observed by the father. It now seemed really clear that, having assumed they were to hear a beautiful or entertaining violin recital, they were disappointed; they had had enough of the entire performance and were allowing their peace and quiet to be disturbed only out of politeness. In particular, the way in which they all blew the smoke from their cigars out of their noses and mouths up into the air led one to conclude that they were very irritated. And yet his sister was playing so beautifully. Her face was turned to the side, her eyes following the score intently and sadly. Gregor crept forward still a little further, keeping his head close against the floor in order to be able to catch her gaze if possible. Was he an animal that music so captivated him? For him it was as if the way to the unknown nourishment he craved was revealing itself. He was determined to press forward right up to his sister, to tug at her dress, and to indicate to her in this way that she might still come with her violin into his room, because here no one valued the recital as he wanted to value it. He did not wish to let her go from his room any more, at least not so long as he lived. His frightening appearance would for the first time become useful for him. He wanted to be at all the doors of his room simultaneously and snarl back at the attackers. However, his sister should not be compelled but would remain with him voluntarily. She would sit next to him on the sofa, bend down her ear to him, and he would then confide in her that he firmly intended to send her to the Conservatory and that, if his misfortune had not arrived in the interim, he would have declared all this last Christmas—had Christmas really already come and gone?—and would have brooked no argument. After this explanation his sister would break out in tears of emotion, and Gregor would lift himself up to her armpit and kiss her throat, which she, from the time she had been going to work, had left exposed without a band or a collar.

"Mr. Samsal!" called out the middle lodger to the father and, without uttering a further word, pointed his index finger at Gregor as he was moving slowly forward. The violin fell silent. The middle lodger smiled, first shaking his head at his friends, and then looked down at Gregor once more. Rather than driving Gregor back, the father seemed

to consider it more important for the time being to calm down the lodgers, although they were not at all upset and Gregor seemed to entertain them more than the violin recital. The father hurried over to them and with outstretched arms tried to push them into their own room and at the same time to block their view of Gregor with his own body. At this point they became really somewhat irritated, although one no longer knew whether that was because of the father's behaviour or because of the knowledge they had just acquired that they had, without being aware of it, a neighbour like Gregor. They demanded explanations from his father, raised their arms to make their points, tugged agitatedly at their beards, and moved back towards their room quite slowly. In the meantime, the isolation which had suddenly fallen upon his sister after the unexpected breaking off of the recital had overwhelmed her. She had held onto the violin and bow in her limp hands for a little while and had continued to look at the sheet music as if she was still playing. All at once she pulled herself together, placed the instrument in her mother's lap—the mother was still sitting in her chair having trouble breathing, for her lungs were labouring hard—and had run into the next room, which the lodgers, pressured by the father, were already approaching more rapidly. One could observe how under the sister's practised hands the covers and pillows on the beds were thrown high and then rearranged. Even before the lodgers had reached the room, she had finished fixing the beds and was slipping out. The father seemed once again so gripped by his stubbornness that he forgot about the respect which, after all, he must show his lodgers. He pressed on and on, until right in the door of the room the middle gentleman stamped loudly with his foot and thus brought the father to a standstill. "I hereby declare," the middle lodger said, raising his hand and casting his glance both on the mother and the sister, "that considering the disgraceful conditions prevailing in this apartment and family"—with this he spat decisively on the floor—"I immediately cancel my room. I will, of course, pay nothing at all for the days which I have lived here; on the contrary, I shall think about whether or not I will initiate some sort of action against you, something which—believe me—will be very easy to establish." He fell silent and looked directly in front of him, as if he was waiting for something. In fact, his two friends immediately joined in with their opinions, "We also give immediate notice." At that he seized the door handle and with a bang slammed the door shut.

The father groped his way tottering to his chair and let himself fall in it. It looked as if he was stretching out for his usual evening snooze, but the heavy nodding of his head, which appeared as if it had no support, showed that he was not sleeping at all. Gregor had lain motionless the entire time in the spot where the lodgers had caught him. Disappointment with the collapse of his plan and perhaps also weakness brought on by his severe hunger made it impossible for him to move. He was afraid and reasonably certain that they might launch a combined attack against him at any moment, and he waited. He was not even startled when the violin fell from the mother's lap, out from under her trembling fingers, and gave off a reverberating tone.

"My dear parents," said the sister banging her hand on the table by way of an introduction, "things cannot go on any longer in this way. Maybe if you don't understand that, well, I do. I will not utter my brother's name in front of this monster, and thus I say only that we must try to get rid of it. We have tried what is humanly possible to take care of it and to be patient. I believe that no one can criticize us in the slightest."

"She is right in a thousand ways," said the father to himself. The mother, who was still incapable of breathing properly, began to cough numbly with her hand held up over her mouth and a manic expression in her eyes.

The sister hurried over to her mother and held her forehead. The sister's words seemed to have led the father to certain reflections. He sat upright, played with his service hat among the plates, which still lay on the table from the lodgers' evening meal, and looked now and then at the motionless Gregor.

"We must try to get rid of it," the sister now said decisively to the father, for the mother, in her coughing fit, was not listening to anything. "It is killing you both. I see it coming. When people have to work as hard as we all do, they cannot also tolerate this endless torment at home. I just can't go on any more." And she broke out into such a crying fit that her tears flowed out down onto her mother's face. She wiped them off her mother with mechanical motions of her hands.

"Child," said the father sympathetically and with obvious appreciation, "then what should we do?"

The sister only shrugged her shoulders as a sign of the perplexity which, in contrast to her previous confidence, had now come over her while she was crying.

"If he understood us," said the father in a semi-questioning tone. The sister, in the midst of her sobbing, shook her hand energetically as a sign that there was no point thinking of that.

"If he understood us," repeated the father and by shutting his eyes he absorbed the sister's conviction of the impossibility of this point, "then perhaps some compromise would be possible with him. But as it is. . ."

"It has to go," cried the sister. "That is the only way, father. You must try to get rid of the idea that this is Gregor. The fact that we have believed this for so long, that is truly our real misfortune. But how can it be Gregor? If it were Gregor, he would have long ago realized that a communal life among human beings is not possible with such a creature and would have gone away voluntarily. Then we would not have a brother, but we could go on living and honour his memory. But this animal plagues us. It drives away the lodgers, will obviously take over the entire apartment, and leave us to spend the night in the lane. Just look, father," she suddenly cried out, "he's already starting up again." With a fright which was totally incomprehensible to Gregor, the sister even left the mother, literally pushed herself away from her chair, as if she would sooner sacrifice her mother than remain in Gregor's vicinity, and rushed behind her father who, excited merely by her behaviour, also stood up and half raised his arms in front of the sister as though to protect her.

But Gregor did not have any notion of wishing to create problems for anyone and certainly not for his sister. He had just started to turn himself around in order to creep back into his room, quite a startling sight, since, as a result of his suffering condition, he had to guide himself through the difficulty of turning around with his head, in this process lifting and striking it against the floor several times. He paused and looked around. His good intentions seemed to have been recognized. The fright had lasted only for a moment. Now they looked at him in silence and sorrow. His

mother lay in her chair, with her legs stretched out and pressed together, her eyes almost shut from weariness. The father and sister sat next to one another. The sister had put her hands around the father's neck.

"Now perhaps I can actually turn myself around," thought Gregor and began the task again. He couldn't stop puffing at the effort and had to rest now and then. Besides, no one was urging him on. It was all left to him on his own. When he had completed turning around, he immediately began to wander straight back. He was astonished at the great distance which separated him from his room and did not understand in the least how in his weakness he had covered the same distance a short time before, almost without noticing it. Always intent only on creeping along quickly, he hardly paid any attention to the fact that no word or cry from his family interrupted him. Only when he was already in the doorway did he turn his head, not completely, because he felt his neck growing stiff. At any rate, he still saw that behind him nothing had changed. Only the sister was standing up. His last glimpse brushed over the mother, who was now completely asleep.

He was only just inside his room when the door was pushed shut very quickly, bolted fast, and barred. Gregor was startled by the sudden commotion behind him, so much so that his little limbs bent double under him. It was his sister who had been in such a hurry. She was already standing up, had waited, and then sprung forward nimbly. Gregor had not heard anything of her approach. She cried out "Finally!" to her parents, as she turned the key in the lock.

"What now?" Gregor asked himself and looked around him in the darkness. He soon made the discovery that he could no longer move at all. He was not surprised at that. On the contrary, it struck him as unnatural that up to this point he had really been able up to move around with these thin little legs. Besides he felt relatively content. True, he had pains throughout his entire body, but it seemed to him that they were gradually becoming weaker and weaker and would finally go away completely. The rotten apple in his back and the inflamed surrounding area, entirely covered with white dust, he hardly noticed. He remembered his family with deep feelings of love. In this business, his own thought that he had to disappear was, if possible, even more decisive than his sister's. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection until the tower clock struck three in the morning. In front of the window he witnessed the beginning of the outside growing generally lighter. Then without willing it, his head sank all the way down, and from his nostrils his last breath flowed weakly out.

Early in the morning the cleaning woman came. In her sheer energy and haste she banged all the doors—in precisely the way people had already frequently asked her to avoid—so much so that once she arrived a quiet sleep was no longer possible anywhere in the entire apartment. In her customarily brief visit to Gregor she at first found nothing special. She thought he lay so immobile there on purpose and was playing the offended party. She gave him credit for as complete an understanding as possible. Since she happened to be holding the long broom in her hand, she tried to tickle Gregor with it from the door. When that was quite unsuccessful, she became irritated and poked Gregor a little, and only when she had shoved him from his place without any resistance did she become attentive. When she quickly realized the true state of affairs, her eyes grew large and she whistled to herself. However, she didn't restrain herself for long. She pulled open the door of the bedroom and yelled in a loud voice into the darkness, "Come and look. It's kicked the bucket. It's lying there. It's completely snuffed it!"

The Samsas sat upright in their marriage bed and had to get over their fright at the cleaning woman before they managed to grasp her message. But then Mr. and Mrs. Samsa climbed very quickly out of bed, one on either side. Mr. Samsa threw the bedspread over his shoulders, Mrs. Samsa came out only in her nightshirt, and like this they stepped into Gregor's room. Meanwhile, the door of the living room, in which Grete had slept since the lodgers had arrived on the scene, had also opened. She was fully clothed, as if she had not slept at all; her white face also seemed to indicate that. "Dead?" said Mrs. Samsa and looked questioningly at the cleaning woman, although she could have checked everything on her own and it was clear even without a check. "I should say so," said the cleaning woman and, by way of proof, poked Gregor's body with the broom a considerable distance more to the side. Mrs. Samsa made a movement, as if she wished to restrain the broom, but did not do it. "Well," said Mr. Samsa, "now we can give thanks to God." He crossed himself, and the three women followed his example. Grete, who did not take her eyes off the corpse, said, "Just look how thin he was. He has eaten nothing for such a long time. The meals which came in here came out again exactly the same." In fact, Gregor's body was completely flat and dry. That was apparent really for the first time, now that he was no longer raised on his small limbs and nothing else distracted one from looking.

"Grete, come into us for a moment," said Mrs. Samsa with a melancholy smile, and Grete went, not without looking back at the corpse, behind her parents into the bed room. The cleaning woman shut the door and opened the window wide. In spite of the early morning, the fresh air was partly tinged with warmth. It was already almost the end of March.

The three lodgers stepped out of their room and looked around for their breakfast, astonished that they had been forgotten. The middle one of the gentlemen asked the cleaning woman grumpily "Where is the breakfast?" However, she laid her finger to her lips and then quickly and silently indicated to the lodgers that they could come into Gregor's room. So they came and stood in the room, which was already quite bright, around Gregor's corpse, their hands in the pockets of their somewhat worn jackets.

Then the door of the bed room opened, and Mr. Samsa appeared in his uniform, with his wife on one arm and his daughter on the other. All were a little tear stained. Now and then Grete pressed her face into her father's arm.

"Get out of my apartment immediately," said Mr. Samsa and pointed to the door, without letting go of the women. "What do you mean?" said the middle lodger, somewhat dismayed and with a sugary smile. The two others kept their hands behind them and constantly rubbed them against each other, as if in joyful anticipation of a great squabble which must end up in their favour. "I mean exactly what I say," replied Mr. Samsa and went directly up to the lodger with his two female companions. The latter at first stood there motionless and looked at the floor, as if matters were arranging themselves in a new way in his head. "All right, then we'll go," he said and looked up at Mr. Samsa as

if, suddenly overcome by humility, he was even asking fresh permission for this decision. Mr. Samsa merely nodded briefly and repeatedly to him with his eyes open wide. Following that, with long strides the lodger actually went out immediately into the hall. His two friends had already been listening for a while with their hands quite still, and now they hopped smartly after him, as if afraid that Mr. Samsa could step into the hall ahead of them and disturb their reunion with their leader. In the hall all three of them took their hats from the coat rack, pulled their canes from the umbrella stand, bowed silently, and left the apartment. In what turned out to be an entirely groundless mistrust, Mr. Samsa stepped with the two women out onto the landing, leaned against the railing, and looked over as the three lodgers slowly but steadily made their way down the long staircase, disappeared on each floor in a certain turn of the stairwell, and in a few seconds reappeared again. The further down they went, the more the Samsa family lost interest in them, and when a butcher with a tray on his head came up to meet them and then with a proud bearing ascended the stairs high above them, Mr. Samsa, together with the women, soon left the bannister, and they all returned, as if relieved, back into their apartment.

They decided to pass that day resting and going for a stroll. Not only had they earned this break from work, but there was no question that they really needed it. And so they sat down at the table and wrote three letters of apology: Mr. Samsa to his supervisor, Mrs. Samsa to her client, and Grete to her proprietor. During the writing the cleaning woman came in to say that she was going off, for her morning work was finished. The three people writing at first merely nodded, without glancing up. Only when the cleaning woman was still unwilling to depart, did they look up annoyed. "Well?" asked Mr. Samsa. The cleaning woman stood smiling in the doorway, as if she had a great stroke of luck to report to the family but would only do it if she was questioned thoroughly. The almost upright small ostrich feather in her hat, which had irritated Mr. Samsa during her entire service with them, swayed lightly in all directions. "All right then, what do you really want?" asked Mrs. Samsa, whom the cleaning lady respected more than the others. "Well," answered the cleaning woman, smiling so happily she couldn't go on speaking right away, "you mustn't worry about throwing out that rubbish from the next room. It's all taken care of." Mrs. Samsa and Grete bent down to their letters, as though they wanted to go on writing. Mr. Samsa, who noticed that the cleaning woman now wanted to start describing everything in detail, decisively prevented her with an outstretched hand. But since she was not allowed to explain, she remembered the great hurry she was in, and called out, clearly insulted, "Bye bye, everyone," then turned around furiously and left the apartment with a fearful slamming of the door.

"This evening she'll be given notice," said Mr. Samsa, but he got no answer from either his wife or from his daughter, because the cleaning woman seemed to have once again upset the tranquillity they had just attained. The women got up, went to the window, and remained there, with their arms about each other. Mr. Samsa turned around in his chair in their direction and observed them quietly for a while. Then he called out, "All right, come here then. Let's finally get rid of old things. And have a little consideration for me." The women attended to him at once. They rushed to him, caressed him, and quickly ended their letters.

Then all three left the apartment together, something they had not done for months now, and took the electric tram into the open air outside the city. The car in which they were sitting by themselves was totally engulfed by the warm sun. Leaning back comfortably in their seats, they talked to each other about future prospects, and they discovered that on closer observation these were not at all bad, for the three of them had employment, about which they had not really questioned each other at all, which was extremely favourable and with especially promising future prospects. The greatest improvement in their situation at this point, of course, had to come from a change of dwelling. Now they wanted to rent a smaller and cheaper apartment but better situated and generally more practical than the present one, which Gregor had chosen. While they amused themselves in this way, it struck Mr. and Mrs. Samsa, almost at the same moment, as they looked at their daughter, who was getting more animated all the time, how she had blossomed recently, in spite of all the troubles which had made her cheeks pale, into a beautiful and voluptuous young woman. Growing more silent and almost unconsciously understanding each other in their glances, they thought that the time was now at hand to seek out a good honest man for her. And it was something of a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when at the end of their journey their daughter stood up first and stretched her young body.

Vi na televisão que as lojas bacanas estavam vendendo adoidado roupas ricas para as madames vestirem no reveillon. Vi também que as casas de artigos finos para comer e beber tinham vendido todo o estoque.

Pereba, vou ter que esperar o dia raiar e apanhar cachaça, galinha morta e farofa dos macumbeiros. Pereba entrou no banheiro e disse, que fedor.

Vai mijar noutro lugar, tô sem água.

Pereba saiu e foi mijar na escada.

Onde você afanou a TV, Pereba perguntou.

Afanei, porra nenhuma. Comprei. O recibo está bem em cima dela. Ô Pereba! você pensa que eu sou algum babaquara para ter coisa estarrada no meu cafofo?

Tô morrendo de fome, disse Pereba.

De manhã a gente enche a barriga com os despachos dos babalaôs, eu disse, só de sacanagem.

Não conte comigo, disse Pereba. Lembra-se do Crispim? Deu um bico numa macumba aqui na Borges de Medeiros, a perna ficou preta, cortaram no Miguel Couto e tá ele aí, fudidão, andando de mula.

Pereba sempre foi supersticioso. Eu não. Tenho ginásio, sei ler, escrever e fazer raiz quadrada. Chuto a macumba que quiser.

Acendemos uns baseados e ficamos vendo a novela. Merda. Mudamos de canal, prum bang-bang, Outra bosta.

As madames granfas tão todas de roupa nova, vão entrar o ano novo dançando com os braços pro alto, já viu como as branqueiras dançam? Levantam os braços pro alto, acho que é pra mostrar o sovaco, elas querem mesmo é mostrar a boceta mas não têm culhão e mostram o sovaco. Todas corneiam os maridos. Você sabia que a vida delas é dar a xoxota por aí?

Pena que não tão dando pra gente, disse Pereba. Ele falava devagar, gozador, cansado, doente.

Pereba, você não tem dentes, é vesgo, preto e pobre, você acha que as madames vão dar pra você? Ô Pereba, o máximo que você pode fazer é tocar uma punheta. Fecha os olhos e manda brasa.

Eu queria ser rico, sair da merda em que estava metido! Tanta gente rica e eu fudido.

Zequinha entrou na sala, viu Pereba tocando punheta e disse, que é isso Pereba?

Michou, michou, assim não é possível, disse Pereba.

Por que você não foi para o banheiro descascar sua bronha?, disse Zequinha.

No banheiro tá um fedor danado, disse Pereba. Tô sem água.

As mulheres aqui do conjunto não estão mais dando?, perguntou Zequinha.

Ele tava homenageando uma loura bacana, de vestido de baile e cheia de jóias.

Ela tava nua, disse Pereba.

Já vi que vocês tão na merda, disse Zequinha.

Ele tá querendo comer restos de lemanjá, disse Pereba.

Brincadeira, eu disse. Afinal, eu e Zequinha tínhamos assaltado um supermercado no Leblon, não tinha dado muita grana, mas passamos um tempão em São Paulo na boca do lixo, bebendo e comendo as mulheres. A gente se respeitava.

Pra falar a verdade a maré também não tá boa pro meu lado, disse Zequinha. A barra tá pesada. Os homens não tão brincando, viu o que fizeram com o Bom Crioulo? Dezesseis tiros no quengo. Pegaram o Vevé e estrangularam. O Minhoca, porra! O Minhoca! crescemos juntos em Caxias, o cara era tão míope que não enxergava daqui até ali, e também era meio gago — pegaram ele e jogaram dentro do Guandu, todo arrebetado.

Pior foi com o Tripé. Tacaram fogo nele. Virou torresmo. Os homens não tão dando sopa, disse Pereba. E frango de macumba eu não como.

Depois de amanhã vocês vão ver. Vão ver o que?, perguntou Zequinha.

Só tô esperando o Lambreta chegar de São Paulo.

Porra, tu tá transando com o Lambreta?, disse Zequinha.

As ferramentas dele tão todas aqui.

Aqui!?, disse Zequinha. Você tá louco.

Eu ri.

Quais são os ferros que você tem?, perguntou Zequinha. Uma Thompson lata de goiabada, uma carabina doze, de cano serrado, e duas magnum.

Putaquepariu, disse Zequinha.

E vocês montados nessa baba tão aqui tocando punheta?

Esperando o dia raiar para comer farofa de macumba, disse Pereba. Ele faria sucesso falando daquele jeito na TV, ia matar as pessoas de rir.

Fumamos. Esvaziamos uma pitu.

Posso ver o material?, disse Zequinha.

Descemos pelas escadas, o elevador não funcionava e fomos no apartamento de Dona Candinha. Batemos. A velha abriu a porta.

Dona Candinha, boa noite, vim apanhar aquele pacote.

O Lambreta já chegou?, disse a preta velha.

Já, eu disse, está lá em cima.

A velha trouxe o pacote, caminhando com esforço. O peso era demais para ela. Cuidado, meus filhos, ela disse.

Subimos pelas escadas e voltamos para o meu apartamento. Abri o pacote. Armei primeiro a lata de goiabada e dei pro Zequinha segurar. Me amarro nessa máquina, tarratátátá!, disse Zequinha.

É antiga mas não falha, eu disse.

Zequinha pegou a magnum. Jóia, jóia, ele disse. Depois segurou a doze, colocou a culatra no ombro e disse: ainda dou um tiro com esta belezinha nos peitos de um tira, bem de perto, sabe como é, pra jogar o puto de costas na parede e deixar ele pregado lá.

Botamos tudo em cima da mesa e ficamos olhando. Fumamos mais um pouco.

Quando é que vocês vão usar o material?, disse Zequinha.

Dia 2. Vamos estourar um banco na Penha. O Lambreta quer fazer o primeiro gol do ano.

Ele é um cara vaidoso, disse Zequinha.

É vaidoso, mas merece. Já trabalhou em São Paulo, Curitiba, Florianópolis, Porto Alegre, Vitória, Niterói, pra não falar aqui no Rio. Mais de trinta bancos.

É, mas dizem que ele dá o bozó, disse Zequinha.

Não sei se dá, nem tenho peito de perguntar. Pra cima de mim nunca veio com frescuras.

Você já viu ele com mulher?, disse Zequinha.

Não, nunca vi. Sei lá, pode ser verdade, mas que importa?

Homem não deve dar o cu. Ainda mais um cara importante como o Lambreta, disse Zequinha.

Cara importante faz o que quer, eu disse.

É verdade, disse Zequinha.

Ficamos calados, fumando.

Os ferros na mão e a gente nada, disse Zequinha.

O material é do Lambreta. E aonde é que a gente ia usar ele numa hora destas? Zequinha chupou ar fingindo que tinha coisas entre os dentes. Acho que ele também estava com fome.

Eu tava pensando a gente invadir uma casa bacana que tá dando festa. O mulherio tá cheio de jóia e eu tenho um cara que compra tudo que eu levar. E os barbados tão cheios de grana na carteira. Você sabe que tem anel que vale cinco milhas e colar de quinze, nesse intruja que eu conheço? Ele paga na hora.

O fumo acabou. A cachaça também. Começou a chover. Lá se foi a tua farofa, disse Pereba.

Que casa? Você tem alguma em vista?

Não, mas tá cheio de casa de rico por aí. A gente puxa um carro e sai procurando.

Coloquei a lata de goiabada numa saca de feira, junto com a munição. Dei uma magnum pro Pereba, outra pro Zequinha. Prendi a carabina no cinto, o cano para baixo e vesti uma capa. Apanhei três meias de mulher e uma tesoura. Vamos, eu disse.

Puxamos um Opala. Seguimos para os lados de São Conrado. Passamos várias casas que não davam pé, ou tavam muito perto da rua ou tinham gente demais. Até que achamos o lugar perfeito. Tinha na frente um jardim grande e a casa ficava lá no fundo, isolada. A gente ouvia barulho de música de carnaval, mas poucas vozes cantando. Botamos as meias na cara. Cortei com a tesoura os buracos dos olhos. Entramos pela porta principal.

Eles estavam bebendo e dançando num salão quando viram a gente.

É um assalto, gritei bem alto, para abafar o som da vitrola. Se vocês ficarem quietos ninguém se machuca. Você aí, apaga essa porra dessa vitrola!

Pereba e Zequinha foram procurar os empregados e vieram com três garçons e duas cozinheiras. Deita todo mundo, eu disse.

Contei. Eram vinte e cinco pessoas. Todos deitados em silêncio, quietos, como se não estivessem sendo vistos nem vendo nada.

Tem mais alguém em casa?, eu perguntei.

Minha mãe. Ela está lá em cima no quarto. É uma senhora doente, disse uma mulher toda enfeitada, de vestido longo vermelho. Devia ser a dona da casa.

Crianças?

Estão em Cabo Frio, com os tios.

Gonçalves, vai lá em cima com a gordinha e traz a mãe dela.

Gonçalves?, disse Pereba.

É você mesmo. Tu não sabe mais o teu nome, ô burro? Pereba pegou a mulher e subiu as escadas.

Inocência, amarra os barbados.

Zequinha amarrou os caras usando cintos, fios de cortinas, fios de telefones, tudo que encontrou.

Revistamos os sujeitos. Muito pouca grana. Os putos estavam cheios de cartões de crédito e talões de cheques. Os relógios eram bons, de ouro e platina. Arrancamos as jóias das mulheres. Um bocado de ouro e brilhante. Botamos tudo na saca.

Pereba desceu as escadas sozinho.

Cadê as mulheres?, eu disse.

Engrossaram e eu tive que botar respeito.

Subi. A gordinha estava na cama, as roupas rasgadas, a língua de fora. Mortinha. Pra que ficou de flozô e não deu logo? O Pereba tava atrasado. Além de fudida, mal paga. Limpei as jóias. A velha tava no corredor, caída no chão. Também tinha batido as botas. Toda penteada, aquele cabelão armado, pintado de louro, de roupa nova, rosto encarquilhado, esperando o ano novo, mas já tava mais pra lá do que pra cá. Acho que morreu de susto. Arranquei os colares, broches e anéis. Tinha um anel que não saía. Com nojo, molhei de saliva o dedo da velha, mas mesmo assim o anel não saía. Fiquei puto e dei uma dentada, arrancando o dedo dela. Enfiei tudo dentro de uma fronha. O quarto da gordinha tinha as paredes forradas de couro. A banheira era um buraco quadrado grande de mármore branco, enfiado no chão. A parede toda de espelhos. Tudo perfumado. Voltei para o quarto, empurrei a gordinha para o chão, arrumei a colcha de cetim da cama com cuidado, ela ficou lisinha, brilhando. Tirei as calças e caguei em cima da colcha. Foi um alívio, muito legal. Depois limpei o cu na colcha, botei as calças e descí.

Vamos comer, eu disse, botando a fronha dentro da saca. Os homens e mulheres no chão estavam todos quietos e encagaçados, como carneirinhos. Para assustar ainda mais eu disse, o puto que se mexer eu estouro os miolos.

Então, de repente, um deles disse, calmamente, não se irrite, levem o que quiserem não faremos nada.

Fiquei olhando para ele. Usava um lenço de seda colorida em volta do pescoço.

Podem também comer e beber à vontade, ele disse.

Filha da puta. As bebidas, as comidas, as jóias, o dinheiro, tudo aquilo para eles era migalha. Tinham muito mais no banco. Para eles, nós não passávamos de três moscas no açucareiro.

Como é seu nome?

Maurício, ele disse.

Seu Maurício, o senhor quer se levantar, por favor?

Ele se levantou. Desamarrei os braços dele.

Muito obrigado, ele disse. Vê-se que o senhor é um homem educado, instruído. Os senhores podem ir embora, que não daremos queixa à polícia. Ele disse isso olhando para os outros, que estavam quietos apavorados no chão, e fazendo um gesto com as mãos abertas, como quem diz, calma minha gente, já levei este bunda suja no papo.

Inocência, você já acabou de comer? Me traz uma perna de peru dessas aí. Em cima de uma mesa tinha comida que dava para alimentar o presídio inteiro. Comi a perna de peru. Apanhei a carabina doze e carreguei os dois canos.

Seu Maurício, quer fazer o favor de chegar perto da parede? Ele se encostou na parede.

Encostado não, não, uns dois metros de distância. Mais um pouquinho para cá. Aí. Muito obrigado.

Atirei bem no meio do peito dele, esvaziando os dois canos, aquele tremendo trovão. O impacto jogou o cara com força contra a parede. Ele foi escorregando lentamente e ficou sentado no chão. No peito dele tinha um buraco que dava para colocar um panetone.

Viu, não grudou o cara na parede, porra nenhuma.

Tem que ser na madeira, numa porta. Parede não dá, Zequinha disse.

Os caras deitados no chão estavam de olhos fechados, nem se mexiam. Não se ouvia nada, a não ser os arrotos do Pereba.

Você aí, levante-se, disse Zequinha. O sacana tinha escolhido um cara magrinho, de cabelos compridos.

Por favor, o sujeito disse, bem baixinho. Fica de costas para a parede, disse Zequinha. Carreguei os dois canos da doze. Atira você, o coice dela machucou o meu ombro. Apóia bem a culatra senão ela te quebra a clavícula.

Vê como esse vai grudar. Zequinha atirou. O cara voou, os pés saíram do chão, foi bonito, como se ele tivesse dado um salto para trás. Bateu com estrondo na porta e ficou ali grudado. Foi pouco tempo, mas o corpo do cara ficou preso pelo chumbo grosso na madeira.

Eu não disse? Zequinha esfregou o ombro dolorido. Esse canhão é foda.

Não vais comer uma bacana destas?, perguntou Pereba.

Não estou a fim. Tenho nojo dessas mulheres. Tô cagando pra elas. Só como mulher que eu gosto.

E você... Inocência?

Acho que vou papar aquela moreninha.

A garota tentou atrapalhar, mas Zequinha deu uns murros nos cornos dela, ela sossegou e ficou quieta, de olhos abertos, olhando para o teto, enquanto era executada no sofá.

Vamos embora, eu disse. Enchemos toalhas e fronhas com comidas e objetos.

Muito obrigado pela cooperação de todos, eu disse. Ninguém respondeu.

Sáímos. Entramos no Opala e voltamos para casa.

Disse para o Pereba, larga o rodante numa rua deserta de Botafogo, pega um táxi e volta. Eu e Zequinha saltamos.

Este edifício está mesmo fudido, disse Zequinha, enquanto subíamos, com o material, pelas escadas imundas e arrebetadas.

Fudido, mas é Zona Sul, perto da praia. Tás querendo que eu vá morar em Vilópolis?

Chegamos lá em cima cansados. Botei as ferramentas no pacote, as jóias e o dinheiro na saca e levei para o apartamento da preta velha.

Dona Candinha, eu disse, mostrando a saca, é coisa quente.

Pode deixar, meus filhos. Os homens aqui não vêm.

Subimos. Coloquei as garrafas e as comidas em cima de uma toalha no chão. Zequinha quis beber e eu não deixei. Vamos esperar o Pereba.

Quando o Pereba chegou, eu enchi os copos e disse, que o próximo ano seja melhor. Feliz Ano Novo.

Antes do baile verde

Lygia Fagundes Telles

O Rancho Azul e Branco desfilava com seus passistas vestidos à Luís XV e sua porta-estandarte de peruca prateada em forma de pirâmide, os cachos desabados na testa, a cauda do vestido de cetim arrastando-se enxovalhada pelo asfalto. O negro do bumbo fez uma profunda reverência diante das duas mulheres, debruçadas na janela e prosseguiu com seu chapéu de três bicos, fazendo flutuar a capa encharcada de suor.

– Ele gostou de você – disse a jovem, voltando-se para a mulher que ainda aplaudia. – O cumprimento foi na sua direção, viu que chique?

A preta deu uma risadinha.

– Meu homem é mil vezes mais bonito, pelo menos na minha opinião. E já deve estar chegando, ficou de me pegar às dez na esquina. Se me atraso, ele começa a encher a caveira e pronto, não sai mais nada.

A jovem tomou-a pelo braço e arrastou-a até a mesa de cabeceira. O quarto estava revolvido como se um ladrão tivesse passado por ali e despejado caixas e gavetas.

– Estou atrasadíssima, Lu! Essa fantasia é fogo... Tenha paciência, mas você vai me ajudar um pouquinho.

– Mas você ainda não acabou?

Sentando-se na cama, a jovem abriu sobre os joelhos o saiotte verde. Usava biquíni e meias rendadas também verdes.

– Acabei o que, falta pregar tudo isso ainda, olha aí... Fui inventar um raio de pierrete difícilima!

A preta aproximou-se, alisando com as mãos o quimono de seda brilhante. Espetado na carapinha trazia um crisântemo de papel-crepom vermelho. Sentou-se ao lado da moça.

– O Raimundo já deve estar chegando, ele fica uma onça se me atraso. A gente vai ver os ranchos, hoje quero ver todos.

– Tem tempo, sossega – atalhou a jovem. Afastou os cabelos que lhe caíam nos olhos. Levantou o abajur que tombou na mesinha. – Não sei como fui me atrasar desse jeito.

– Mas não posso perder o desfile, viu, Tatisa? Tudo, menos perder o desfile!

– E quem está dizendo que você vai perder?

A mulher enfiou o dedo no pote de cola e baixou-se de leve nas lantejoulas do pires. Em seguida, levou o dedo até o saiotte e ali deixou as lantejoulas formando uma constelação desordenada. Colheu uma lantejoulas que escapara e delicadamente tocou com ela na cola. Depositou-a no saiotte, fixando-a com pequenos movimentos circulares.

– Mas se tiver que pregar as lantejoulas em todo o saiotte...

– Já começou a queixação? Achei que dava tempo e agora não posso largar a coisa pela metade, vê se entende! Você ajudando vai num instante, já me pinte, olha aí, que tal minha cara? Você nem disse nada, sua bruxa! Hein?... Que tal?

A mulher sorriu.

– Ficou bonito, Tatisa. Com o cabelo assim verde, você está parecendo uma alcachofra, tão gozado. Não gosto é desse verde na unha, fica esquisito.

Num movimento brusco, a jovem levantou a cabeça para respirar melhor. Passou o dorso da mão na face afogueada.

– Mas as unhas é que dão a nota, sua tonta. É um baile verde, as fantasias têm que ser verdes, tudo verde. Mas não precisa ficar me olhando, vamos, não pare, pode falar, mas vá trabalhando. Falta mais da metade, Lu!

– Estou sem óculos, não enxergo direito sem os óculos.

– Não faz mal – disse a jovem, limpando no lençol o excesso de cola que lhe escorreu pelo dedo. – Vá grudando de qualquer jeito que lá dentro ninguém vai reparar, vai ter gente à beca. O que está me endoidando é este calor, não agüento mais, tenho a impressão de que estou me derretendo, você não sente? Calor bárbaro!

A mulher tentou prender o crisântemo que resvalara para o pescoço. Franziu a testa e baixou o tom de voz.

– Estive lá.

– E daí?

– Ele está morrendo.

Um carro passou na rua, buzinando freneticamente. Alguns meninos puseram-se a cantar aos gritos, o compasso marcado pelas batidas numa frigideira: A coroa do rei não é de ouro nem de prata...

– Parece que estou num forno – gemeu a jovem, dilatando as narinas porejadas de suor. – Se soubesse, teria inventado uma fantasia mais leve.

– Mais leve do que isso? Você está quase nua, Tatisa. Eu ia com a minha havaiana, mas só porque aparece um pedaço da coxa o Raimundo implica. Imagine você então...

Com a ponta da unha, Tatisa colheu uma lantejoulas que se enredara na renda da meia. Deixou-a cair na pequena constelação que ia armando na barra do saiotte e ficou raspando pensativamente um pingo ressequido de cola que lhe caíra no joelho. Vagava o olhar pelos objetos, sem fixar-se em nenhum. Falou num tom sombrio:

– Você acha, Lu?

– Acha o quê?

– Que ele está morrendo?

– Ah, está sim. Conheço bem isso, já vi um monte de gente morrer, agora já sei como é. Ele não passa desta noite.

– Mas você já se enganou uma vez, lembra? Disse que ele ia morrer, que estava nas últimas... E no dia seguinte ele já pedia leite, radiante.

– Radiante? – espantou-se a empregada. Fechou num muxoxo os lábios pintados de vermelho-violeta. – E depois, eu não disse não senhora que ele ia morrer, eu disse que ele estava ruim, foi o que eu disse. Mas hoje é diferente, Tatisa. Espiei da porta, nem precisei entrar para ver que ele está morrendo.

– Mas quando fui lá ele estava dormindo tal calmo, Lu.

– Aquilo não é sono. É outra coisa.

Afastando bruscamente o saiote aberto nos joelhos, a jovem levantou-se. Foi até a mesa, pegou a garrafa de uísque e procurou um copo em meio da desordem dos frascos e caixas. Achou-o debaixo da esponja de arminho. Soprou o fundo cheio de pó-de-arroz e bebeu em largos goles, apertando os maxilares. Respirou de boca aberta. Dirigiu-se à preta.

– Quer?

– Tomei muita cerveja, se mistura dá ânsia.

A jovem despejou mais uísque no copo.

– Minha pintura não está derretendo? Veja se o verde dos olhos não borrou... Nunca transpirei tanto, sinto o sangue ferver.

– Você está bebendo demais. E nessa correria... Também não sei por que essa invenção de saiote bordado, as lantejoulas vão se desgrudar todas no aperto. E o pior é que não posso caprichar, com o pensamento no Raimundo lá na esquina...

– Você é chata, não, Lu? Mil vezes fica repetindo a mesma coisa, taque-taque-taque-taque! Esse cara não pode esperar um pouco?

A mulher não respondeu. Ouvia com expressão deliciada a música de um bloco que passava já longínquo. Cantorolou em falsete: Acabou chorando... acabou chorando...

– No outro carnaval entrei num bloco de sujos e me diverti à grande. Meu sapato até desmanchou de tanto que dancei.

– E eu na cama, podre de gripe, lembra? Neste quero me esbaldar.

– E seu pai?

Lentamente a jovem foi limpando no lenço as pontas dos dedos esbranquiçados de cola. Tomou um gole de uísque. Voltou a afundar o dedo no pote.

– Você quer que eu fique aqui chorando, não é isso que você quer? Quer que eu cubra a cabeça com cinza e fique de joelhos rezando, não é isso que você está querendo? – Ficou olhando para a ponta do dedo coberto de lantejoulas. Foi deixando no saiote o dedal cintilante. – Que é que eu posso fazer? Não sou Deus, sou? Então? Se ele está pior, que culpa tenho eu?

– Não estou dizendo que você é culpada, Tatisa. Não tenho nada com isso, ele é seu pai, não meu. Faça o que bem entender.

– Mas você começa a dizer que ele está morrendo!

– Pois está mesmo.

– Está nada! Também espiei, ele está dormindo, ninguém morre dormindo daquele jeito.

– Então não está.

A jovem foi até a janela e ofereceu a face ao céu roxo. Na calçada, um bando de meninos brincava com bisnagas de plástico em formato de banana, esguichando água um na cara do outro. Interromperam a brincadeira para vaiar um homem que passou vestido de mulher, pisando para fora nos sapatos de saltos altíssimos. “Minha lindura, vem comigo, minha lindura!” – gritou o moleque maior, correndo atrás do homem. Ela assistia à cena com indiferença. Puxou com força as meias presas aos elásticos do biquíni.

– Estou transpirando feito um cavalo. Juro que, se não tivesse me pintado, metia-me agora num chuveiro, besteira a gente se pintar antes.

– E eu não agüento mais de sede – resmungou a empregada, arregaçando as mangas do quimono. – Ai! uma cerveja bem geladinha. Gosto mesmo é de cerveja, mas o Raimundo prefere cachaça. No ano passado, ele ficou de porre os três dias, fui sozinha no desfile. Tinha um carro que foi o mais bonito de todos, representava um mar. Você precisava ver aquele monte de sereias enroladas em pérolas. Tinha pescador, tinha pirata, tinha polvo, tinha tudo! Bem lá em cima, dentro de uma concha abrindo e fechando a rainha do mar coberta de jóias...

– Você já se enganou uma vez – atalhou a jovem. – Ele não pode estar morrendo, não pode. Também estive lá antes de você, ele estava dormindo tão sossegado. E hoje cedo até me reconheceu, ficou me olhando, me olhando e depois sorriu. Você está bem, papai?, perguntei e ele não respondeu, mas vi que entendeu perfeitamente o que eu disse.

– Ele se fez de forte, coitado.

– De forte, como?

– Sabe que você tem os seu baile, não quer atrapaalhar.

– Ih, como é difícil conversar com gente ignorante – explodiu a jovem, atirando no chão as roupas amontoadas na cama. Revistou os bolsos de uma calça comprida. – Você pegou meu cigarro?

– Tenho minha marca, não preciso dos seus.

– Escuta, Luzinha, escuta – começou ela, ajeitando a flor na carapinha da mulher. – Eu não estou inventando, tenho certeza de que ainda hoje cedo ele me reconheceu. Acho que nessa hora sentiu alguma dor, porque uma lágrima foi escorrendo daquele lado paralisado. Nunca vi ele chorar daquele lado, nunca. Chorou só daquele lado, uma lágrima tão escura...

– Ele estava se despedindo.

– Lá vem você de novo, merda! Pare de bancar o corvo, até parece que você quer que seja hoje. Por que tem que repetir isso, por quê?

– Você mesma pergunta e não quer que eu responda. Não vou mentir, Tatisa.

A jovem espiou debaixo da cama. Puxou um pé de sapato. Agachou-se mais, roçando os cabelos verdes no chão. Levantou-se, olhou em redor. E foi-se ajoelhando devagarinho diante da preta. Apanhou o pote de cola.

– E se você desse um pulo lá só para ver?

– Mas você quer ou não que eu acabe isto? – a mulher gemeu exasperada, abrindo e fechando os dedos ressequidos de cola. – O Raimundo tem ódio de esperar, hoje ainda apanho!

A jovem levantou-se. Fungou, andando rápida num andar de bicho na jaula. Chutou um sapato que encontrou no caminho.

– Aquele médico miserável. Tudo culpa daquela bicha. Eu bem que disse que não podia ficar com ele aqui em casa, eu disse que não sei tratar de doente, não tenho jeito, não posso! Se você fosse boazinha, você me ajudava, mas você não passa de uma egoísta, uma chata que não quer saber de nada. Sua egoísta!

- Mas, Tatisa, ele não é meu pai, não tenho nada com isso, até que tenho ajudado muito, sim senhora, como não? Todos esses meses quem é que tem agüentado o tranco? Não me queixo, porque ele é muito bom, coitado. Mas tenha a santa paciência, hoje não! Até que estou fazendo muito aqui plantada quando devia estar na rua.

Com um gesto fatigado, a jovem abriu a porta do armário. Olhou-se no espelho. Beliscou a cintura. (...).

O espelho

Machado de Assis

Esboço de uma nova teoria da alma humana

Quatro ou cinco cavalheiros debatiam, uma noite, várias questões de alta transcendência, sem que a disparidade dos votos trouxesse a menor alteração aos espíritos. A casa ficava no morro de Santa Teresa, a sala era pequena, alumada a velas, cuja luz fundia-se misteriosamente com o luar que vinha de fora. Entre a cidade, com as suas agitações e aventuras, e o céu, em que as estrelas pestanejavam, através de uma atmosfera límpida e sossegada, estavam os nossos quatro ou cinco investigadores de coisas metafísicas, resolvendo amigavelmente os mais árduos problemas do universo.

Por que quatro ou cinco? Rigorosamente eram quatro os que falavam; mas, além deles, havia na sala um quinto personagem, calado, pensando, cochilando, cuja espórtula no debate não passava de um ou outro resmungo de aprovação. Esse homem tinha a mesma idade dos companheiros, entre quarenta e cinquenta anos, era provinciano, capitalista, inteligente, não sem instrução, e, ao que parece, astuto e cáustico. Não discutia nunca; e defendia-se da abstenção com um paradoxo, dizendo que a discussão é a forma polida do instinto batalhador, que jaz no homem, como uma herança bestial; e acrescentava que os serafins e os querubins não controvertiam nada, e, aliás, eram a perfeição espiritual e eterna. Como desse esta mesma resposta naquela noite, contestou-lha um dos presentes, e desafiou-o a demonstrar o que dizia, se era capaz. Jacobina (assim se chamava ele) refletiu um instante, e respondeu:

- Pensando bem, talvez o senhor tenha razão.

Vai senão quando, no meio da noite, sucedeu que este casmurro usou da palavra, e não dois ou três minutos, mas trinta ou quarenta. A conversa, em seus meandros, veio a cair na natureza da alma, ponto que dividiu radicalmente os quatro amigos. Cada cabeça, cada sentença; não só o acordo, mas a mesma discussão tornou-se difícil, senão impossível, pela multiplicidade das questões que se deduziram do tronco principal e um pouco, talvez, pela inconsistência dos pareceres. Um dos argumentadores pediu ao acobina alguma opinião, - uma conjectura, ao menos.

- Nem conjectura, nem opinião, redargüiu ele; uma ou outra pode dar lugar a dissentimento, e, como sabem, eu não discuto. Mas, se querem ouvir-me calados, posso contar-lhes um caso de minha vida, em que ressalta a mais clara demonstração acerca da matéria de que se trata. Em primeiro lugar, não há uma só alma, há duas...

- Duas?

- Nada menos de duas almas. Cada criatura humana traz duas almas consigo: uma que olha de dentro para fora, outra que olha de fora para entro... Espantem-se à vontade, podem ficar de boca aberta, dar de ombros, tudo; não admito réplica. Se me replicarem, acabo o charuto e vou dormir. A alma exterior pode ser um espírito, um fluido, um homem, muitos homens, um objeto, uma operação. Há casos, por exemplo, em que um simples botão de camisa é a alma exterior de uma pessoa; - e assim também a polca, o voltarete, um livro, uma máquina, um par de botas, uma cavatina, um tambor, etc. Está claro que o ofício dessa segunda alma é transmitir a vida, como a primeira; as duas completam o homem, que é, metafisicamente falando, uma laranja. Quem perde uma das metades, perde naturalmente metade da existência; e casos há, não raros, em que a perda da alma exterior implica a da existência inteira. Shylock, por exemplo. A alma exterior aquele judeu eram os seus ducados; perdê-los equivalia a morrer. "Nunca mais verei o meu ouro, diz ele a Tubal; *é um punhal que me enterras no coração.*" Vejam bem esta frase; a perda dos ducados, alma exterior, era a morte para ele. Agora, é preciso saber que a alma exterior não é sempre a mesma...

- Não?

- Não, senhor; muda de natureza e de estado. Não aludo a certas almas absorventes, como a pátria, com a qual disse o Camões que morria, e o poder, que foi a alma exterior de César e de Cromwell. São almas enérgicas e exclusivas; mas há outras, embora enérgicas, de natureza mudável. Há cavalheiros, por exemplo, cuja alma exterior, nos primeiros anos, foi um chocalho ou um cavallinho de pau, e mais tarde uma provedoria de irmandade, suponhamos. Pela minha parte, conheço uma senhora, - na verdade, gentilíssima, - que muda de alma exterior cinco, seis vezes por ano. Durante a estação lírica é a ópera; cessando a estação, a alma exterior substitui-se por outra: um concerto, um baile do Cassino, a rua do Ouvidor, Petrópolis...

- Perdão; essa senhora quem é?

- Essa senhora é parenta do diabo, e tem o mesmo nome; chama-se Legião... E assim outros mais casos. Eu mesmo tenho experimentado dessas trocas. Não as relato, porque iria longe; restrinjo-me ao episódio de que lhes falei. Um episódio dos meus vinte e cinco anos...

Os quatro companheiros, ansiosos de ouvir o caso prometido, esqueceram a controvérsia. Santa curiosidade! tu não és só a alma da civilização, és também o pomo da concórdia, fruta divina, de outro sabor que não aquele pomo da mitologia. A sala, até há pouco ruidosa de física e metafísica, é agora um mar morto; todos os olhos estão no Jacobina, que conserta a ponta do charuto, recolhendo as memórias. Eis aqui como ele começou a narração:

- Tinha vinte e cinco anos, era pobre, e acabava de ser nomeado alferes da Guarda Nacional. Não imaginam o acontecimento que isto foi em nossa casa. Minha mãe ficou tão orgulhosa! tão contente! Chamava-me o seu

alferes. Primos e tios, foi tudo uma alegria sincera e pura. Na vila, note-se bem, houve alguns despeitados; choro e ranger de dentes, como na Escritura; e o motivo não foi outro senão que o posto tinha muitos candidatos e que esses perderam. Suponho também que uma parte do desgosto foi inteiramente gratuita: nasceu da simples distinção. Lembra-me de alguns rapazes, que se davam comigo, e passaram a olhar-me de revés, durante algum tempo. Em compensação, tive muitas pessoas que ficaram satisfeitas com a nomeação; e a prova é que todo o fardamento me foi dado por amigos... Vai então uma das minhas tias, D. Marcolina, viúva do Capitão Peçanha, que morava a muitas léguas da vila, num sítio escuso e solitário, desejou ver-me, e pediu que fosse ter com ela e levasse a farda. Fui, acompanhado de um pajem, que daí a dias tornou à vila, porque a tia Marcolina, apenas me pilhou no sítio, escreveu a minha mãe dizendo que não me soltava antes de um mês, pelo menos. E abraçava-me! Chamava-me também o seu alferes. Achava-me um rapagão bonito. Como era um tanto patusca, chegou a confessar que tinha inveja da moça que houvesse de ser minha mulher. Jurava que em toda a província não havia outro que me pusesse o pé adiante. E sempre alferes; era alferes para cá, alferes para lá, alferes a toda a hora. Eu pedia-lhe que me chamasse Joãozinho, como dantes; e ela abanava a cabeça, bradando que não, que era o "senhor alferes". Um cunhado dela, irmão do finado Peçanha, que ali morava, não me chamava de outra maneira. Era o "senhor alferes", não por gracejo, mas a sério, e à vista dos escravos, que naturalmente foram pelo mesmo caminho. Na mesa tinha eu o melhor lugar, e era o primeiro servido. Não imaginam. Se lhes disser que o entusiasmo da tia Marcolina chegou ao ponto de mandar pôr no meu quarto um grande espelho, obra rica e magnífica, que destoava do resto da casa, cuja mobília era modesta e simples... Era um espelho que lhe dera a madrinha, e que esta herdara da mãe, que o comprara a uma das fidalgas vindas em 1808 com a corte de D. João VI. Não sei o que havia nisso de verdade; era a tradição. O espelho estava naturalmente muito velho; mas via-se-lhe ainda o ouro, comido em parte pelo tempo, uns delfins esculpidos nos ângulos superiores da moldura, uns enfeites de madrepérola e outros caprichos do artista. Tudo velho, mas bom...

- Espelho grande?

- Grande. E foi, como digo, uma enorme fineza, porque o espelho estava na sala; era a melhor peça da casa. Mas não houve forças que a demovessem do propósito; respondia que não fazia falta, que era só por algumas semanas, e finalmente que o "senhor alferes" merecia muito mais. O certo é que todas essas coisas, carinhos, atenções, obséquios, fizeram em mim uma transformação, que o natural sentimento da mocidade ajudou e completou. Imaginam, creio eu?

- Não.

- O alferes eliminou o homem. Durante alguns dias as duas naturezas equilibraram-se; mas não tardou que a primitiva cedesse à outra; ficou-me uma parte mínima de humanidade. Aconteceu então que a alma exterior, que era dantes o sol, o ar, o campo, os olhos das moças, mudou de natureza, e passou a ser a cortesia e os rapapés da casa, tudo o que me falava do posto, nada do que me falava do homem. A única parte do cidadão que ficou comigo foi aquela que entendia com o exercício da patente; a outra dispersou-se no ar e no passado. Custa-lhes acreditar, não?

- Custa-me até entender, respondeu um dos ouvintes.

- Vai entender. Os fatos explicarão melhor os sentimentos: os fatos são tudo. A melhor definição do amor não vale um beijo de moça namorada; e, se bem me lembro, um filósofo antigo demonstrou o movimento andando. Vamos aos fatos. Vamos ver como, ao tempo em que a consciência do homem se obliterava, a do alferes tornava-se viva e intensa. As dores humanas, as alegrias humanas, se eram só isso, mal obtinham de mim uma compaixão apática ou um sorriso de favor. No fim de três semanas, era outro, totalmente outro. Era exclusivamente alferes. Ora, um dia recebeu a tia Marcolina uma notícia grave; uma de suas filhas, casada com um lavrador residente dali a cinco léguas, estava mal e à morte. Adeus, sobrinho! adeus, alferes! Era mãe extremosa, armou logo uma viagem, pediu ao cunhado que fosse com ela, e a mim que tomasse conta do sítio. Creio que, se não fosse a aflição, disporia o contrário; deixaria o cunhado e iria comigo. Mas o certo é que fiquei só, com os poucos escravos da casa. Confesso-lhes que desde logo senti uma grande opressão, alguma coisa semelhante ao efeito de quatro paredes de um cárcere, subitamente levantadas em torno de mim. Era a alma exterior que se reduzia; estava agora limitada a alguns espíritos boçais. O alferes continuava a dominar em mim, embora a vida fosse menos intensa, e a consciência mais débil. Os escravos punham uma nota de humildade nas suas cortesias, que de certa maneira compensava a afeição dos parentes e a intimidade doméstica interrompida. Notei mesmo, naquela noite, que eles redobravam de respeito, de alegria, de protestos. Nhô alferes, de minuto a minuto; nhô alferes é muito bonito; nhô alferes há de ser coronel; nhô alferes há de casar com moça bonita, filha de general; um concerto de louvores e profecias, que me deixou extático. Ah! pérfidos! mal podia eu suspeitar a intenção secreta dos malvados.

- Matá-lo?

- Antes assim fosse.

- Coisa pior?

- Ouçam-me. Na manhã seguinte achei-me só. Os velhacos, seduzidos por outros, ou de movimento próprio, tinham resolvido fugir durante a noite; e assim fizeram. Achei-me só, sem mais ninguém, entre quatro paredes, diante do terreiro deserto e da roça abandonada. Nenhum fôlego humano. Corri a casa toda, a senzala, tudo; ninguém, um molequinho que fosse. Galos e galinhas tão-somente, um par de mulas, que filosofavam a vida, sacudindo as moscas, e três bois. Os mesmos cães foram levados pelos escravos. Nenhum ente humano. Parece-lhes que isto era melhor do que ter morrido? era pior. Não por medo; juro-lhes que não tinha medo; era um pouco atrevidinho, tanto que não senti nada, durante as primeiras horas. Fiquei triste por causa do dano causado à tia Marcolina; fiquei também um pouco perplexo, não sabendo se devia ir ter com ela, para lhe dar a triste notícia, ou ficar tomando conta da casa. Adotei o segundo alvitre, para não desamparar a casa, e porque, se a minha prima enferma estava mal, eu ia somente aumentar a dor da mãe, sem remédio nenhum; finalmente, esperei que o irmão do tio Peçanha voltasse naquele dia ou no outro, visto que tinha saído havia já trinta e seis horas. Mas a manhã passou sem vestígio dele; à

tarde comecei a sentir a sensação como de pessoa que houvesse perdido toda a ação nervosa, e não tivesse consciência da ação muscular. O irmão do tio Peçanha não voltou nesse dia, nem no outro, nem em toda aquela semana. Minha solidão tomou proporções enormes. Nunca os dias foram mais compridos, nunca o sol abraçou a terra com uma obstinação mais cansativa. As horas batiam de século a século no velho relógio da sala, cuja pêndula *tic-tac, tic-tac*, feria-me a alma interior, como um piparote contínuo da eternidade. Quando, muitos anos depois, li uma poesia americana, creio que de Longfellow, e topei este famoso estribilho: *Never, for ever! - For ever, never!* confesso-lhes que tive um calafrio: recordei-me daqueles dias medonhos. Era justamente assim que fazia o relógio da tia Marcolina: - *Never, for ever! - For ever, never!* Não eram golpes de pêndula, era um diálogo do abismo, um cochicho do nada. E então de noite! Não que a noite fosse mais silenciosa. O silêncio era o mesmo que de dia. Mas a noite era a sombra, era a solidão ainda mais estreita, ou mais larga. *Tic-tac, tic-tac*. Ninguém, nas salas, na varanda, nos corredores, no terreiro, ninguém em parte nenhuma... Riem-se?

- Sim, parece que tinha um pouco de medo.

- Oh! fora bom se eu pudesse ter medo! Viveria. Mas o característico daquela situação é que eu nem sequer podia ter medo, isto é, o medo vulgarmente entendido. Tinha uma sensação inexplicável. Era como um defunto andando, um sonâmbulo, um boneco mecânico. Dormindo, era outra coisa. O sono dava-me alívio, não pela razão comum de ser irmão da morte, mas por outra. Acho que posso explicar assim esse fenômeno: - o sono, eliminando a necessidade de uma alma exterior, deixava atuar a alma interior. Nos sonhos, fardava-me orgulhosamente, no meio da família e dos amigos, que me elogiavam o garbo, que me chamavam alferes; vinha um amigo de nossa casa, e prometia-me o posto de tenente, outro o de capitão ou major; e tudo isso fazia-me viver. Mas quando acordava, dia claro, esvaía-se com o sono a consciência do meu ser novo e único - porque a alma interior perdia a ação exclusiva, e ficava dependente da outra, que teimava em não tornar... Não tornava. Eu saía fora, a um lado e outro, a ver se descobria algum sinal de regresso. *Soeur Anne, soeur Anne, ne vois-tu rien venir?* Nada, coisa nenhuma; tal qual como na lenda francesa. Nada mais do que a poeira da estrada e o capinzal dos morros. Voltava para casa, nervoso, desesperado, estirava-me no canapé da sala. *Tic-tac, tic-tac*. Levantava-me, passeava, tamborilava nos vidros das janelas, assobiava. Em certa ocasião lembrei-me de escrever alguma coisa, um artigo político, um romance, uma ode; não escolhi nada definitivamente; sentei-me e tracei no papel algumas palavras e frases soltas, para intercalar no estilo. Mas o estilo, como tia Marcolina, deixava-se estar. *Soeur Anne, soeur Anne...* Coisa nenhuma. Quando muito via negrejar a tinta e alvejar o papel.

- Mas não comia?

- Comia mal, frutas, farinha, conservas, algumas raízes tostadas ao fogo, mas suportaria tudo alegremente, se não fora a terrível situação moral em que me achava. Recitava versos, discursos, trechos latinos, liras de Gonzaga, oitavas de Camões, décimas, uma antologia em trinta volumes. As vezes fazia ginástica; outra dava beliscões nas pernas; mas o efeito era só uma sensação física de dor ou de cansaço, e mais nada. Tudo silêncio, um silêncio vasto, enorme, infinito, apenas sublinhado pelo eterno *tic-tac* da pêndula. *Tic-tac, tic-tac...*

- Na verdade, era de enlouquecer.

- Vão ouvir coisa pior. Convém dizer-lhes que, desde que ficara só, não olhara uma só vez para o espelho. Não era abstenção deliberada, não tinha motivo; era um impulso inconsciente, um receio de achar-me um e dois, ao mesmo tempo, naquela casa solitária; e se tal explicação é verdadeira, nada prova melhor a contradição humana, porque no fim de oito dias deu-me na veneta de olhar para o espelho com o fim justamente de achar-me dois. Olhei e recuei. O próprio vidro parecia conjurado com o resto do universo; não me estampou a figura nítida e inteira, mas vaga, esfumada, difusa, sombra de sombra. A realidade das leis físicas não permite negar que o espelho reproduziu-me textualmente, com os mesmos contornos e feições; assim devia ter sido. Mas tal não foi a minha sensação. Então tive medo; atribuí o fenômeno à excitação nervosa em que andava; rezei ficar mais tempo, e enlouquecer. - Vou-me embora, disse comigo. E levantei o braço com gesto de mau humor, e ao mesmo tempo de decisão, olhando para o vidro; o gesto lá estava, mas disperso, esgaçado, mutilado... Entrei a vestir-me, murmurando comigo, tossindo sem tosse, sacudindo a roupa com estrépito, afligindo-me a frio com os botões, para dizer alguma coisa. De quando em quando, olhava furtivamente para o espelho; a imagem era a mesma difusão de linhas, a mesma decomposição de contornos... Continuei a vestir-me. Subitamente por uma inspiração inexplicável, por um impulso sem cálculo, lembrou-me... Se forem capazes de adivinhar qual foi a minha idéia...

- Diga.

- Estava a olhar para o vidro, com uma persistência de desesperado, contemplando as próprias feições derramadas

e inacabadas, uma nuvem de linhas soltas, informes, quando tive o pensamento... Não, não são capazes de adivinhar.

- Mas, diga, diga.

- Lembrou-me vestir a farda de alferes. Vesti-a, aprontei-me de todo; e, como estava defronte do espelho, levantei os olhos, e... não lhes digo nada; o vidro reproduziu então a figura integral; nenhuma linha de menos, nenhum contorno diverso; era eu mesmo, o alferes, que achava, enfim, a alma exterior. Essa alma ausente com a dona do sítio, dispersa e fugida com os escravos, ei-la recolhida no espelho. Imaginai um homem que, pouco a pouco, emerge de um letargo, abre os olhos sem ver, depois começa a ver, distingue as pessoas dos objetos, mas não conhece individualmente uns nem outros; enfim, sabe que este é Fulano, aquele é Sicrano; aqui está uma cadeira, ali um sofá. Tudo volta ao que era antes do sono. Assim foi comigo. Olhava para o espelho, ia de um lado para outro, recuava, gesticulava, sorria e o vidro exprimia tudo. Não era mais um autômato, era um ente animado. Daí em diante, fui outro. Cada dia, a uma certa hora, vestia-me de alferes, e sentava-me diante do espelho, lendo olhando, meditando; no fim de duas, três horas, despia-me outra vez. Com este regime pude atravessar mais seis dias de solidão sem os sentir...

Quando os outros voltaram a si, o narrador tinha descido as escadas.

Não sei dançar

Manuel Bandeira

Uns tomam éter, outros cocaína.
Eu já tomei tristeza, hoje tomo alegria.
Tenho todos os motivos menos um de ser triste.
Mas o cálculo das probabilidades é uma pilhéria...
Abaixo Amiel!
E nunca lerei o diário de Maria Bashkirtseff.

Sim, já perdi pai, mãe, irmãos.
Perdi a saúde também.
É por isso que sinto como ninguém o ritmo do jazz-band.

Uns tomam éter, outros cocaína.
Eu tomo alegria!
Eis aí por que vim assistir a este baile de terça-feira gorda.

Mistura muito excelente de chás...

Esta foi açafata...

— Não, foi arrumadeira.
E está dançando com o ex-prefeito municipal:
Tão Brasil!

De fato este salão de sangues misturados parece o Brasil...
Há até a fração incipiente amarela
Na figura de um japonês.
O japonês também dança maxixe:
Acugêlê banzai!

A filha do usineiro de Campos
Olha com repugnância
Para a crioula imoral.
No entanto o que faz a indecência da outra
É dengue nos olhos maravilhosos da moça.
E aquele cair de ombros...
Mas ela não sabe...
Tão Brasil!

Ninguém se lembra de política...
Nem dos oito mil quilômetros de costa...
O algodão do Seridó é o melhor do mundo?... Que me importa?
Não há malária nem moléstia de Chagas nem ancilóstomos.
A sereia sibila e o ganzá do jazz-band batuca.
Eu tomo alegria!

A Cyro Novaes

Há pouco leite no país,
é preciso entregá-lo cedo.
Há muita sede no país,
é preciso entregá-lo cedo.
Há no país uma lenda,
que ladrão se mata com tiro.

Então o moço que é leiteiro
de madrugada com sua lata
sai correndo e distribuindo
leite bom para gente ruim.
Sua lata, suas garrafas
e seus sapatos de borracha
vão dizendo aos homens no sono
que alguém acordou cedinho
e veio do último subúrbio
trazer o leite mais frio
e mais alvo da melhor vaca
para todos criarem força
na luta brava da cidade.

Na mão a garrafa branca
não tem tempo de dizer
as coisas que lhe atribuo
nem o moço leiteiro ignaro,
morados na Rua Namur,
empregado no entreposto,
com 21 anos de idade,
sabe lá o que seja impulso
de humana compreensão.
E já que tem pressa, o corpo
vai deixando à beira das casas
uma apenas mercadoria.

E como a porta dos fundos
também escondesse gente
que aspira ao pouco de leite
disponível em nosso tempo,
avancemos por esse beco,
peguemos o corredor,
depositemos o litro...
Sem fazer barulho, é claro,
que barulho nada resolve.

Meu leiteiro tão sutil
de passo maneiro e leve,
antes desliza que marcha.
É certo que algum rumor
sempre se faz: passo errado,
vaso de flor no caminho,
cão latindo por princípio,
ou um gato quizilento.
E há sempre um senhor que acorda,
resmunga e torna a dormir.

Mas este acordou em pânico
(ladrões infestam o bairro),
não quis saber de mais nada.
O revólver da gaveta
saltou para sua mão.
Ladrão? se pega com tiro.

Os tiros na madrugada
liquidaram meu leiteiro.
Se era noivo, se era virgem,
se era alegre, se era bom,
não sei,
é tarde para saber.

Mas o homem perdeu o sono
de todo, e fuge pra rua.
Meu Deus, matei um inocente.
Bala que mata gatuno
também serve pra furtar
a vida de nosso irmão.
Quem quiser que chame médico,
polícia não bota a mão
neste filho de meu pai.
Está salva a propriedade.
A noite geral prossegue,
a manhã custa a chegar,
mas o leiteiro
estatelado, ao relento,
perdeu a pressa que tinha.

Da garrafa estilhaçada,
no ladrilho já sereno
escorre uma coisa espessa
que é leite, sangue... não sei.
Por entre objetos confusos,
mal redimidos da noite,
duas cores se procuram,
suavemente se tocam,
amorosamente se enlaçam,
formando um terceiro tom
a que chamamos aurora.

O mito

Sequer conheço Fulana,
Vejo Fulana tão curto
Fulana jamais me vê,
Mas como amo Fulana.

Amarei mesmo Fulana?
Ou é ilusão de sexo?
Talvez a linha do busto,
Da perna, talvez o ombro.

Amo Fulana tão forte,
Amo Fulana tão dor,
Que todo me despedaço
E choro, menino, choro

Mas Fulana vai se rindo...
Vejam Fulana dançando
No esporte ele está sozinha
No bar, quão acompanhada.

E Fulana diz mistérios,
Diz marxismo, rimmel, gás.
Fulana me bombardeia,
No entanto sequer me vê.

E sequer nos compreendemos,
É dama de alta fidência,
Tem latifúndios, iates,
Sustenta cinco mil pobres,

Menos eu...que de orgulhoso
Me basto pensando nela
Pensando com unha, plasma,
Fúria, gilete, desânimo.

Amor tão disparatado,
Desbaratado é que é...
Nunca a sentei no meu colo
Nem vi pela fechadura.

Mas sei quanto me custa
Manter esse gelo digno,
Essa indiferença gaia, e não
gritar: vem, Fulana!

Como deixar de invadir
Sua casa de mil fechos
E sua veste arrancando
Mostrá-la depois ao povo

Tal como deve ser:
Branca, intata, neutra, rara,
Feita de pedra translúcida,
De ausência e ruivos ornatos.

Mas como será Fulana?
Digamos, no seu banheiro?
Só de pensar em seu corpo,
O meu se punge...pois sim.

Porque preciso do corpo
Para mendigar Fulana,
Rogar-lhe que pise em mim,
Que me maltrate...assim não.

Mas Fulana será gente?
Estará somente em ópera?
Será figura de livros?
Será bicho? saberei?

Não saberei? só pegando,
Pedindo: dona, desculpe,
O seu vestido, esconde algo?
Tem coxas reais? cintura?

Fulana às vezes existe
Demais: até me apavora.
Vou sozinho pela rua,
Eis que Fulana me roça.
(...)

Mas não quero nada disso.
Para que chatear Fulana?
Pancada na sua nuca
Na minha que vai doer.

E daí não sou criança
Fulana estuda meu rosto
Coitado: de raça branca
Tadinho: tinha gravata

Já morto, me quererá?
Esconjuro, se é necrófila...
Fulana é vida, ama as flores,
As artérias e as debêntures.

Sei que jamais me perdoara
Matar-me para servi-la.
Fulana quer homens fortes
Couraçados, invasores.

Fulana é tão dinâmica
Tem um motor na barriga.
Suas unhas são elétricas,
Seus beijos refrigerados,

Desinfetados, gravados
Em máquina multilite.
Fulana, como é sadia!
Os enfermos somos nós.

Sou eu, o poeta precário
Que fez de Fulana um mito
Nutrindo-me de Petrarca,
Ronsard, Camões e capim;

Que a sei embebida em leite,
Carne, tomate, ginástica
E lhe colo metafísicas,
Enigmas, causas primeiras.

Mas, se tentasse construir
Outra Fulana que não
Essa de burguês sorriso
E de tão burro esplendor?

Mudo-lhe o nome: recorto-lhe
Um traje de transparência;

Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Já perde a carência humana
E bato-a; de tirar sangue.

E lhe dou todas as faces
De meu sonho que especula;
E abolimos a cidade
Já sem peso e nitidez.

E vadeamos a ciência,
Mar de hipóteses. a Lua
Fica sendo nosso esquema
De um território mais justo.

E colocamos os dados
De um mundo sem classe e
imposto;
E nesse mundo instalamos
Os nossos irmãos vingados:

E nessa fase gloriosa,
De contradições extintas,
Eu e Fulana, abrasados,
Queremos...que mais queremos?

E digo a Fulana: amiga,
Afinal nos compreendemos.
Já não sofro, já não brilhas,
Mas somos a mesma coisa

(uma coisa tão diversa da que
pensava que fossemos.)

Alba

Vinícius de Moraes

Alba, no canteiro dos lírios estão caídas as pétalas de uma rosa cor de sangue
Que tristeza esta vida, minha amiga...
Lembras-te quando vínhamos na tarde roxa e eles jaziam puros
E houve um grande amor no nosso coração pela morte distante?
Ontem, Alba, sofri porque vi subitamente a nódoa rubra entre a carne pálida ferida
Eu vinha passando tão calmo, Alba, tão longe da angústia, tão suavizado
Quando a visão daquela flor gloriosa matando a serenidade dos lírios entrou em mim
E eu senti correr em meu corpo palpitações desordenadas de luxúria.
Eu sofri, minha amiga, porque aquela rosa me trouxe a lembrança do teu sexo que eu não via
Sob a lívida pureza da tua pele aveludada e calma
Eu sofri porque de repente senti o vento e vi que estava nu e ardente
E porque era teu corpo dormindo que existia diante de meus olhos.
Como poderias me perdoar, minha amiga, se soubesses que me aproximei da flor como um
perdido
E a tive desfolhada entre minhas mãos nervosas e senti escorrer de mim o sêmen da minha
volúpia?
Ela está lá, Alba, sobre o canteiro dos lírios, desfeita e cor de sangue
Que destino nas coisas, minha amiga!
Lembras-te, quando eram só os lírios altos e puros?
Hoje eles continuam misteriosamente vivendo, altos e trêmulos
Mas a pureza fugiu dos lírios como o último suspiro dos moribundos
Ficaram apenas as pétalas da rosa, vivas e rubras como a tua lembrança
Ficou o vento que soprou nas minhas faces e a terra que eu segurei nas minhas mãos.

Soneto de devoção

Vinícius de Moraes

Essa mulher que se arremessa, fria
E lúbrica aos meus braços, e nos seios
Me arrebatava e me beija e balbucia
Versos, votos de amor e nomes feios.

Essa mulher, flor de melancolia
Que se ri dos meus pálidos receios
A única entre todas a quem dei
Os carinhos que nunca a outra daria.

Essa mulher que a cada amor proclama
A miséria e a grandeza de quem ama
E guarda a marca dos meus dentes nela.

Essa mulher é um mundo! – uma cadela
Talvez... – mas na moldura de uma cama
Nunca mulher nenhuma foi tão bela!