



Bound by Blood, Broken by Burden: an Account of Devotion, Duty, and Disintegration in Franz Kafka's *the Metamorphosis*

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Abstract

Franz Kafka's the Metamorphosis presents a poignant exploration of duty, devotion, and the gradual disintegration of familial bonds through the life of Gregor Samsa. This paper interprets Gregor's transformation not simply as a physical change but as a symbolic extension of his alienated existence as the self-sacrificing provider of the Samsa family. Prior to his metamorphosis, Gregor dutifully endures an exhausting occupation to repay his father's debts and secure his family's comfort, while secretly nurturing aspirations for his sister Grete's future. Even after his transformation, Gregor's emotional devotion remains unchanged, and Grete initially responds with remarkable empathy by caring for him, providing food, and protecting him from complete exclusion. Her actions reflect a profound sibling bond that persists despite fear and uncertainty. However, as the family's financial condition worsens, external pressures increase, and their domestic space is shared with lodgers, Gregor's presence begins to disrupt everyday life and social order. The terror experienced by the lodgers upon encountering Gregor intensifies the family's sense of shame and inconvenience. Gradually, Gregor is perceived less as a family member and more as a burden, whose existence threatens stability and survival. This shift culminates in the family's desire to free themselves from him, underscoring Kafka's critique of relationships strained by utility, obligation, and social conformity.

Keywords: The Metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa, Grete, Identity, Familial duty, Transformation.

Introduction

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* presents a profound exploration of family relationships tested under extreme circumstances, where affection, responsibility, and obligation are placed under relentless pressure. The novella narrates the sudden transformation of Gregor Samsa into an insect-like creature, but the narrative extends far beyond physical change to examine the emotional and moral dynamics within the Samsa household. Gregor's metamorphosis disrupts not only his ability to function as the family's sole breadwinner but also the fragile balance that sustains familial bonds. What emerges is a gradual shift from dependence on Gregor's devotion to a growing perception of him as a burden, a transition that exposes the limits of familial duty.

Burdened Devotion and the Unmaking of Family Bonds

In the opening section of *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa attempts to suppress the shock of his physical transformation by diverting his mind toward habitual, ordinary concerns¹. Rather than reacting with panic, he looks out of the window at the dull weather and comforts himself with the thought, "How about if I sleep a little bit longer and forget all this nonsense?" This desire to return to sleep reflects Gregor's refusal—or inability—to

confront the reality of his altered body. His instinctive response is not fear of his monstrous form but anxiety about routine disruption. Even after realizing that his body has become unmanageable, Gregor's thoughts repeatedly turn toward his profession, revealing deep dissatisfaction with his work. He laments, "Oh God," he thought, "what a strenuous career it is that I've chosen!" and reflects bitterly on a life of constant travelling, irregular meals, and impersonal human contact. Kafka emphasizes that Gregor's sense of entrapment predates his metamorphosis; his alienation is psychological before it becomes physical. His concern about missing trains and displeasing his employer—"If I didn't have my parents to think about, I'd have given in my notice a long time ago" demonstrates how duty has suppressed his personal desires. Thus, Gregor's attempt to forget his bodily change by focusing on work highlights how thoroughly his identity has been consumed by professional obligation and self-denial.

Gregor Samsa's desire to escape his dehumanising occupation is clearly articulated even before he fully confronts the grotesque transformation of his body. Kafka presents Gregor's inner monologue as deeply preoccupied with work, debt, and time, suggesting that his psychological imprisonment predates his physical metamorphosis². Gregor consoles himself with the thought that his present suffering is temporary and that liberation is possible only after fulfilling his familial duty. He

resolves to endure his oppressive job until he has repaid his parents' debt to his employer, reflecting a life governed by obligation rather than personal will. As Gregor thinks, "once I've got the money together to pay off my parents' debt to him—another five or six years I suppose—that's definitely what I'll do. That's when I'll make the big change". This statement reveals that even Gregor's hope for freedom is postponed and conditional, reinforcing the idea that his identity has been reduced to that of a financial instrument.

Significantly, Gregor attempts to suppress the horror of his bodily change by redirecting his thoughts toward routine matters of work and travel. His immediate concern is not his transformation but the possibility of missing his train, which indicates how deeply his professional obligations dominate his consciousness. The sudden realization that he has overslept intensifies his anxiety: "And he looked over at the alarm clock, ticking on the chest of drawers. 'God in Heaven!' he thought. It was half past six". The ticking clock becomes a symbol of mechanical time governing Gregor's life, a force more alarming to him than his monstrous body. His panic is heightened by the fact that the alarm had been set correctly, yet he failed to hear it, suggesting a breakdown between human intention and bodily response.

Gregor's thoughts quickly turn to the consequences of his lateness, especially the reaction of the office assistant, who functions as an extension of the employer's authority. Even if Gregor were to catch a later train, he realises that surveillance and reporting are inevitable: "even if he did catch the train he would not avoid his boss's anger as the office assistant would have been there to see the five o'clock train go". The office assistant is described as "the boss's man, spineless, and with no understanding", a portrayal that underlines the impersonal and oppressive nature of bureaucratic power. Gregor's fear is not merely of being late, but of being misrepresented and judged without sympathy.

When Gregor considers reporting himself sick, he immediately dismisses the idea, recognising that such a claim would appear suspicious given his unblemished work record: "in fifteen years of service Gregor had never once yet been ill". Kafka here exposes the cruelty of a system that penalises consistency and denies human vulnerability. Gregor even imagines the doctor accusing his parents of raising a "lazy son," revealing how professional failure threatens not only his own dignity but also his family's social standing. Ironically, despite his transformation, Gregor feels "completely well and even felt much hungrier than usual", emphasising the absurd contrast between his physical condition and his psychological subservience to work.

Thus, it illustrates that Gregor's metamorphosis is less shocking than his unquestioning submission to duty. His longing to forget his altered body by focusing on work schedules, debt repayment, and official scrutiny reveals that his true entrapment

lies in economic responsibility and institutional control. Kafka uses Gregor's anxiety over the alarm clock and the office assistant to critique a modern system in which time, labour, and authority erase individuality long before any literal transformation occurs.

In the early moments following his awakening, Gregor Samsa attempts to console himself by directing his gaze outward, as if the external world might restore a sense of normalcy. Kafka notes that Gregor repeatedly looks through the window, hoping that the stillness outside might "bring things back to their real and natural state". This act of looking outward reflects Gregor's psychological denial of his bodily transformation and his desire to cling to routine. Rather than surrendering to despair, he forces himself to think pragmatically, reminding himself that he must get out of bed before it is too late for work. His anxiety about punctuality dominates his thoughts as he resolves, "Before it strikes quarter past seven I'll definitely have got properly out of bed". Despite the difficulty posed by his transformed body, Gregor carefully plans his movements, fearing that a loud fall might alarm his family. His concern is not injury but the noise he might cause, revealing his continued sense of responsibility. Kafka describes how Gregor experiments with a new method of movement, rocking himself gently so as to descend quietly, hoping to avoid disturbance. These painstaking efforts underscore Gregor's determination to prepare for his job, demonstrating that his sense of duty remains intact even when his physical condition renders such devotion tragic and futile.

The entry of the Chief Clerk signifies the sudden extension of workplace authority into Gregor's domestic life, heightening his anxiety and sense of obligation. Bloom describes how Gregor immediately recognizes the visitor through his formal manner of speaking and realizes that it is "the chief clerk himself", reflecting the company's strict supervision. Grete offers quiet assistance by whispering, "Gregor, the chief clerk is here", thus alerting him without causing further disturbance³. At the same time, Gregor's parents repeatedly call out to him from outside the room, urging him to respond and explain his failure to leave for work. His father's firm reminder that the Chief Clerk has come to inquire about his absence reinforces the pressure of duty and accountability. This episode demonstrates how Gregor is confronted simultaneously by professional demands and familial expectations at a moment of personal crisis.

Kafka presents Gregor Samsa's unwavering sense of duty under intense professional pressure, even in a moment of profound physical distress⁴. The chief clerk firmly refuses to consider the possibility of leave, asserting that absence from work cannot be justified and hinting that Gregor's conduct has already attracted suspicion. This insistence transforms the domestic space into an extension of the workplace, where accountability and obedience are demanded without regard for personal limitation. As the confrontation continues, Gregor repeatedly attempts to reassure the Chief Clerk by minimizing his condition, claiming that he is "only slightly unwell, an attack of dizziness, I haven't been able

to get up” and promising to return to work immediately. His anxiety is not directed toward his condition but toward preserving his role as a dependable employee. Gregor goes so far as to promise that he will catch the eight o’clock train, demonstrating his willingness to force himself into compliance despite extreme difficulty. Finally his painful effort to stand upright and support himself against the furniture reveals the physical cost of such devotion. This sequence underscores how Gregor’s identity remains tied to duty and responsibility even after his transformation, a commitment that initially earns concern from his sister and parents but gradually contributes to the family’s perception of him as an impediment to their stability—thus aligning with the paper’s central argument on devotion and eventual familial breakdown.

This progression reveals how Gregor’s sense of duty persists beyond his physical change, yet as his presence disrupts the family’s routine and economic balance, slowly gives way to rejection.

Grete’s response reveals a shift from practical assistance to anxious concern as she becomes alarmed by the sound of Gregor’s voice. When Gregor attempts to speak, his words emerge in a distorted form, prompting the Chief Clerk to remark that it was “the voice of an animal” rather than that of a human being. Grete, however, interprets this change not as deliberate defiance but as a sign of serious illness. Disturbed by what she hears, she immediately suggests seeking medical help, asking whether a doctor ought not to be called. Her reaction demonstrates an effort to understand Gregor’s condition through care and remedy rather than accusation. At this moment, Gregor’s altered voice becomes the first undeniable indication for the family that his condition extends beyond ordinary sickness. Yet Grete’s instinctive turn toward medical intervention shows that, even as his humanity is questioned by others, her response remains guided by concern and responsibility.

Gregor makes a conscious effort to regulate his behaviour in ways that might reassure his family and prevent them from feeling distressed. Although his speech is no longer intelligible to others, he himself believes that his words are becoming “clearer than before,” which leads him to conclude that “there was something wrong with him, and they were ready to help”. In response to this realization, Gregor attempts to imitate human gestures, even coughing “carefully,” taking pains not to do so “too loudly,” as he wishes his voice to resemble that of “a human cough”. This deliberate self-control reflects his persistent concern for his parents’ emotional state rather than his own physical suffering.

Gregor’s devotion is further evident in his painstaking attempt to unlock the door using the key held in his mouth. Fully aware that he lacks “proper teeth,” he nevertheless persists, relying on “a very strong jaw” to turn the key, despite injuring himself in the process. His effort is marked by endurance rather than

complaint, as he continues even while a “brown fluid came from his mouth” and dripped onto the floor. Importantly, his motivation is not escape but reassurance: by opening the door himself, he seeks to prevent panic and shield his parents from fear. These actions demonstrate that even after his physical transformation, Gregor’s primary impulse remains protective and self-sacrificial, rooted in responsibility toward his family rather than self-preservation.

When the door is finally opened, the visual revelation of Gregor’s transformed body produces immediate and sharply contrasting reactions among those present. The chief clerk responds with instinctive shock, uttering a loud “Oh!,” a sound likened to “the sougning of the wind,” before retreating abruptly. His reaction reflects fear and professional withdrawal, as he presses his hand to his mouth and steadily moves away, “as if driven by some steady and invisible force”. Gregor’s father reacts with visible hostility and agitation; he clenches his fists “as if wanting to knock Gregor back into his room,” his posture suggesting aggression rather than comprehension. In contrast, Gregor’s mother collapses in shock, sinking to the floor with her face buried in her skirts, while his father turns away, covering his eyes and weeping, his “powerful chest” shaking.

Amid these responses, Gregor himself remains cautious and restrained. He does not advance into the room but instead stays partially concealed, leaning against the inside of the door so that “only half of his body could be seen”. This deliberate positioning reveals his awareness of the distress his appearance causes and his attempt to reduce its impact. Even at the moment of exposure, Gregor chooses restraint over assertion, responding not with movement or sound but with physical limitation, signalling his continued concern for his family’s emotional endurance rather than his own condition.

Gregor delivers a long, anxious address to the Chief Clerk that reveals how deeply his sense of duty has been shaped by the demands of his profession. Even after his physical transformation, his thoughts remain fixed on work, responsibility, and justification. He insists that he is “not stubborn” and that he genuinely wishes “to do my job,” emphasising that life as a commercial traveller is “arduous” yet unavoidable, since “without travelling I couldn’t earn my living”. His speech exposes a mind trained to defend productivity at all costs, as he pleads for temporary understanding while promising renewed diligence once the difficulty passes. Gregor further explains the pressures faced by travelling employees, noting that they are constantly subject to “gossip and groundless complaints” and denied any real chance to defend themselves. This defence of travellers is not merely professional but personal; it reflects his internal need to validate the sacrifices he has made for his family’s financial stability. Mentally, Gregor appears caught between physical incapacity and an ingrained work ethic, attempting to reason his way back into acceptance through explanation rather than resistance. His

speech thus reveals a consciousness still governed by obligation, where devotion to work and family overrides even the recognition of his own altered condition.

When Gregor's mother finally confronts his transformed appearance, her reaction is marked by intense nervous shock and physical disorientation. Initially, she appears momentarily detached, "quite engrossed in herself," but the moment recognition sets in, her composure collapses entirely. She suddenly springs forward "with her arms outstretched and her fingers spread, shouting: 'Help, for pity's sake, Help!'" Her gestures suggest an instinctive maternal impulse, yet her fear overwhelms her ability to approach or comprehend him. The text further emphasises her panic through her uncontrolled movements, as she retreats blindly, forgetting "that the table was behind her with all the breakfast things on it," and sits down abruptly while coffee spills across the carpet. Gregor's reaction to his mother's distress is deeply emotional and protective rather than self-centred. Addressing her gently, he says, "Mother, mother," revealing his continued filial concern despite his altered form. He is momentarily so affected by her agitation that he "had completely forgotten the chief clerk," indicating that his primary anxiety lies with his mother's well-being rather than external authority. However, his involuntary physical response—snapping his jaws at the sight of flowing coffee—only heightens her terror, causing her to scream again and flee into the arms of Gregor's father. This scene poignantly captures the tragic gap between Gregor's inner intentions and the fear his presence provokes, especially in his mother, whose nervous collapse underscores the emotional strain imposed by his condition.

During the late hours of the night, Gregor becomes a silent observer of his family's quiet domestic contentment, a scene that deeply affects his inner consciousness. Through the crack of the door, he notices that the gas has been lit in the living room and that his family has settled into a calm routine, engaged in reading and subdued conversation. His father reads the evening paper aloud, while his mother and sister listen attentively, creating an atmosphere of order and mutual comfort. This scene leads Gregor to reflect on his former role within the household, and he experiences a profound sense of satisfaction in realizing that he had once been able to provide such a life for them. He thinks "What a quiet life it is the family lead" and feels "great pride" in having secured a peaceful home for his parents and sister, one marked by stability and modest happiness. However, this sense of fulfillment is immediately shadowed by anxiety about the future. Gregor questions how long this harmony can endure and wonders whether the present peace might lead to "a horrible and frightening end". Unwilling to dwell excessively on these thoughts, he attempts to distract himself by crawling restlessly around the room. This moment reveals Gregor's enduring emotional attachment to his family, as well as his deep concern for their well-being, even when he can no longer actively participate in their lives.

Grete's concern for Gregor is most clearly expressed through her attentive and thoughtful provision of food, which marks her attempt to understand his altered needs rather than impose her own assumptions. When she notices that the milk—once Gregor's favourite—remains untouched, she does not react with irritation but quietly removes the dish, "using a rag, not her bare hands," suggesting both caution and continued responsibility. Determined to discover what might suit him, she later brings a wide variety of food items, arranging them carefully on an old newspaper "in order to test his taste". Her selection includes decayed vegetables, scraps, cheese, and leftovers, reflecting her willingness to adapt to Gregor's transformed appetite rather than withdraw her care. Gregor responds with intense curiosity and gratitude, imagining "the wildest possibilities" of what she might bring, a reaction that reveals his emotional dependence on her kindness. He eagerly consumes the cheese and spoiled food, noting with surprise that these attract him "much more than the other foods," while the fresh items repel him. Even while eating, he remains conscious of her comfort, retreating under the couch when she turns the key in the lock so that she may feel at ease. This episode underscores Grete's sustained devotion and Gregor's sensitive awareness of her efforts, highlighting a relationship still grounded in care and mutual consideration despite his changed condition.

Grete's care for Gregor subtly takes the form of small, considerate verbal gestures, which reveals her continued emotional attentiveness. After observing whether Gregor had eaten his food or left it untouched, she would sometimes offer a quiet, reassuring remark such as "He's enjoyed his dinner today" when he had eaten well, or, with subdued sadness, "now everything's just been left there again" when he had not. These comments, though spoken indirectly and without entering his room, function as signs of recognition and concern, acknowledging Gregor's presence and needs even in his altered condition.

Gregor, though unable to respond verbally, derives a deep sense of contentment from these remarks. Kafka notes that although he could not hear every word clearly, he listened carefully to what was said in the next room, and whenever he sensed someone speaking about him, he would press his whole body against the door, attentive and responsive in his own way. These moments bring him quiet satisfaction, as they affirm that he is still noticed and gently cared for. The simple act of being spoken of kindly allows Gregor to feel momentarily reassured, reinforcing his emotional bond with his sister and sustaining his patience and endurance within the household.

In the aftermath of Gregor's transformation, Kafka presents the Samsa household as a space marked by mutual, restrained concern, where family members attempt to console one another through small domestic gestures⁵. Gregor observes that during mealtimes, family members repeatedly urged each other to eat, only to receive quiet refusals such as "No thanks, I've had enough", indicating not indifference but shared emotional

exhaustion. These exchanges reveal a subdued effort at reassurance, as if the act of encouraging food intake could momentarily restore normalcy amid crisis. Grete's occasional offers—such as asking her father whether he would like a beer—further emphasize her role as an emotional mediator, attempting to sustain familial stability through care and attentiveness.

Despite his isolation, Gregor remains deeply emotionally invested in his parents and sister. Listening from behind the door, he follows their conversations with intense attention, pressing himself against it whenever his name or situation is mentioned, deriving quiet comfort from being included in their concerns. His thoughts frequently turn to the past, when his labor had ensured the family's financial comfort, and to his enduring affection for Grete. Gregor harbors a secret plan to send his sister to the conservatory, recognizing her musical talent and hoping to secure her future, even at great personal cost. This unspoken intention underscores the strength of his familial devotion, particularly his protective bond with his sister.

A moment of guarded relief emerges when Gregor learns that some money still remains from his father's earlier business savings. Kafka notes that these funds, though modest, had been left untouched and supplemented by accrued interest, offering Gregor a brief sense of reassurance that his family is not entirely destitute. This realization temporarily alleviates his anxiety, reinforcing his enduring concern for his parents' well-being even in his diminished state. Collectively, these moments foreground the novel's persistent emphasis on familial bonds sustained through silent care, sacrifice, and emotional attentiveness, even as physical and communicative barriers grow increasingly insurmountable.

Gregor's brief sense of reassurance on learning that some money had been saved soon gives way to renewed anxiety when he realizes the limits of that security. Initially, he responds with quiet satisfaction, noting with approval the family's "unexpected thrift and caution" and even reflecting that this surplus might earlier have helped reduce his father's debt and freed him from his exhausting employment. However, this comfort is quickly unsettled when Gregor understands that the money was "certainly not enough to enable the family to live off the interest" and could sustain them "perhaps, one or two years, no more". This realization marks a turning point in his emotional state, as relief gives way to worry over the family's future.

Gregor's thoughts then move anxiously toward the possibility of his parents and sister being forced into labor⁶. His concern for his mother is particularly pronounced, as he reflects on her fragile health, recalling that she "suffered from asthma" and that even moving about the house caused her visible strain. The idea that she might now have to earn money deeply troubles him, revealing Gregor's continued sense of responsibility toward her

well-being. His worry extends to Grete as well; he is pained by the thought that his young sister, "still a child of seventeen," might be compelled to abandon her modest pleasures and musical pursuits in order to support the household. Whenever such discussions arise, Gregor reacts physically and emotionally, withdrawing in shame and distress, throwing himself onto the sofa as he becomes "quite hot with shame and regret". These responses underscore Gregor's enduring familial concern, showing that even when confined to silence, his thoughts remain bound to the economic and emotional security of those he loves.

With Gregor confined to his room, Grete gradually assumes responsibilities that mark her movement into adult duty, while the parents, though deeply disturbed by Gregor's transformed state, continue to seek knowledge of his condition indirectly. Kafka notes that for the first fourteen days, Gregor's parents "could not bring themselves to come into the room to see him," yet they waited anxiously outside while Grete attended to him, asking her afterward "how everything looked, what Gregor had eaten, how he had behaved this time, and whether, perhaps, any slight improvement" had occurred. This mediated concern reflects both fear and parental attachment, as the parents rely entirely on their daughter's care and reports. Grete's role is now openly acknowledged and appreciated; the parents speak of "all the new work his sister was doing," despite having earlier regarded her as "somewhat useless", indicating a shift in familial roles brought about by necessity.

As Grete manages both household duties and work outside, Gregor becomes increasingly confined to empty hours. To avoid distressing his family and with little stimulation left to him, he begins to move restlessly within his room. Kafka records that, lacking any other occupation, Gregor "got into the habit of crawling up and down the walls and the ceiling," finding this movement preferable to lying still on the floor. This repetitive motion serves as a means of passing time rather than pleasure, underscoring the monotony of his days. Even so, Gregor's thoughts remain closely tied to his family, revealing that while his physical existence has altered, his sense of familial concern continues to shape his inner life.

The attempt by Gregor's mother and sister to clear his room reflects not neglect but a conflicted form of care shaped by concern for his altered bodily needs. Before allowing her mother to enter, Grete carefully ensures that Gregor is hidden from sight, assuring her mother, "You can come in, he can't be seen", thus protecting both Gregor and her mother from distress. The physical labor itself further reveals Grete's devotion, as she undertakes "the heaviest part of the work for herself," disregarding her mother's warnings that she might strain herself. This effort is motivated by the belief that removing furniture would give Gregor more space to move freely, yet it simultaneously raises fears about what such removal might signify emotionally.

The mother voices a deep anxiety that stripping the room of its familiar objects would suggest abandonment rather than care. She argues that seeing the room emptied would make Gregor feel that they had “given up all hope of improvement” and were “abandoning him to cope for himself,” insisting instead that the room remain unchanged so that when he recovers, “he’ll find everything unchanged” and be able to forget the intervening period more easily⁷. These words reveal a persistent hope for Gregor’s recovery and a refusal to accept his condition as permanent. Gregor himself is deeply affected by this conversation, realizing that the prolonged lack of direct communication and the altered domestic routine have confused his own desires, making him momentarily unsure whether he truly wished the room to be emptied.

The transformation exposes a fractured identity in which Gregor remains mentally human but socially and physically erased⁸. Grete, however, gradually assumes the role of decision-maker, acting as Gregor’s “spokesman to his parents” and insisting on removing most of the furniture except the couch, convinced that Gregor “needed a lot of room to crawl about”. This disagreement between mother and sister captures two distinct expressions of love: the mother’s attachment to familiarity as a sign of hope, and the sister’s practical concern for Gregor’s present condition. Together, their conversation and actions underscore a familial bond sustained by care, hope, and emotional struggle, even as the household adapts to circumstances it does not yet fully accept.

When Grete notices Gregor clinging to the wall, her first response is not rejection but controlled urgency, shaped by her concern for her mother’s fragile state. Kafka records that Grete’s eyes “met those of Gregor on the wall,” and though she remains outwardly composed, her awareness of the danger this sight poses to her mother is immediate. Rather than reacting impulsively, Grete quickly redirects her attention toward her mother, attempting to prevent her from turning around and witnessing Gregor’s form. She places herself physically between them, “spread out her arms” and faces her mother, a gesture that simultaneously shields Gregor from exposure and protects her mother from shock.

Grete then takes decisive action to remove her mother from the room altogether. She urges her gently but firmly to leave, guiding her toward the adjoining room, as the text notes that she “led her mother to the other room” so that she would not be forced to confront Gregor’s presence. This act reflects Grete’s double responsibility: she is mindful of her mother’s emotional limits while also safeguarding her brother from being seen in a state that might provoke fear or distress.

The mother’s reaction underscores the tension of the moment; upon partially grasping the situation, she becomes visibly shaken, crying out “Oh God, oh God!” and collapsing onto the couch, which further confirms Grete’s fears about her vulnerability. Even at this moment, Grete continues to manage

the crisis, calling out to Gregor by name—“Gregor!”—not in anger, but as an instinctive appeal to restraint. Her actions throughout the episode reveal a sustained bond rooted in care and responsibility, as she navigates the space between parental protection and sibling devotion with remarkable presence of mind. Even at this moment, Grete continues to manage the crisis, calling out to Gregor by name—“Gregor!”—not in anger, but as an instinctive appeal to restraint. Her actions throughout the episode reveal a sustained bond rooted in care and responsibility, as she navigates the space between parental protection and sibling devotion with remarkable presence of mind.

When Gregor’s altered body becomes visible during the removal of furniture, his mother’s response is immediate and physical, revealing the intensity of her emotional shock. Unable to reconcile the familiar image of her son with his transformed appearance, she collapses. Kafka records that she “fell onto the couch as if she had given up everything”, indicating a moment where maternal affection is overwhelmed by sudden horror. Her fainting underscores the fragile boundary between recognition and fear, as the sight of Gregor proves unbearable to her senses.

At this critical moment, Grete assumes responsibility, carefully managing the situation to protect her mother. She supports her physically and attempts to move her out of the room, acting with urgency and composure. Kafka notes that Grete “stepped to one side, saw the enormous brown patch against the flowers of the wallpaper, and before she could cry out ‘Oh God!’ her mother had already collapsed”. Despite her own fear, Grete prioritizes her mother’s safety, revealing her dual devotion to both parent and brother.

The father’s entrance marks a decisive shift in atmosphere. Confronted with the scene, he responds not with tenderness but with authority and force, interpreting Gregor’s presence as a threat. His reaction signals an increasing emotional distance, as he moves to drive Gregor back into his room, reinforcing a dynamic of fear and control rather than understanding.

When Gregor’s father enters the room and witnesses the disturbance caused by his son’s presence, his response is marked by authority, suppressed rage, and defensive urgency. Kafka describes him as advancing toward Gregor “with a look of determination” and lifting his feet “unusually high”, a physical posture that conveys not only control but also hostility. His uniform, freshly worn, reinforces his reclaimed role as the family’s provider, a role now threatened by Gregor’s continued existence within the domestic space.

The father’s anger culminates in an act of sudden violence. Kafka records that he “had filled his pockets with fruit from the bowl on the sideboard and now, without even taking the time for careful aim, threw one apple after another” at Gregor. The apples function symbolically as tools of expulsion. They are not thrown merely to injure but to force Gregor back into

confinement, away from the shared family space that he is now perceived to disrupt. One apple strikes Gregor and becomes embedded in his body, where it “lodged firmly in his back”, marking a moment where paternal authority turns into lasting harm.

The motivation behind this act lies in the father’s fear and frustration. Gregor’s presence threatens order, routine, and the family’s fragile stability—especially at a time when they are struggling to adjust to new responsibilities and external pressures. The father’s violence thus reflects an emotional state shaped by anxiety, resentment, and the belief that strictness is necessary to restore control. Through this act, Kafka illustrates how familial duty, once borne by Gregor, is now redirected against him, transforming protection into punishment.

As Gregor’s condition continues, his father’s growing resentment surfaces not only through actions but also through words that openly register his disappointment with life itself. Kafka records a moment when the father, exhausted and embittered by the family’s altered circumstances, exclaims, “What a life!”, a brief but revealing utterance that condenses his frustration with the relentless demands now imposed upon him. This expression emerges in the context of physical fatigue, economic pressure, and the unsettling presence of Gregor’s altered body, which has rendered the father’s former security impossible. The father’s anger is thus not merely personal but existential, directed at a life that has forced him back into labor and responsibility. His inability to look upon Gregor without distress is closely tied to this bitterness, as the transformed body of his son stands as a constant reminder of loss—loss of stability, authority, and peace within the household. The father’s words, sharp and dismissive, reveal a mind weighed down by resentment and fear, where disappointment with circumstances translates into emotional hardness toward Gregor. In this way, Kafka presents paternal anger as an outcome of sustained pressure, where care gives way to reproach, and life itself becomes something to be endured rather than lived.

After Gregor’s transformation, the responsibility of earning shifts forcefully onto the other members of the family, marking a reluctant but necessary change in their domestic roles. Kafka records that “his mother sacrificed herself by washing clothes for strangers, his sister ran back and forth behind her desk at the behest of the customers”, while Gregor’s father, who had earlier remained inactive, returns to work and even brings “bank employees” into the household. This collective engagement in labour reflects a household driven by economic pressure rather than personal choice. Simultaneously, Gregor continues to suffer intense physical pain, as “the injury in Gregor’s back began to hurt as much as when it was new”, suggesting a sustained condition of bodily distress. Yet, despite this suffering, Gregor’s consciousness remains oriented toward responsibility and care. He momentarily imagines “taking over the family’s affairs, just like before”, revealing that his sense of duty survives even when his physical capacity has collapsed.

This contrast between his enduring intention and his increasing incapacity highlights the tragic imbalance between inner resolve and external reality within the narrative.

Grete’s emotional response to her parents’ handling of Gregor’s room reveals the depth of her concern for her brother and her growing sense of responsibility toward his fragile condition. When Gregor’s mother attempts to clean the room thoroughly using “several bucketfuls of water,” the act unintentionally worsens Gregor’s suffering, leaving him “ill” and “bitter and immobile”. Grete immediately perceives the harmful consequences of this well-intentioned act and reacts with visible agitation. Kafka notes that she “noticed the change in Gregor’s room and, highly aggrieved, ran back into the living room”, where her emotional outburst underscores her protective instinct. Her anger is not rooted in defiance but in care, as she understands that excessive cleaning threatens Gregor’s already weakened state. Even when her father accuses her of neglecting her duty and insists that she should resume cleaning the room, Grete “screamed at her mother that she was never to clean Gregor’s room again”. This firm resistance signifies her exclusive claim over Gregor’s care and her insistence on shielding him from further physical harm. Through Grete’s reaction, Kafka presents her as the family member most attuned to Gregor’s needs, whose anger emerges directly from empathy and concern rather than hostility.

Gregor’s sister continues to approach him with a mixture of concern, tenderness, and emotional exhaustion, revealing the persistence of her affection even as his condition worsens. Despite being “exhausted from going out to work, and looking after Gregor,” she does not withdraw from him but remains attentive to his presence and needs. When she looks at Gregor, her reaction is not one of cruelty but of strained compassion, as she still attempts to communicate with him. Kafka notes that she would open the door slightly and speak to him in what she “probably considered friendly” words, calling out, “Come on then, you old dung-beetle!”. Though her language appears casual and even dismissive on the surface, it reflects familiarity rather than rejection, suggesting her effort to maintain a bond with her brother. However, Gregor remains unresponsive; he “responded to being spoken to in that way, but just remained where he was without moving,” as if human communication no longer reaches him. This failure of response marks a crucial stage in his isolation. Alongside this emotional withdrawal, Gregor’s physical condition also declines significantly. Kafka observes that Gregor “had almost entirely stopped eating,” and even when food was placed near him, he would merely play with it or spit it out again. His refusal of nourishment symbolizes his loss of will to survive and his growing detachment from life itself. Thus, while his sister’s actions continue to reflect care and lingering love, Gregor’s silence and self-neglect indicate the irreversible deterioration brought about by his transformation⁹.

As the financial burden of the household intensifies, Gregor’s family takes the decisive step of renting out one of their rooms

to three gentlemen, a move that reflects their growing dependence on external means for survival. Kafka notes that “one of the rooms in the flat had been rented out to three gentlemen,” all of whom were “serious people” and deeply concerned with order and cleanliness. Their presence transforms the domestic space into a commercial one, where economic necessity overrides emotional comfort. The family’s purpose in renting the room is clearly financial, as the income generated by the lodgers becomes essential to sustaining the household after Gregor’s incapacity. The gentlemen demand strict discipline, insisting on tidiness not only in their rented room but throughout the entire flat, as “unnecessary clutter was something they could not tolerate”. Consequently, Gregor’s room is reduced to a storage space for discarded household items, symbolizing his further displacement within his own home. Their entry also alters the family’s daily routine; the living room becomes a shared space where the lodgers take their evening meals, seated at the table where Gregor once belonged as an active family member. Thus, the renting of the room serves a dual purpose: it ensures financial stability for the family while simultaneously marking Gregor’s complete exclusion from familial and social life, reinforcing his silent erasure from the household structure. Gregor’s suffering reflects a broader existential condition in which human worth is measured solely through productivity and usefulness¹⁰.

During the episode of the violin performance, Gregor’s sister plays music not out of personal joy but to satisfy the three tenants, whose presence in the house represents the family’s growing dependence on external approval and income. Kafka describes how she played “so beautifully,” her face marked by “a melancholy expression,” indicating emotional exhaustion rather than artistic fulfilment. Gregor, deeply moved by her music, is drawn out of his room, believing that the sound offers him a rare emotional nourishment. He wonders whether he is “an animal, that music could captivate him so,” and feels compelled to show his gratitude and affection by imagining his sister entering his room so that he might finally express what he had long suppressed: that he had “intended to send her to the conservatory” and wished to reward her devotion with recognition and closeness. His desire to “kiss her neck” is not suggestive but symbolic of profound sibling affection and gratitude. However, this moment of emotional intensity is abruptly disrupted when the tenants notice Gregor’s presence. One of them angrily declares, “I hereby declare here and now that I give immediate notice,” citing the “repugnant conditions” of the household. Gregor’s father hastily intervenes, attempting to shield the tenants from Gregor’s sight and force him back into his room, prioritizing the family’s financial survival over Gregor’s emotional need. In this scene, Gregor’s attempt to express love and recognition toward his sister results instead in further rejection, as his presence becomes a liability. The episode marks a turning point where Gregor’s silent devotion is no longer merely ignored but actively threatens the household’s stability, reinforcing the shift from familial care to calculated necessity.

Gregor’s family’s conversation clearly marks the breaking point of their emotional bond with him, as love gives way to fear and self-preservation. His sister, who once cared for him, now speaks decisively against him, saying, “We have to try and get rid of it”, and firmly denying his identity by declaring, “If he were Gregor, he would have gone away of his own free will”. Through these words, she completely rejects Gregor’s humanity and justifies his removal as necessary for the family’s survival. She further exaggerates the threat posed by him, crying in panic, “This animal is persecuting us... it wants to take over the whole flat and force us to sleep on the streets”. The father, though less aggressive, shows helpless acceptance when he asks, “What are we to do?”, indicating his surrender to the idea of getting rid of Gregor. Even the mother remains silent and powerless, unable to oppose the decision. The repeated use of the word “it” instead of Gregor’s name shows that he is no longer seen as a son or brother. This conversation symbolizes the complete disintegration of the family, as emotional bonds collapse and Gregor is finally rejected both emotionally and morally by his own family. Some critics interpret Gregor’s transformation as a projection of his unconscious psyche shaped by deep psychological conflicts rooted in familial authority and guilt¹¹.

Conclusion

Gregor’s death brings the narrative to a quiet close where duty, devotion, and familial bonds intersect in silence rather than conflict. From the beginning, Gregor’s life is defined by his sense of responsibility; even after his transformation, his first thoughts are not of himself but of his parents’ comfort and his sister’s future. Bound by blood, he continues to endure pain and isolation in order to protect his family from fear and hardship. In the early stages of his transformation, this bond is reciprocated—his sister feeds him, his mother worries for him, and the family attempts, however imperfectly, to adjust to his altered existence. Love, though strained, remains present in their cautious gestures and anxious concern. Yet as time passes, exhaustion, fear, and practical realities slowly reshape these emotions. Gregor’s increasing weakness mirrors the gradual fading of familial closeness, not through cruelty, but through human limitation. When Gregor finally retreats into his room and dies quietly during the night, his death is first noticed by the charwoman, marking how completely he has withdrawn from family life. The family’s reaction is one of solemn relief rather than celebration, suggesting release from a prolonged suffering shared by all. In the calm that follows, the Samsas step into the light of a new morning, carrying forward the memory of Gregor’s sacrifice¹². Thus, *The Metamorphosis* closes not with bitterness, but with the tragic beauty of a bond forged in blood—one that begins in devotion, endures through suffering, and ends in silent understanding.

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