

The Metamorphosis

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Franz Kafka

Must-Read Classics

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When Gregor Samsa woke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous verminous creature. He lay on his hard, armor-plated back, and when he raised his head a little, he could see his rounded brown abdomen, divided into rigid, arching segments. The bedspread perched precariously on top of it, barely keeping itself from sliding off altogether. His many legs, pitifully thin in comparison with the rest of his bulk, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened to me?” he thought.

It was no dream. His room—a proper human bedroom, though somewhat too small—lay peacefully within its four familiar walls. Above the table, where a collection of fabric samples had been unpacked and spread out—Samsa was a traveling salesman—hung a picture he had recently cut from an illustrated magazine and placed in a handsome gilded frame. It showed a lady sitting upright, dressed in a fur hat and fur boa, holding out toward the viewer a heavy fur muff into which her entire forearm had disappeared.

Gregor’s gaze shifted toward the window, and the gloomy weather—the sound of raindrops striking the metal sill could be heard—filled him with melancholy.

“What if I went back to sleep for a little while,” he thought, “and forgot all this nonsense?”

But that was completely impossible. He was used to sleeping on his right side, and in his present condition he could not turn himself into that position. No matter how forcefully he threw himself to the right, he always rocked back onto his hard shell. He must have tried a hundred times, closing his eyes so that he would not have to see his legs flailing about, and he stopped only when he began to feel a faint, dull pain in his side, unlike anything he had ever felt before.

“Oh God,” he thought, “what an exhausting profession I’ve chosen. Traveling day in, day out. The strain of doing business on the road is far worse than working at the office itself, and on top of that there is the torment of travel—the anxiety over train connections, the irregular and miserable meals, the constant