

THE WANDERER BY FRANZ KAFKA

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Translated by
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As Gregor Samsa wandered dishevelled from Morgens to Traumen, distracted and sick since reaching Bett, he came unexpectedly to Ungeziefer. Before long the beating of his rotten heart, restless and weary, jumped and skipped unexpectedly, swollen, bunched, – for a ghoulish figure emerged beckoning him back to see this sick joke – Betty lying there. He stood gazing at the frosty aspect straight out of the night’s end. Sensing violence, in his veins there sang a kind of dull clanging, that flitted through the hillfog towards Augen.

“What is that slightest murmur?” he thought doubtfully. The war had reached Traum. Since summer, the rich man (for that he was) would hear no mention of summer, but would rush here and there, like a world-weary trick. In spite of disapproval, an attempted pact was brought together in Tuchwaren, to broach the war, – Samsa the war tourist – was built, as is the curse of those written up by the illustrated dailies, like a husband, golden haired beneath his Rahmen hat. The stole his lady donned, with a pelt and borders of ermine, danced into a pigskin pelt-muff, in whose gaze wonder was untamed, but the kiss was gagged.

Gregor’s pen sat waiting on the window ledge, the refill barely damp, but recalling regicide, lying across the window latch, soaked in a pool of it’s own melancholy ink. ‘We were there, when night awaited the waterfowl and all the other nocturnal fauna’ he had scribbled as the war slipped under the antenna, it was left wanting from a right to laugh, to the time when, giggling, the night sunk into the lake. A muddy craft suctioned out of the swamp right up to the wharf, and with a shudder stuck to the boards. It was true that it was world-weary, stuck in that mud, with the light of it’s eyes now gumming with mucus, and listless while this night confused it, moss-like, a dampening mist from which all this began.

‘God!’ she said, ‘this fur is strangling the ruff I’m wearing! Typical. Each time it’s the same. The light pales without fail, all is broken in the house, and afterwards it is simply that disease, The Plague of Jokers, that is left, morbid in their saccharine-ity, unremittingly slapped for trying, when either a face-slap or a pinched arse has neither the last word or a chance of working. A foil on those holes!’ A fault in the lights jerked him off the bench; biscuits from his bag languished, neither nibbled-at nor crushed into a corner. That joking star from which laughter punched this war, died in the night by the blue-patterned wash-stand. And what about that Good Star bastard, from whom glints dappled? They’d be wrung-out, unwet from a cold shower.

A glint wider than the lady Seine struck across the lake. ‘The luck of dice and fruit machines stops’ he told her, ‘without any bloodsucking gain. The mind needs protection from that wind. You can take it back or lighten it with the company of harems. When I double-speak, laughing and vomiting by the swing-bridge, then my language exits through a trapdoor, whether citizens or gods, men are truly stuck. There’s only one thing I ask of my superior; that I may flee to the stars. Wherever it takes me, this night will be good for my understanding. Might I not take a miner’s cart over that bridge by lamplight, for I have long fingers, and I know my superior hates me and wants rid of my digging the ground where he gets his wisdom. I’ll pull my hat on before I fall amongst thieves! It is such a solitary Art, that donning a Stetson to redden angel’s faces with laughter’s heresy, the unsteady cart must annihilate the continuing heresies of the superior’s sworn secret. No, the offering this night is not gagging on a promise. I might be as a gelded animal, should the lantern splutter out – this hard night might dry my eyes –, it might yet unbed me. That word becomes a flea market. Flogging anything I can steal, as if my ears can’t hear my arse!’

And with that he turned on his heels, and threw away his ticket. “He’s a plate-licker!” he rasped between clenched teeth. It was half seven when the flame-haired twin finally rang, only half past, and

she was already sick of having fun. Was it only the other night she was off her head? Man, that Betty was out of it, completely blotto in spite of the war; and with that hat glued to her head. Yep, war might be maudlin, disease unstoppable, but would she let that ruin her fun? Nope, a ruined hat that night would be laughable, and warmongering could go to rot. Was all this loneliness a dumb joke? Time for the next tasteless pull of gin and lemon; and then falling into that hole, hat and sick spinning beneath the smoke, and the war collection not yet fully spent, and herself full and sick, lurching amongst the spilled fish and chips. And when finally she was bought to a stop, it was by a chef's special kebab, uneaten, with the stick still through it, happily waiting for the morning, and some cleaning vehicle to come along. This war was the creation of chefs, for rats and vermin. Where now, when her illness cranked into a headache? What was almost as painful and disgusting, was that Gregor was having his fun with those night dentists and wise vets. Given the word the Boss might come begrudgingly to kiss her arse, a word that might enlighten this fallen lonely wife and turns that alley that winds behind the church into the highway that absolves unwilling arse-kissers, for though it is only her hiccups that sound, they turn arabesques in her mind. And the hat that fell from that bridge – was that right? Gregor thought it was, even when a long scarf worked it's way into the freezing river, the wool and soggy hat bouncing away as one and feeding the river's hunger.

Everything dies, everything washes up on that gross island, and only such sleep comes, as Betty now knew – gliding sluggishly through the dirty water – clumping and shifting in the tow, the stoolpigeon sees Betty, 'Gregor' it's everywhere – this mother killing war 'it's diverted over there. Will it wedge there overnight?' Die, sainted stream! Gregor shrieked, but something stopped his cry mid-stream, the words undone without so much as a breath, what an aberration, with such attention to her, a night where underwear, smeared lipstick a peeping mist, the words were neither formed on those reddened lips or in her duty-bound belief, that something was cunningly hidden in that neckscarf, and what was worse, had to be recovered along with

the hat. Gregor had long known that hats were waterproof but that all woollen products would shrink if left standing soaking, he said ‘yes, yes, thank you mother, I’ve been well taught.’ Hidden in a holster on the veranda of Gregor’s room, was a length of pure unblemished wool, which his mother had bequeathed him should such an eventuality occur. Since time in memoriam, cleaning clothing had been his family’s trade, tirelessly ridding the world of marks, but Gregor’s world had been widened by this war, and he had dropped the science of his father, slopped it out with the dirty water with the careless ease of Faust. ‘Gregor, Gregor’ they grieved of him ‘What, then?’ And never again would a cleaning pail dirty his hand with tepid stale water. “Gregor, Gregor!’ And a hand steeped in the knowledge of the claggy ooze of soap water. ‘Gregor? Are you not well? Have you a fever?’ now asked to sit with him, Gregor interrupted, ‘I’ve been secretly going to school’, and with a smile, since he had learned Austrian, and could, in that tongue, switch from the Polish language any word including his name. His father cared so much for this foolish rebel, that his answer was flustered. ‘Gregor, march off, I beg you’. Gregor was given that night, the gift of leaving, which sounding still in his ears as reason overcame want, he turned from the house and headed into the night on his Vesper.

His knowledge of wool, of colour-running and of shrinkage stayed with him, so firmly was it all stuck, that he thought now ‘from this whitest of washes, there’s a stain on the wool’ – Betty’s world was now a dark night and that a kind of snuffing out signalled that the end had finally come. Her ermine drenched, and with no shoes, in Betty was now engendered the sudden halting of age, and at the same time an exuding of light, a light smeared with the profundity of having been, of having outstayed the welcome, of having left the building, and wearing her war-paint, slid from the prison of the river into heights of the starry vortex. Now began the wandering through the still nights of the war, all but forbidden by any vehicle, but like a crazed travel agent bereft of her mind, she took flight from the night’s garrison.

The deck of cards had absolved the war of its selfish gain; it bought

with it such a blaze of victory and self-confidence. But a truer word for it would be ashen, freewill had been blown asunder rather than just undermined by this blazing war. The hat, now waved high in the air, was like some kind of sick victory sign; the hat's design that could never be restored to its former beauty, utterly broken, an absurdity that no one would consider wearing, a bearskin coconut. And that wool that was plucked live from an animal, what was left there, damp and so stretched? And so long it seemed endless, with these snags that unravel it, what used to be wool, was now so arbitrarily entangled everywhere, and terribly smeared with riverweed, and mud. 'That Betty should have been stopped on such a night like this' thought Gregor, sick with wisdom.

He gathered the woollens and with them turned tail again, and leaving Betty's body thought to return to his house, and as he turned, there under the bridge that night, clasping the hat, there came from him such a wretched moan as no man can, other than when his very soul bewails; he cried so long, from that archway, fast with water, but dumbly he was reminded of his craft, he put on the water-drenched rucksack, filled with the hat and remains of the scarf, tugged Betty's cold unburied body from the mud, and heaving it, it sunk into the current, then floated, belly up, the ward of the undertow's will, till luck or fate would have the body found.

But truth is stranger, and Betty also now left her body, and landed straight into the living body of the policeman Bertrand. Death belongs to light, and trotted here bright and breezy, forgetting the slippery dead bodyweight, in exchange for this wedding to the cop. But all the cop really noticed ultimately from Betty hijacking his veins and heart, was a kind of angst, which after some wise contemplation when such nonsense is laid to rest, he began to wonder if it might have been that gherkin, which the cop had not realised was over-salty. So busying himself dutifully, the guard justly, and with keen precision, lay around aimlessly; lay around not knowing that in him Betty now lived.

After all, weirder things have happened from the frozen tips of the

Muhe Glacier so clogged with fruit, to the strange tales that have wagged a good French poodle, argued with a gaggle of geese, or pampered the fat lapping cat, in these things are sensible rules and order brought to light, and it was with just such a breadth of wisdom, that the disembodied Betty lived on, coming and going like the seven seas, so open and with the cleanest of breezes kissing it, this weirdness befriended Betty. Slipping across the glassy night a question-mark hung over her running, and much better than just feeling it's way tentatively, also criss-crossed, running and running, leg over leg. And in just a blink of the eye, as if caught by a splinter on a fence, the town of Augen was made to lick it's mortal wounds by the victors, and slumped it the sight of their straining engines, halted, and went shivering and muttering to their holes, 'Soon it will be ours' they said as a nuclear bomb levelled and wrecked the town, 'Soon it will be ours and not theirs on any level', and as a long time passed ruined by that restless atom, all was lit up as by a volley from a gun, frozen in the weirdness of that work, and stood utterly alone, halted.

Then muttering, wise and sick, " It's all upside-down; that slag! I must unmake the bed that Betty left dischevelled. In a single word everything that was demanded was so bloody common, not just bits of it, but to the bloody word was carefully mapped-out." And like a machete given to a sick nun, the cop gazed into himself standing still for a long time, hoping to catch a glimpse while Betty hid within him. When the sickness of the sense that Betty had fallen into him had left the cop, like the fallen scarf of heavy wool, he was overtaken by a voracious hunger. That rocky road from his heart to his belly; those words would be the downfall of these typical nightshifts. The fat deckhand handed him a rucksack from the bobbing craft, and he was then given mustard and a limp sandwich filled with something tough that might be chicken, like some dour Borghese, without even a word. The very mustard could string together more words.

Gregor shone a half-light onto those rags of Betty's – this new method that was more talk than tested, but bought forth from the rucksack a shaking –, he felt it in him, though others were not aware, like when

a man is half dreaming. This stark light – given to him by his father and the Dye-masters – was of high-standing genius; it highlighted where the arm went through the straps of the rucksack, just as Betty had used, such that the last creases and blots stuck from where it was worn, dabbed on the underside of the whole length of the hand luggage, where the hot light bleached sin into words. Nothing, other than wild guesswork, could turn such things up. Had this work-and-a-half ruffled something? Footprints would be unknown here, or be so dank that a likeness could not be undertaken.

So far so good, that in spite of the stark shock that the frozen night had held, and so bad must be the sickness that no final guilt is hidden, that the war ached to overturn it's minute fun, – everyone got a standing ovation. 'That's typical of those fuckers', ready, get-set, and go fast, and where it ends they neither know nor give a flying jump. In the blink of an eye all is still 'You don't often see that' second guesses Gregor, irregularly banging out an unsung offering. It seems natural that teeth will fester when schrapneling toffee and nugat. Gregor bought neither the testy Grubwort or leeches that whore and writhe, this was war – he would self-proscribe. Where would Gregor be dazed by vertigo, might it be on terra firma, or might it be on cloudy Vesuvius's gushing gobs and fabled ash? When all anger is the same as lumpen thought, talking is then some kind of truancy begat by men, there, when nothing but a couple of morning shafts of light have snuffed out the night, where will wisdom nourish words and gestures that instead of war, Betty might re-appear? A good night is a working night, and a lecherous youth could not frighten that girl – when upset by fragmentary war news –, should the judge come himself, and gather to church the unschooled children that are the wards of this visiting family, and in a low singing voice decry the verdant angels on high that encircle the judge and count his words? And more is unfolded in this error, in which Gregor dumps these superlative rhymes, to embrace again those righteous sluice gates, that swing and stick with all their might against Betty. It is said that she's a lousy slag, as if that's a little light that shines through a crack in the night. The

winning word 'Fall' was a triple word score, and like the elastic on the rucksack, Gregor had it, and when it came to his turn, he was so elated that he crashed it down on the board, The cop had neither hate nor the inclination to halt his genius, and slapped him on the shoulder; and to the left and right of him was tepid with silver and glitz.

'You've spilled your drink' said the Judge in the golf cart. Gregor sucked at the sickly dregs, oblivious that such maliciousness from the Judge was only a passing comment, which hurt him; a cat with dusty musk, men say, eagerly licks the rubbish bin. But the anti-stain on his trousers meant this spill matters nothing, but the judge in the cart had scraped his best under-par, and left the rest of the field abandoned. From the right of the cart fluttered his so'wester, and Gregor stood on it. 'Gregor, the Judge is your father'. 'Allergy wipe' thought Gregor in spite of him. What a lout, this is the so'wester that was this hour cleaned, pressed, steamed and de-haired.

'Gregor' said the father now from the golf cart 'The Judge has come here and beckoning his finger thus, warns you not to go to the frozen extremities. This winter night was where he came to know sadness. Everyone will mistakenly omit their personal statement. And also bite off more than they can chew. The world order's summer school will shine with good habits. 'Good morning, Mr Samsa' tries the Judge with a friendly dazzling white grin 'I'm not well' the Judge then mutters, wherein the water surged and the tide receded, 'I'm not well in spite of my title Judge. With what words this Gregor sings a short verse! The panama I stole from that cop is broken. I can argue this much quickly, and there is no turning back; just as the doctor suffers from his own specialism, so judges bring their errors home. You sit in judgement tutting and lying with all the excitement of a long-haul test-flight. And soon it's string-him-up, when and where with a lamb-to-the-slaughter dismissal. That which was once so bespoke of life now abandons its cleanliness for grubbiness. The words cease, the hush is all; the hung man drains of colour; the words he was saying catch in his throat, this Gregor is out-matched. I am above all lucky, despite my sinning, in my judging errors. We're all in it

together Gregor, don't deny it, so keep detouring; it is so heartbreaking; and blessed is he who is not well, and stamping on them as if it was as casual as tipping your hat good morning.' 'I'm come unstuck' languishing bedridden and ruined by such negativity, at the unkind words of the old man. 'And in addition, while you knit your brow, can I make one more thing clear' said the Judge, 'Usually it is not taken seriously. When I make such mistakes, wise men must, like a shaft of light, willingly lie like an arse-licker, lie so unwholesomely that these arse-licking shitters are fucked by their own flatulence' 'And can the Judge shine from his behind?' a parting in the robes of the father, and a cloven hoof is revealed on the turf. 'Nay' thought Gregor. The golf cart crossed the green as straight as a ruled line, and from the cart tears began to shred the so'wester.

Is it possible to wear gingham and denim without a so'wester? If wire wool was a joke, then even Betty could stand with a cocked hat garnished with a grin of angel's teeth. Where did that warm wind come from? Might there be a stand-off, here in this distant war, between the Judge without a hairline, and the postman whose virility and health even the Chief of the Postal Service can't deny with his carefully folded forged words? Wearing such a fig-leaf would not go unnoticed. Now Gregor was here, like a gangster on a dark night to avenge his family. In the blink of an eye, his will felt tepid, and numbed, as if he couldn't reach his hat from a hat-stand, though it truly was his hat, and this was when the Judge struck. From the wagon came an unholy clanging, and light splattered out subliminal words, words Gregor knew in his gut, like a stuffed chicken. And Gregor shines, like the tiger burning bright, in the forests of the night, as if he was wine red-dening in the stores. And now he was washed out, wet and bedraggled as a benevolent school teacher.

'Mr Samsa' whispered the Judge, hampered by a stammer, 'What is there to loose? Barricaded in this golf-cart, no word can blot you with a yes or no, much less a swearword, your dampness will go unnoticed and poets, who will never be wanting, will here in a shaft of golden light, praise you with unbridled wisdom. I speak here in the Eternal

Names of the Gods who biting the hands that feed them , declare their duty. I know, I know. I went about it all in a rush, snuffing out people you knew, and not caring that the plot would thicken, as that barren moon paraded. The chief duty I had was to free up a little clarity in those poets so they would betray an inner cursory glance with their inky verses –, but once I'd quickly read every word for them, those Larks wouldn't even suffer me. Now here I am grief-stricken, starlight and truth has crumbled to lust, without as much as a simile for my trouble. And now the very stars are choking on this festering night. I must lance this abscess, so that veins flow again with wisdom until there are so many nuggets of my Vision scattered amongst their verses, and well I might, for it is not warm here among the fallen. The tungsten light coming from those letters was also friendless; it was not a holy light, but made a dull shaft that seemed to darken. Unlike a holy light, this shaft of light was not just glib and upperty, Mr Samsa, but it was dark as night.'

'Calm down, Judge' said Gregor feeling sick and glassy and summoning all his courage, 'I've made that mistake , often enough. The lights don't shine, the wind falls, like so much exhaust fumes from behind. I am not pledged just to Betty. I have been fishing with a wider net. Oh, I would always stick with Betty. But I'm not some kind of gelded cuckold! It was never that good when I was with her. It was more like shearing wool. It's not worth mentioning how far you can fall! But I've not put on so much weight, my alternative wit is still here, I smell better, and you'd never guess I'd had a colonic irrigation. Man has more than you must say. Where would I be if not screwing some beauty! Other men deny this to themselves, but these men die crazy with a lust that defies words. Judge! Shine your light! For all it's worth, this is not just macho, it is the very ground; man has more devotion than words can say. If you let this outrage you, the die is cast, nothing less! Take comfort, not in those distant thunderclouds that rise up, but on that steady road where there is much traffic. Stop for the night, Mr Judge; I have caught myself on the gearstick, and have seen the good, and the wisdom, which the Gods have emphasised!'

Wherein all of Gregor's hastily mustered comely words, once spoken, had no sooner left, but were enfolded in wool in Betty's long-blocked ears, cast like an unheard and silent nun, while he was so outspoken. The wool tickled the aforementioned ear, tickled it so much that the girl must talk to the Judge; it came from afar, was whispered, just enough to reach him, a silence pricked by a wise word. A word that, had it been shouted, would have been a kind of warning to Gregor, and sent him running. But the word was all a rushing whisper, and skimming just above the ground, made a beeline to tickle the ear of the cloven-hoofed one. That tiniest blip that would barely register on the flat eardrum, especially one that had so recently allowed such an endless gabble to accost it; after this attack of unbridled schmooze it could take no more, so much was it ringing. Those lies had gagged those ruined ears where now silence fell, fooled by recurring echoes. Damn that long and wordy silence that broke those ears, the Judge could hear nothing now.

'Have you not understood a word? The Judge snapped from his reverie to suggest 'Maybe a cotton-bud would help?' 'God's dick' he was answered in a drunken mutter, 'it is cantankerous to swear, but we're well qualified. Great, Great!' creid the damned man. "what are you muttering?" he answered pulling the so'wester from the passenger seat. And then Gregor stood up unsteadily in the golf-cart. 'You must be an arse-licker! Gregor is mad! A rash on that arse. Has Gregor just blushed like a whore?' 'That was a tear stain' said the Judge, muffling this gibberish from a shriek to a mutter. 'No. No!' comforted the Judge as he clumsily forced the cart into gear, and took the matter into hand, ' So much for loosing that hole!' and so lightening the way with the madman curled up on the seat rocking, he drove the cart onwards – why had such a south-westerly wind so suddenly agitated? – it had ripped the canopy off. Man, this was not the time to make a tour of the lake; it was normally so calm, but now it was woe-fully phlegmatic, dense with gross slapping waves.

Gregor was able to pull a veil over those words. Man can also take an oath that not a single word more would trot out of him, and it be-

came clearer and clearer that the distant, but encroaching war, hid in its folds a terrible warning. And while immersed in his doubts, the man withdrew, and to him it seemed not an ordinary war, but a war that would help – even benefit him. The shivering and nausea got better now, and a north-easterly wind blew away those weary words, and treated him well. This fullness was emboldened in his crazed mind, and lifted by its bidding, made an art of its own loss, and only gently now it slid, groping and uncertain towards a light. Now for the first time, his conversation became dumbness like a cat had got his tongue, hushed it had gone, everything mute, and that which had his tongue, had cat-like taken this silence and pulled it underwater to further hush its racket, so now its own silence could no longer be heard. That ridiculous cart was awash with the stillness of words. The light from the Judge's lamp began to spit and splutter, a lamplight that played on the tyres as they ground to a halt.

Gregor sobbed a long while after the tyres settled, and fell asleep, comforted by tyre's relief, and by such fresh air –that even a balloon can't attain after take-off, and he slept a sleep that was as long as a blink and short as forever. Then with a start and a jerk he awoke, a world of drool and slobber under his chin. He wiped, dabbed, and cleaned urgently as best he could – had he vomited or retched when he was fast asleep? – after dabbing with a handkerchief, he felt rawly freshened. Feeling half recovered and almost working, in that sleep had begun an uncertain headache, such as fellows get from shady subterfuge, where a flustered brain has gone out of its mind, and collapses onto sleep and trips up the body. 'It is now time' said the judge in the cart 'that was a deep sleep.' That was for Gregor a gross understatement; after all he had been entirely unconscious, until the father had murmured 'Shhhh Gregor' at which his swollen sleep was ruffled, 'here you are, wet with slobber you are!' these waking words, with the Behemoth of sleep spinning and unfolding, along with words and nausea, was like a boat pulling alongside gently kiss-kissing in the shifting water. meanwhile the druggy grip of sleep unteased itself in his dribble; halting the night with a fresh world, that was as

bedazzling as it was sickening, that sleep that had so drugged him, slowly, gradually breathed it's last gasp and left his body. Gregor was woken from the hellish length of this endless broken unconsciousness. Trying to make sense he said 'I forgot to bring my pillow', and lifted his head clumsily from off the tyre.

And off the tyre indeed he must, for they urgently needed to move on, and put that night behind them. They must put distance between themselves and that turbulent harum-scarum, and such a distance, that the night can never again catch up and enter that cart so fat with the fallen and broken. This was not now a weary journey beginning, broken and without spirit, without direction or order, -the horn was sounded and the Judge cried out 'Oh!' the bell was rung, and where the wind blew (and there was none like this one), they would go, with a screeching of their tyres and with hands gripping hard, with mud flying and with lunging switchbacks, they described an unseen circle, glancing the traffic returning from the weekend. No matter – standing in yesterday's footsteps, the Judge had stolen hindsight from the previous night, and had bent it round – and it was with trembling hands that the father gave his righteous way to Gregor, and feeling in his hands the rings that shone with precious stones, that shone with the unknowable and irradiated pure base thought. The father bound with a seal this Faustian deal, and well Gregor knew, stuck in this cart, that damnation sat with him in this same cart, sat with hands of steel and wind, and he knew that this very match could surely only destroy.

Gregor froze defenceless in the cart, sound and light seeped from within the already celebrating turncoat, who was so pleased with himself that he neither saw nor heard the rubbery vision of the cop's face at his shoulder, who had sidled up to them unnoticed. He wished them a courteous hello; they jumped out of their skins and saw at once a flophouse for ladyboys, the end terrace of a line of grime-worn houses, – it was a madhouse, – with it's heart on the front of it's dirty britches, – royally proclaimed in it's windows, but royalty stopped there, for it was a gross barren sight that formed itself before their eyes, leaving them dumbly lost for words. The frozen pair stood in unknown

fear of their rights, then the father snapped out of it and wished him malevolent tidings, ready to take the lecture he had coming to him. Wandering across to the ladyboy house, he produced a photograph of Gregor's from his military jacket, the one with Lieutenant Stripes which handily, it turned out, was a uniform that commanded respect with every arrest. The pair from the cart were truly caught, and like they say, those who cry wolf too often, have their cries ignored, and so set themselves up for a fall from the start.

'Oh no' said Gregor, his speech muffled, it was clear in the first instance, that the law had been broken, 'I was with him the whole time, the funeral was not well attended and in a distant place. What time was it, what time was it that we left that distant place? No, Judge, tell him, I'm no stool-pigeon and I'm going to be arrested; that reasoning is flawed, and I know the law cannot rely on such reason. Where are you going Judge? Are we shafted? Yes? They say we have rights, don't we? A man can in a moment be undone and beaten, condemnation is made like a righteous full-stop, just as the dead forsee clearly their errors and their weaknesses. Like the man said, now with the benefit of hindsight, you can shoo away those detestable flies, and melt away the guesswork of arbitrary words. I agree with this good Chief who seems so perplexed, that wisdom is a gut reaction. At other times I have indulged a change of mind, and switched about, I am in the clear, my words have a much wider implication. Imagine me not being able to swear on all that is good. Don't stop on my account! Man does not leave reason behind, it's true, Man's reason is as pure as hidden gold, and is found inscribed in all laws. Man has a kind of unsung bond, that understands that the wavering tale is better than one stuck in the mud. In fact, Judge, it happens that we have a better one over and above this stoppage, which is something personal, I know, but it is said that absolute truth, a greater overriding truth, as this Chief knows, and are like signs that point one way for the unturnable man, so lets bury our differences, and disarmed, lets sip at an English beer. Wisdom will out, doubt recede, how quickly a jar will help this problem, so lets offer each other a clap on the shoulder, fall

in together and loose the ground that separates our words, it's sick when it becomes this ugly, and my ideas go one way and yours don't, when you're shopped for merely raising your hat, this here house of pretend women has it's doors open tonight though it's dour and forlorn we have freedom to spur us on. Judge, don't get out your money, I won't hear another word about it, it's my treat, dry your eyes each time a little tear bubbles up, I say!'

Once the Judge had taken in worst of the wind of Gregor's words, he pursed his mouth, put a finger to his lips, and without a word, silenced Gregor. At which Gregor blushed, and stood frozen, unblinking. Sound collapsed, leaving alone Gregor to his fate, at which he started to giggle, and with a wide grin, uttering his best guffaw, leapt from the cart. He who was left in the cart, and of course the policeman, were bewildered, and with the least amount of fuss moved as one, and caught hold of the laughing man who suddenly sickened and trembled with loneliness. They stretched him out in the cart, his right hand trapped behind him, and waited till he gradually started loosing all real reason.

Gregor sighed, at which the Judge, sensing him in a stupor, let him fall limp in the wagon, wherein shafts of starlight burst onto the solitary guarded ward. The subaltern stood all night on guard; he had in those long hours built up an overview, in which Gregor was the victim of this long and damned war, and had thrown himself, without so much as a thought for his safety, into the voracious hands of the approaching fight. Gregor had been sucked into the vortex. The judge must be stopped, brought to account, for his obsequious and slimey winning speeches; the wellbeing of Gregor and his family hung in the balance! Where was the sou'wester that had been here yesterday! It was gone, the hat had been taken, just as Gregor had taken that rucksack. And with the hat, the Judge, that devil-friend, had slipped lithely from here; he had made up credible warnings, and had him guard this broken man in the golf cart. Absconded with the sou'wester into the night, he himself must help Gregor. And one thing to give thanks for, was that this gurgling wreck, weak as a kitten, and slumped in the

wagon, knew nothing, and another thing to give thanks for, was that with each receding moment the warmongering was closer to stopping, as temporary as tyre-tracks; soon it would be morning; perhaps the Judge will hang, and soon the land of plenty will celebrate, licking it's bitten hands; faith is a comfort, for those who wait for the end, with a name clearly inscribed, for old time's sake, on a favourite bench. Warm with this thought, full and well-earned on this morning, the copper feels wellbeing; the bench had welcomed the body on it, with an exhorted welcome, just like Freud had pointed out; stress soaks darkly and will out in a force of rage; and so be glad that the final guilt over Betty will be revealed in unmitigated behaviour. In a frozen moment, all the shock of stopping and starting was gathered to its infernal mother and reduced to the gibbering wreck of a broken body, racked with disease, collapsed in such a sunken heap, that, with a sick sense of humour, opens his arms wide, and with a finger pointing says 'Half, it's only half god's will!' the cop wakes from his reverie, just as Gregor in a hushed whisper, says something, then louder, his sinuses stuck. Trying to guess, picking at hints that he might almost half understand; rasping as if it was borne of anger, stopped somewhere in his throat, forcing it's way out of him; a scream that missed it's mark, an unformed word grossly forcing itself from his nose, like coffee voluminously streaming from the hot top of it's pot spout.

'Mutter Mutter' says Gregor weakly, in his ear. The Judge was in a moment back, as if without sin; knowing the strain that such a night would hold, he bought warm coffees in flimsy paper cups, snapping the key-fob in his hands. Calmed with a hush, his nervy muttering eased, he felt his head stroked with a shush-ing, then he felt himself entangled in his fathers arms. Now Gregor just caught sight of the Subaltern; The Judge was now sure of the trap; the goose after the gander, say what you like about bad luck. Gregor let out a laugh, like a cat bolting through a hole; The Judge must have been annoyed, for with all his might he sprung up completely stupefied and fled; 'Huh!' he cried at the night, it ringing out against the trannie-house. The flight of this judging father was not pursued, and he crashed with

a sudden halt into a big fat dressing gown, wrapped around a man-woman, whose vital statistics the Judge was at a loss to understand, nor how Gregor was also now hidden in those same folds, the judge was now packed with the right hand into an armpit, and with much hup-ing and umph-ing from this self-styled rough-girl, he was held as if chained to a great mountain of kitch, that shook with every heavy stamp of a foot, Gregor swung down from the armpits, and seated himself in the cart next to the transvestite. Gregor felt sort of half better, half better without understanding, and watched the cop continue with his duties so dryly, while the father stamped, mad with fury. The one dressed as a mother trotted across the wet cobbles to the high fence of the police station, and dropped him over it to sit and wait, clutching the fence posts in his hands. The switch to gas now lit the jailhouse with a harsh light, the fence-hanger was pulled off, his numb tongue rasping and tsch-ing, while his bladder failed and he wet himself. Biting his lip the father was dragged away, and as the light was snuffed out, he pissed himself even more. Now Gregor remembered the stuffed rucksack, and the long overdue work he had to do. Now that Gregor thought about it, it was clear that it might be in the cart, or some such place, for maybe the father drugged him and manipulated his traumatised mind, with his gold-digging machinations, and then when he was right in the soup, the rucksack had secretly passed from the father's hand, over to the cop. With an endlessness that beggared belief, Gregor was unable to bridge the gap of this recent night, so marked by uncertainty, but suspected that what was in the rucksack might somehow put this to rights; and so began an unholy anger aimed at that father, like an ugly rash, that worked it's way under his skin. The goodwill that was of old associated with the father, was now no longer harboured, and so was dragged to these dreaded stocks and covered in spit. How couldn't the hidden tragedy of such fathers not be guessed at? Gregor urgently needed to talk to the cop, and go off to war. He hoped that, though the cop was only earning his crust, everything would come to those who wait. The father was quite rightly festering in his warcrimes of that infernal night,

and was unable to turn and flee, and for Gregor it seemed now that a chapter was drawing to a close. With no fixed idea occurring, Gregor, usually so rash, mused morbidly in the cart. None of this evil had been able to stay his voracious need for understanding, and Gregor thought that surely right and truth would come and light the torch of wisdom. The more he tribulated, the greater the hinderance, Gregor felt that under this cloud an alarm was sounding; it's ringing hinted to Gregor to go no more with this steam that sheltered such fathers; no gob is worth more spit, so Gregor swallowed – at, and inhaling his fag deeply into his lungs, and without a hint of wonder, flicked lazily at one of the tyres, stating that it was bald, and as a result of the previous night, could barely run any more, several inches of a seat hung ripped open on the left, the off-side indicator was smashed, and the bodywork crumpled – and as he spoke he hinted in jest that the father could expect a parking ticket, and flicking the half-finished butt-end, also waited in the cart. Thus they took stock of the whole world, and the war raged on.

It was a curse that erupted from Gregor, a laughing swearword from his own mouth. It was not without spite that he had gone to the storage facility, and falling to his knees searched for the keys to unlock it, this was now his plan, for like a lost bet that dead golf-cart with the wrecked tyres offered up no vestige of hope. The electric shine belched strobe-light across the deck of the cart, showing it to be empty from its tail to its motor, and it was clear that it was finished with Gregor. It left a nasty taste in his mouth, not unchecked with a full-on flavour, but an acquired smattering, that teased him, at the back of his nose, a sleeping irritant. But he kept being reminded of having seen a long straight spanner with a pointed end that must have seen better days. He realised it had been lying on that bench (and this was where he let fall the curse that was half laugh half vomit) it had been where his warder had slept, -he was now fast with wonder, surely this warder had left it there, and had left it there to loose it, of course.

He could do with just such a tool now, hiding in a doorway that was hopelessly locked; he bashed and barged at it. Suddenly, with super human strength, the door opened a chink, and in that little slit of light the sweat on his brow swam. Quickly he slipped through the gap, then with a growing hunger, such as you get in the morning, a hunch told him that the cop was one step ahead still. It was a bald fact that he had escaped with the rucksack; nevertheless, in him there was some essential hidden link, sight unseen, and it was knowledge of that essence, that the cunning copper had made sure was snuffed out – , so it smacked of ill-doing, like the songs of unloved drunkards, but he did have the remains of the sou'wester, at least, and wanted to quickly find the wherewithal of the stuff crushed into that rucksack from the cart.

In a moment Gregor turned pale, for like gas oozing in, was the

sound of the ancient sayings of his father with neither middle or end in sight, but muttered darkly from a whisper to a hobbling stammer at such phlegmatic volume, that it haunted him like a loud joke. Notwithstanding the volume, he directed at these whispers, a hue and cry, that pierced and popped his own ears. This was followed by a ringing in the ensuing stillness, trodden down with an uncritical warning, 'What is fur to the rabbit is also fur to the family' a saying that Gregor knew full well, which would usually prompt his uncle to say, that 'the pickpocket stole the robber', just like the aforementioned policeman and the aforementioned sou'wester who were so intertwined with the missing hat and scarf. After all, when something is left to it's own devices, it will come to a standstill, are all predictions in the end just name calling? And it is not only thanks to truth that Gregor laboured from the beginning and forced himself to the bitter end.

It is a bad end where language bends words of science, and it is doubly bad that in cleaning a spillage up, a greater mess spread; if demands can heat a bed here and now, then what needs an extra duvet? Gregor made no uncertain attempt to stop these one-liners, and loosing them, he could then beseech with urgency to overturn these far-fetched superstitions, one and all; not another word could attempt to offer itself that Gregor would not forbid. Free from these worn-out turns of phrase, stopped from entering his hearing by cotton wool, they had in turn offered themselves again and again till in offering themselves had worn their words away, and could no more, stricken by over-use, be made audible.

The fight of the last word was lost in a second, nouns left forestalled, and the subaltern and the sou'wester were cast free of language, while the kneeling man counted the hours, his mouth that had been so dry, was now full of spit. You could not wipe that organ any more than Gregor now did; he also wiped his tongue, now un-distorted and light as air, that which was so recently leaden was now seeking a new order. It was as if a joyless rumour, like a guessing game gone wrong, had flashed before him, taunting him, only to fail in its search to find a hero, when there was just such a one in him, it was rumoured – and

like a half un-betrothed wedding, could elope down the aisle and under cover, where it could trample that rucksack with a broken word, and trample on that cop so that he had no more contact, irrespective of whether that bag was full or empty, or if the cop was clever, and be left standing under that cover, utterly let down by words.

Don't believe that nothing happened, that this half-joking tale destroyed his inner hunger. It was verbose, this tale that was in places an undiluted offering, and in others the sluice gates fully turned, so that a running volume halted and left untold the main part about the rucksack, the family, the unlikely and tragic muse, or any of this warts-and-all last stand, that notwithstanding truth, had won this war.

Morning shone through the early hours, and it was soon no longer night, which gave Gregor a leg up, and the craft that had fabricated endless proofs, such as saving the sou'wester from the golf-cart, that switchback voyage, the tyre and the inclusion of the spanner. He found it all so unlikely, after all it was all done under cover – good, he must either turn himself in, or else fly the nest – he shook like a see-saw, first this way, then that, he wavered, the gap between them widening. After all he was a good man, and often when the road was wide and treacherous, or when madness overcame any friendship, his mouth filled with spit. Gregor hated the cop who had forced open his knap-sack like some tin of peas, and emptied it out. All the wool was marked, and the same stains were all over the girl's hat, and there were earwigs that had ruined it with their hunger, and without needing to say a word, had he spoken to the dead Betty? That it was past it's sell-by date, or would be better left hanging, those marks still held a truth, trodden-in indelibly and drunk with it, this upturned can of peas was forcing his hand, just as the sou'wester had determined his future and that it turned out to be good though the experience was bitter. And though the sou'wester had become a comfort in his wandering it had not swollen his head, for just as milk leaves a ring when it boils over, and the hob is stuck with it, you must not touch the spillage, but wait a while, and so he should now trust himself. Gregor burst out laughing anew, for while he sat there words occurred to him, and they echoed

like a rubber thank-you. It had neither hate nor error, for wasn't the sou'wester a good working hat? It occurred to him that it smacked of proof, and like an off-the-wall gaze, all or nothing could come of it. It was half the fault of his muse; the knowledge would not harm her, for from the first word it was sauciness she wore on her lips; a pair so rosy and manipulative; in which case, Gregor saw his wife taken for a kind of forbidden lark; a tricky bird who knows which side of her bread is buttered on. All this stealth was like the night-time shine of an animal fur, fur of a beast Gregor knew, that had slipped into the water. And from the very start, it was clear, that Gregor would eat his words every night, burning with such egotism and soaking to the skin as well, damn that Gregor came so close to that mark, but that he behaved so dumb, and so woolly. Gregor's bench was written, all was reduced to brass. No wonder so much brimmed with longstanding guilty sin, and full to the brim threatened more, that staunching the overflow would dash the plan, and more or less all of their money that was won from this mess was reduced to finger knitting, and for him this would not force him off his knees. 'Am I joking when I'm so vengeful?' back and forth he argued his case, such that in spite of himself, comfort had naturally turned to hate. Rashly hinting here and now, and with a tendency to befriend any visitor to the case, was the muse and her source; that cold spy didn't suspect him, and couldn't give all that much away and so slept soaked in sweat, while the essence would be stuck by its own weight. It was long and furtive and not least foul of that winking star, to snatch the sou'wester from his chin, and with such single-minded stubbornness, languish lazily undressed. The correction sorted him out, trotted-out and shiney, and wiser under-cover. Before it cost him his gross self-importance, which he now cursed, it was clearly good luck that the sou'wester had been in the cart, protected by the canopy, and it had rightly been seen when it was lying on the ground, and could not rest in the calm anger of that man. And another weak-point with it was that her alibi was shady, with the undeniable sou'wester on their side, Betty no longer cared what she blabbed about, for only she heard for while Gregor could not be bothered to

snoop, he also could not be further broken, and with all haste shut it up in his mind, and lazily refusing to think about it, he was hamstrung. Calm had descended, so that under this blanket Gregor was able to stretch out and be blank.

The wisdom that had becalmed Gregor now tickled his conscience, at one in the morning, when the subaltern and the dentist had left, covered in white dust like they had all been mining some metal-essence, the subaltern had left a white trail with each footfall, and the dentist would have certainly left his hand prints on the sou'wester indelibly stuck there. While willing it not to be, Gregor was left hanging, and no matter how vile it had been it could not enrage him, for something more essential in the coming hours would take him far from here, eventually it would come clean as if licked by a cat, or clean like spare trousers, like a rough-licked litter or unworn knees.

With a wince the man blushed at the youth with diarrhoea who had left the toilet door open but with the lock and occupied sign in place, Gregor recalled this distant memory, then the errant request to stay, a hurried apology, and without dithering, that fellow stayed, and so it must be, like a breeze in summer, damned from the start, that floated and bounced in the air from the horror. As they say, everything won is everything wanting – the bystander yawned as he contemplated the nature of the letters on the red sign -, Gregor's mouth chewed into a smirk, a friendly gurn cast at his guarding warden. 'Hurt is he who smirks' he said, when Gregor, under the attempt to touch what was before him, saw in him a gentle collapse, that no kind of corset would halt, and fast dwindling he rasped: 'Now it opens further on its hinges.'

Wherein Gregor snapped out of these distant unchecked memories, as if he had scorched his hands on an unseen flame, and where such a harsh stimulus, left him glassily petrified, taciturn and drugged in the blink of an eye. Bewildered, his mouth was unable to speak, the next seconds, when nothing occurred to him, held him transfixed. Why tag along where those malevolent beraters rubbed out the hours, just stopping short of entirely belittling a man; with each switch of ma-

levolence sprawled the man across the permafrost, then with a sudden humidity they would gather him to the family home, the well trodden way to the house well cleared, and warning the man against falling on the slippery ice. Thus had the dentist skated from certain death – across that clear varnish, and swivelling, fell in a heap – onto his knees, so much the better to there comfort his girl, and all at once standing up gave verbose thanks for the last train, which for the greater good, had arrived now for that man, and grabbing him who had travelled so far, like the first dusting of snow, melted to nothing like it was something overrated.

Now he must get the sou'wester along with his mother out of the kitchen; nothing must upset mummy, from men to fast nights. Open-mindedly, Gregor, with an attitude verging on benevolence which his soul could afford, and with a kind of untoward calm, said: 'Thanks, I have kneeled' this was unlike before. Words were really drunken tonight. Often fragmented from the sou'wester to the father, well soaked in beer, and hazily sea-sick in a bottle, it sealed it's hole, and swigged to the father, here's to you, and clinked the glasses to his name, knowing that the man of the house was sick, and that as the father sagged he slurred a fat 'No' and would never speak another word from this moment on.

Soon he was laughing about those stages of legality that he had won over his father, while preparing elevens-es together in the kitchen with his mother, to whom he had given the sou'wester. He had taken his stand, and halted everything worth its salt, and from this, just for fun folded sandwiches without crusts cut off, and cooked boiled eggs over the fire of the hearth. He was hot, and as if with complicity steam spurted from the steamy enamel cauldron. The banging-up of his father was music to his ears, and Gregor sat silently chewing as the hours passed. In his head he guessed, that his father could no longer mess her about for the ring was removed, and in his mind the water would now gently go, and with it all of Gregor's broken things. There was damn-all of Gregor's that was not soaking wet, utterly saturated, the entire family uncorked, and bobbing upright had lost half it's

height, listing awkwardly as it sped towards his girl. And so with so little left to loose he annihilated his fear with a bite of angry teeth and like those commies resending words, he naturally licked his wounds, and randomly folding the dressing, sought comfort in the form of providing himself with gold bars that he extorted from the luckless family house from which so much disapproval had come. It was only second-guessing, and hardly had he done so, when at a glance, and without stopping, Gregor dropped the tarnished gold, and as if under the gaze of his family, his tragedy stood before him unfolding. This man had wanted so much to give, and in spite of the family, it was now Gregor, who was named the thankless gold man, who before life is gone away, would no longer have a warm kiss to comfort him. Gregor sweated in countless beads, and as was his plan, no longer shy, music leapt and rolled from Gregor like a violin spilling from it's stand, and ignorant of it's great cost, the truth must die, as the man must die who is the bearer of wise words, shaking like jam. More often than not the curtain would halt Gregor in his steps where sprayed with the sweat his conservative audience demanded, and no sooner traumatised, his dressing-gown went unnoticed, and they would call the night to an end with no shoulder to cry on; thus Gregor dashed his stunted gift, and sickening, launched himself on a ferocious drunken bender.

Alone in the rising waters since making his stand against those nutters, the damp gingerly encroached the cop, and he found the door bolted and the tower closed and shut. With his sleeves now soiled, dragging in the muddy flow, gathering more by the hour and leaving the cop cursing the closed tower, and it was little comfort to him that he must clean those stains, that the damned current had left, and without a word had also silenced the girl. 'It was no wider than a trout' the father used to say every once in a while, often when the tower's hinges were working, but those words were always said in an undertone, and all the more weird for lack of pronunciation.

Gregor put no effort in his kneeling – and as the water receded so his elation took greater hold, till, when he knew all ten fingers of his hands had long since stopped fidgeting, he told himself, with a mutter

that he could no longer go along with all this evil – , the dregs glugged away in little streams without him moving his hands to the other side, and without anger or hurt he rinsed in the stream's flow the wedding veil of his now-cleansed girl. After all this war the gold, that Gregor had, along with all the money, brought from the house – itself could not equal the guilt that had stopped-, not withstanding, word had been brought from the capital to the effect that anger was melting. Gregor, hiding in his tower, straightened his tie, savoured this unexpected foresight and jokingly boxed with himself in the mirror. Gently he jabbed his hands as he considered that the gold that should have been his father's had been extracted as if by a cunning head-waiter, who had picked up the tab, or like a postman who was lost for words, and there was no way of guessing, as he kissed those fellows goodbye, just where he had put his father's fortune.

No one knew where that gold glittered and glinted, and his family was for its sins learning it's lesson; for well they knew, in the family, who usually met up at the end of the year, that more was less. And it was also quite a sum, as the man gently drifted from his lack of grief, and there must not be a word of this windfall for the moment; the gold must be left and the man must deny it. Nothing under water makes a sound, let alone man, as soon as fun appears it goes up a gear and as soon as night suddenly falls, truth will certainly out; and had this fun appeared, it might as well jump grinning over a mule as hide itself, so badly was anger set and war agreed to with a sworn word. On the other hand the mother knew nothing of where the gold was hidden, and struck by mild asthma, wondered whether the warning had truly been strung along, and now that her old head was whitening, would she be left beached on a sofa in the breeze of an open window? With an oath that even gold denies, was it not kindness with which she was seized, here besieged with the weight of wisdom that was so far gone, and had stood by her generosity, without a damp eye, but a longing to laugh, hidden in her witchcraft, like a pair of shy virgins sick with their own belittling is it for them that the violins that play? When she realised that unknown gold-diggers would come, she believed the

worst -that Gregor's tower would be lost, and worse, the tower would never be able to be found again from this leather sofa, for which he would be ashamed and traumatised.

Often, when you sleep through a long night, sleep seems a blink, and you start suddenly off the leather. The smell of sweat like a gross fug, settles on the nearby window, then opening the window a crack, and then completely, you lean out of the window, offering that moment of the morning your friendship, a freedom whose daring distances the war from the window's edges. Then all cares go, and a game of tag with no winning ensues with the carefree dawn; the stuff of legend is cranked-up, so all half-baked blips that disrupt the flow, are becalmed or overcome no more to grate, and when nothing can now interrupt it, in this stillness, not even those ranks of charlatan-like statistics, could butt in, and so in the same window he had that moment appeared in, it seemed he grew and grew hard against the shutter bar like a vine. There was no sign to mark which way he should go, but settling by the window, as all badness slipped away, it felt like summer had burst forth, and was now settling beyond this open window, and it seemed that nothing that reflected in these window panes could be untrue.

It was as if Gregor had never spoken of the so'wester and all those dark goings-on, and was free from those machinations and duties, he felt a lightness like leaving a dentist's; both light and disorientated. From the south-west was freshly sucked a clear light air that danced kitten-like across the vista, and lounging in the long grass, this long kiss of such natural air, had Gregor whooping at the sight that now revealed itself. Soon this treat was stretching before him. Come what may, he believed, only such a sight as he beheld, could shroud the tower, and silence the sounds of attack, that in that moment Gregor's summer has dispersed, radiating from the window and laughing, it all stuck fast, and with a hasty hand, his belief was such, that as he himself felt not so cold, this wellbeing would beam from the window and halt tears and grief. Between his laughing and the alarm sounding Gregor was pulled from his lethargy; he gazed out alertly from under the canopy and what he saw was good, that damned germ of hate

within him seemed vanquished, but when and where was anyone's guess, for this summer, which had so befriended Gregor, halted the moment the window was closed.

Evil, the kind that glints in money set Gregor wandering again, and it was thoughts of the so'wester that littered the ground, and over Gregor's house it rained stones, so that the sound travelled far and took Gregor with it, until, in disbelief and so wrecked that stifling a shriek, he shut the window. It was for Gregor not untoward to guess, when this night pushed forward, what hindered its stars, suffocating the window's opening, so that night after night pushed in, till the place was stuck full of them and reeked with their terror; a shudder gripped him, Gregor was half alert and wanted a drink. Gregor stuck his neck out as comfortably as was natural from under the canopy. And with all his might, as if parting waters, unhinged by that so'wester, he screamed vile and unruly songs at it. By singing these, in a blink the tragedy of it made his eyes water until (with tragedy) he blubbered. He dabbed at sick under his breath, (and with a flick of his hand cleaned those parts of his body not devoid of that effluent), all of which haemorrhaged under that canopy. And with a few more blinks he spied, caught by its straps that same rucksack! – brought through some arbitrary desire to stun him. And there! Leaning against the canopy issuing orders with all the wisdom of a soldier, stands none other than the gormless detective, who, clutching the so'wester, passes him a sick bucket, and says nothing. As he leans his meaning leaves nothing to be guessed at. That hat, with its hellish connotations, does nothing but spur on Gregor's horror. Sick rises to his gullet, and dropping straight to his knees, he is barely able to believe his eyes, weary as they are. Gregor soaked them with globs of dank barren tears again and again, till finally the cop casting the line-judge a winning smile, (and saying as much), takes up the so'wester anew to enrich his name.

In the instant these virgin tears came out, they were replaced by all this false night brought, -filling him up, and with much pain. Seeing this, the judge grabbed at the so'wester -flying at it headlong! Wherein, with much huffing and puffing over the so'wester, he grabbed the hat,

and once it was well in his grasp he let loose a mad piercing shriek. Tottering off-balance, the father muttered while Gregor shivered. For whoever the sou'wester rested with, come hell or high water, it would be to their advantage, while the other must shiver, as Gregor worriedly guessed he did now. But suddenly a deathly benumbing descended, that halted even the clock's base ring that marked the hour. This matter brought a welcome halt to Gregor's bald luck, and the father and the sou'wester are frozen mid-action, stuck with a stupid grin, leaving Gregor gasping for breath, and standing uncertainly dizzy. He must have been saved from this by the whole world stopping, at which he gave way to relief; 'Gregor gets the last laugh, my bad luck is ended! Bereft of this damned night, what itch shall I scratch?' then thought Gregor, now that good luck is truly here, when mother comes, just act naturally, like everything is in hand; if everyone is stood still, so much the better for the sou'wester. He trotted around them all mute and dumb together, and as he circled them free of all cares, he let fly such a string of profanities unchecked from his mouth.

Gregor had dared, as the saying goes, to go bald by his hair falling out. Where would this tale end for Gregor when sure as rocking-horse shit his lantern's beam would barely reach the fence, he reckoned it would reach about four meters before the night would veil an entire body, the weak circle it threw ended showing nothing, and this essence made him bald no more (as that saying had suggested), and so like a highwire act on a string, he crossed and quaked above the world to his creaking platform. Applause burst out as he gained the hanging deck; and as he gazed down, all their lying was forbidden; up here man was free; a light swing brought him down to the cop; the sleuth was stuck fast like moss, and so Gregor thought to open his hand, gripped firmly closed, for it seemed his final action before losing life was to clutch something to his body. Almost nothing seemed natural in the way the cop's fat hands were in a grip so fierce and mummified that he himself might fail to un-grasp. Sweat now broke out in the effort to unclasp them, such was Gregor's profound effort – and between his lips there was a high screech as he prised at the clenched

fingers -, but the set stuck as the cop had left them, Gregor's pent-up cry burst out and echoed through this dead world, dead as in halted, or as if all of it, cast and scenery, were carved from wood. None could be knocked over, though he tried each in turn; the father didn't waver when he was bitten; The dentist's gaze was unflinching when his fingers were nipped hard between tweezers or was tapped or had the hairs on his chin pulled out, and if, against the greatest odds, the cook had been squirted with off-milk from head to toe he would not have responded, even when his hair was much ruffled and mussed; then sweat really began to pour in great drops, as he realised that what had made his father absent may also engulf his mother.

Without fail the rules that Freud set out that turned the mother into a heroine, immediately made Gregor think of the tower in his dream. It was natural to sweat so, when everything in that dream was so ordinary; there lies the entire mother. Gregor had engrossed himself in the rendez-vous with these ties and become more at fault, his gaze worked its way to and fell upon, the shelter of a lean-to. Gregor with underlying dismay, spied from that lean-to; and verifying all, the mother appeared hazily to him, and who knows where from, saying she was now on her way. 'Come now, I barely see you' said the sweating man, offering the vision of his mother his hand. Gregor didn't move, with both eyes watching from within him, swore that anyone put in his place, (and with such an immense sweat that it would make an ideal environment for growing beansprouts), would be well warned that their mother might appear, and in such a strange manner. It didn't last long. No sooner had she virtually stood there than the mother's heartbeat sagged, and the man was left alone here among the statues, as they stood still and severe, and without a word of comfort for that father's furtive warden, surrounded by these statues caught in mid-action, Gregor was overwhelmed, weighed down by this garish seizure around him, by his infernal mobility, and Gregor fell fitfully asleep. A gentle snow fell on his back; it tucked him in like a blanket that magically eradicated his pain; and Gregor found himself warm in spite of it, so that there amongst the immobile landscape where all

were now un-dressed in an icy shimmer, drifted the words ‘...and this is not how it is...’, the loss of the mother gained lease, and banked-up by fast flurries, that wrapped him like wool, this Gregor was now caught in the cannot, just like the stifled chime of the hour, or like the word not understood, giving way to uncertainty, ‘...and it is not so. Is all which we infer moving zig-zag? Is what was huffing and puffing out of our mouths and into our earholes only self-serving? ‘I love’. ‘It was for the best’. ‘We are searching the now in the hope that it stops’. In this there is a futile war, damn it Gregor, whenever or wherever you stumble on it, all understanding finds itself like the toss of a coin or a guess.’

For many hours this maternal advice enchanted Gregor, all mangled and mixed-up in his sleeping mind as it was spoken, abounding with family lore and wisdom, laughing in the face of money and understanding that there was nothing to worry about, for they know that nothing is clear, they know that what you earn must be given away in the end, and that words themselves are but a shimmering illusion. Hate or workshy lust were warnings, that became mobilised in error and mutated from what started as a summer but became a hole into which you could wander and loose yourself, and in there the free gift of words would never make you rich could they? – Each phrase frozen under ice, slippery, and glancing aside guesswork as it hides its message. That which is just shown is not given, but just guessed at, and now this long night exhorted the mother, who was now in a rut, to be silent. Not a single infernal word; all must be silence; it was a good thing his mobile didn’t work for otherwise he could not bear it; when the mobile had reception, that signal would always find a way to betray him, so here was shade, a great vortex of silence.

And in the west the war leaders paced in their bunkers; they had not gained anything and were bereft, anger-worn; but the angel-like messages from above that Gregor had sent down to them had left them standing shaking in their boots, and so, just as they would rat on their mothers to gain the West a little ground, their arguments came to nothing but condemnation and bitching, and everything seemed

lost; ring damned mobile, in the name of appeasing the unbearable, do your best! It was naturally not out of kind treatment that they let him be, so under their breath they swore he was being self-serving, and that he was at best a fraud; but in fact, if there was any tittle-tattle to be obtained, Gregor would have brought it to this vile room with urgency, forget the mobile, he would have come himself, if he could not ring. The truth was that in spite of the warmongering sin and madness above ground, they were up to their knees in friendlessness, and even a just a greeting would give hope to their locked-up lives, but it was now a long time since Gregor had missed his regular message that he was well, let alone giving more, so the best they could do was to listen for him coming. There in that room, into which Gregor was magically expected to appear, no word was mentioned of the war, and great generals paced up and down sick and traumatised.

And so he lay flooded by waves of nausea that the interrupted night bought, for it seemed that sooner or later some unspoken scheme would unravel, with bald blunt words, and the West could craft its border policy concerning half-castes. No one knew Gregor's caste, or that it did not fall into their categories, and so he had had to lie about his lineage. He had kept the secret of his caste under his hat, with the aching drunkenness of a teetering glass refilled to the brim, and once Gregor had put himself under the protection of the cop, he had said to him that as sure as a cat-lick, the rucksack would come to grief. But unluckily what starts as a rumour, can easily harden to fact, and a great number of the undesirable caste were stopped and all placed under arrest, and taken naked to their cells. What matter that Gregor's presence was seen to be was wanting, or that his arrival had been so cranked-up, and his elitism so caught-up with the absent rucksack that now both enjoyed absolute protection and that the slightest touch would open up a path. Knowing this, rumours marked his way. Thus stalked, he had come to an unblinking halt, and gave a great shudder.

It occurred to Gregor that there may be a greater truth, that everything was not one great big joke, that even in the sound of an unclear passing word, there must be a bold inherent definiteness, he thought

– and at this began to feel free, as if the slate had been wiped clean; the mobile vibrated against his body, and grabbing it, as if this was the source of all of his troubles, he tossed it, so far that even the cop with the help of the same dog that they use to find drowned bodies, would be left un-wagging, gawping at this and that dumbfounded. He roused his inner-self; no one was with him, and he was leaving the war; the statues, in whom was a latent wisdom in their frozen attitudes, had a kind of aura glowing out of them; locked into that shining from their bodies was a joy that grabbed him forcefully, and he shook each of their academic hands, like a burger-cook, gripping each one in a traditional clasp without wiping his hands, -for hands that work are never dirty, and these good absentees proved, well beyond any doubt, that having given their existence over to being stuck on the verge, they had shopped themselves into keeping schtum, and that no man had the wherewithal to change their fuse.

And so back to the reservoir – where freed jetsom bobbed on the little waves of it's aimless tide, each piece winging its way nowhere – , selfishly vehement in righting itself, when it was clearly unworkable that there would be a right way up, that what was on the surface and what was in the brine was down to the chance of its shape, like a Dame laughing and hanging on the tattoos of a body-builder, crotch bent towards him and pressed there as if against glass, an infestation and sign that heightens his tacky bulk. Such bodily extensions, just as Gregor had predicted, were not gained without vengeance. It was true that the cop had won hands-down at the tower, but now frozen with that rucksack he was truly beaten.

It was like a cygnet surrounded by an old tyre that was over-inflating; inscribed on the arm under 'Mother' which had been deleted like some indelible truth. 'What's-its-name?' said the inscription and no more. The crossing-out was so black that it made Gregor wonder. Why cross out 'Mother' knowing it was stuck fast, when you could still see the word 'Mother', if anything it highlighted the word 'Mother', gave it more prominence rather than halt it, and seemed to say, through all its deleting and rubbing-out: 'Come now, will we not lie

in the blink of an eye, in spite of the wool being pulled over it?’ The absent writing was for Gregor clear, to want to bring such attention to the word ‘Mother’ and to damn it was to cast magic. Never, could one imagine reversing! And once something is made it cannot not be. The lying word is truly great in the depth of its springs.

And just as truly great words are only muttered amongst all the rest of the din, they loose their way, an invisibility of tiny brown flecks absorbed into a dizzy floral carpet, or a reef, that entices with becalmed water, just like Gregor was, was he not, till too late, the realisation stings: ‘I get it, I get it!’ and finally with just a waving arm, the water closes over and under that canopy he is unseen. ‘You, Gregor!’ the reef whispers with a Faustian opener and a lick of seaweed. It was when you became a wanderer that the word raised the bar and gained entry. It has left you swimming in the middle of nowhere, and exposed your very essence as a hole, into which only wreckage can gain entry, like it or not; Gregor had wanted only to help – but the writing on the wall was not right – ; it was like glass-collecting at a party where one must do well through loss; at least swimming in the middle of nowhere, you could trust as much in a rat as in the purest truth; I must be damned to eternity if I stay here; what if all we know to be in is crammed into a bottle, and cast into the sea, a sea that is unending; a bottle of truth at the bottom of the seabed; a crack allows Gregor to squeeze out into the sea, and the bottle reveals itself as a medicine bottle as it floats away; no name for it, only a long halting, like the bottle, which found its own end, and ran aground eventually; tugging and slapping in the fused sea. Gregor had now abdicated on this matter, the slightest sign should reveal him to those toads of war; the tower was neglected and left open, and whether it was the west, or his mother he should believe in, it didn’t seem to matter; he had had his time stolen, and likewise his words; and when a bedraggled sense of self-awareness and order, began to creep in, it overwhelmed everything, wonder, mobility, similitude and faith ended in a thrown-away moment, and as such the unfocused gazed shone from him to nothing in particular, interrupted by a groggy tick.

As if emerging clean from a whale, Gregor rested there, a ringing still in his ears, like a violation disguised as a good sign. The loud-speaker was on.

