

Grete's Second Chance

It would soon be a year since that day when they had found Gregor's dried up body, written their notes of excuse to their respective employers and taken a tram ride into the open country outside the town. It had been a sunny day and, despite the sorrows of the past months, they had felt things were not so bad after all. For the first time, they had each spoken of the work they had had to undertake since Gregor had not been able to support them. They had discovered that each actually liked their work and expected it would lead to better things.

The greatest improvement in their fortunes, however, was that they could now move. They had wanted a smaller and cheaper apartment, which would be easier to run and better situated than the one they had been living in. Indeed, it was later the same day that they had found just such an apartment. Over the following weeks, their old apartment had been tidied up and Gregor's room had been thoroughly disinfected and cleaned. They had terminated their lease and moved into their new apartment. Things seemed to be going well.

There was no advancement, however, for Mr Samsa at work; he remained a bank clerk and realized that at his age he was unlikely to be considered for advancement. But he was respected by his colleagues who treated him well; he was conscientious over his duties and was happy enough. Certainly he continued to be proud of his uniform. Mrs Samsa continued sewing undergarments for her employer; but now that the worry of Gregor was behind her and they were living in their new apartment, which was much easier to run, she was happy enough.

Grete, however, did better herself. She had persisted with her shorthand and with her French. Her head of firm soon realized Grete had more potential than a mere salesgirl. She was now working in the office dealing with the firm's branches in France; she found her shorthand invaluable at staff meetings. She was hopeful of further promotion.

At home Grete continued to play the violin and still occasionally had dreams about going to the Conservatorium to study. But when she did think of that, she recalled that Gregor had dreamt of her going there and this pained her. She regretted her rejection of Gregor towards the end. But, she told herself, it had not been Gregor. Gregor no longer existed when that monstrous creature appeared. Why, she thought, had she fed the monster and tried to look after it to begin with? Thinking it was still Gregor had been the root of their troubles.

The months passed and the Samsas settled more and more to their new life. Memories of Gregor faded; things could only get better.

But as the first anniversary of that last day approached, they felt unsettled. Mrs Samsa began to feel that she ought to visit her son's grave on the anniversary of his death. But she did not know where it was. She did not even know if Gregor had been buried. What had that charwoman done with that dried empty body? She shuddered to think, and this saddened her even more. Grete tried to tell her mother that the dried empty body the charwoman had disposed of had not been her son - had not been Gregor. But this only further upset her mother; also it burned away in Grete's own conscience. She had tried to convince herself that the monstrous bug had never been Gregor; but she knew deep down that this was not true.

In the early days of the transformation, there had been some sort of empathy between brother and sister; however it had happened, the bug had been Gregor. She began to feel more and more guilty about the way she had distanced

herself and come to loathe the bug. When she should have been even kinder to her brother in his misfortune, she had grown colder and colder. Could she have done anything to prevent his dying? Possibly she could not have done; but at least she could have made his last days kinder for him.

Grete's remorse began to take over her life; it started to affect her work and she no longer cared for her job. She consoled herself at home with her violin; but her playing was full of sadness and melancholy, or else discordant and bitter.

Mr Samsa found his wife's sadness hard to bear. What good would it do Gregor anyway if she could visit his grave? He was dead and gone. Why could she not leave it at that? As for Grete, he found it difficult to cope with the moodiness that had come over her during the past month. He found her sudden changes of mood unsettling, and her music, that had once been so pleasant, was now sad and discordant. Was the thought of Gregor upsetting her also? Why could they not forget the unfortunate events of last year and look to the future?

Yet deep down he also was troubled. Why had he become so enraged and bombarded the monster with apples? Why had he used such force? He knew quite well that an apple had penetrated the monster's back. Yet he had allowed it to stay there, to turn rotten and poison the wound. He had killed his son, had he not?

He put such thoughts out of his head and devoted all his time to his work. At home he said little. The happiness the Samsas thought they had found was proving illusory.

Then the day of the anniversary arrived. Mr Samsa had had a bad night and was in no condition to go into work. Mrs Samsa wrote a note of excuse to her husband's board of management; then she wrote a note of excuse to her employer and Grete also wrote one to the head of her firm. Mr Samsa had fallen into a deep sleep. Mother and daughter quietly shut up the house and took a tram back to their old apartment of a year ago. If they could not honor Gregor's memory at his grave, they could at least, they thought, do so at the place where he had died.

In the afternoon they returned to their new apartment and wondered if Mr Samsa would be feeling better after his sleep. Mrs Samsa went to the bedroom and gave an anguished cry. There in the room was an enormous bug just like the one whose memory they had been recalling that day. She slammed the door closed immediately and collapsed into a chair. The shock had been too great; from that moment her mind began to fail.

Grete, however, remained more calm. Perhaps this metamorphosis, strange as it may seem, was something that afflicted the male line in the family. She saw this as being given a second chance to make up for her failing poor Gregor. However difficult it may be, she would do her duty towards her afflicted father.

The bank was informed that Mr Samsa had suffered a stroke and would be unable to continue working there. Mrs Samsa continued to sew underwear for her employer for a few weeks, but as her mind deteriorated she began making mistakes in her sewing. Grete wrote to inform Mrs Samsa's employer that her mother could no longer continue her employment. Grete carried on with her work and, realizing that she would have to look after the family, made sure her work for the firm was impeccable.

They had removed most of the furniture from the bedroom Mr and Mrs Samsa had once shared. Mrs Samsa now shared her daughter's bedroom; and Grete left food for her father each day and did her best to keep the room clean. She found that he, though a bug, responded to her playing her violin. She would

play sweetly and movingly, and this had a soothing effect on her father. But it became clear to her that this was not the best of arrangements.

She had been putting aside some of the money she had been earning since her promotion with the idea that she might have enough one day to enrol at the Conservatorium. She used this money to buy a small holding in the country. She gave up her job with her firm and earned a living by giving violin lessons and some French teaching, and did what she could to grow produce on the land she had.

Sadly, however, her mother steadily got worse and died peacefully in her sleep about a month after they had moved into the country. But her father's life improved. He had a shed where he could rest during the day and at night he came out and exercised in what had once been a chicken run, the wire, which had once protected chicken from foxes, now protecting him. In the evenings Grete would, whenever she could, sit in the garden and play her violin for her father.

Soon news of this young lady who sat in her garden in the evening, playing her violin so beautifully and so movingly, spread round the neighborhood and beyond. People would come just to hear such exquisite music.

One evening her playing was particularly moving, almost heavenly. What only she knew was that her father was quietly and peacefully dying in a dark corner just outside the shed. But it stirred the hearts of those who heard, among whom happened to be a young professor from the Conservatorium. He took the liberty of entering the garden and saying how exquisitely and beautifully she had played and told her that she should enrol at the Conservatorium; she would have a scholarship for such talent should not be wasted.

Grete did enrol. She reverently disposed of her father, sold the small holding and found a small apartment near the Conservatorium. Eventually, she and the young professor married. They had two daughters. Though her husband may have liked to have had a son, Grete was relieved that they did not.