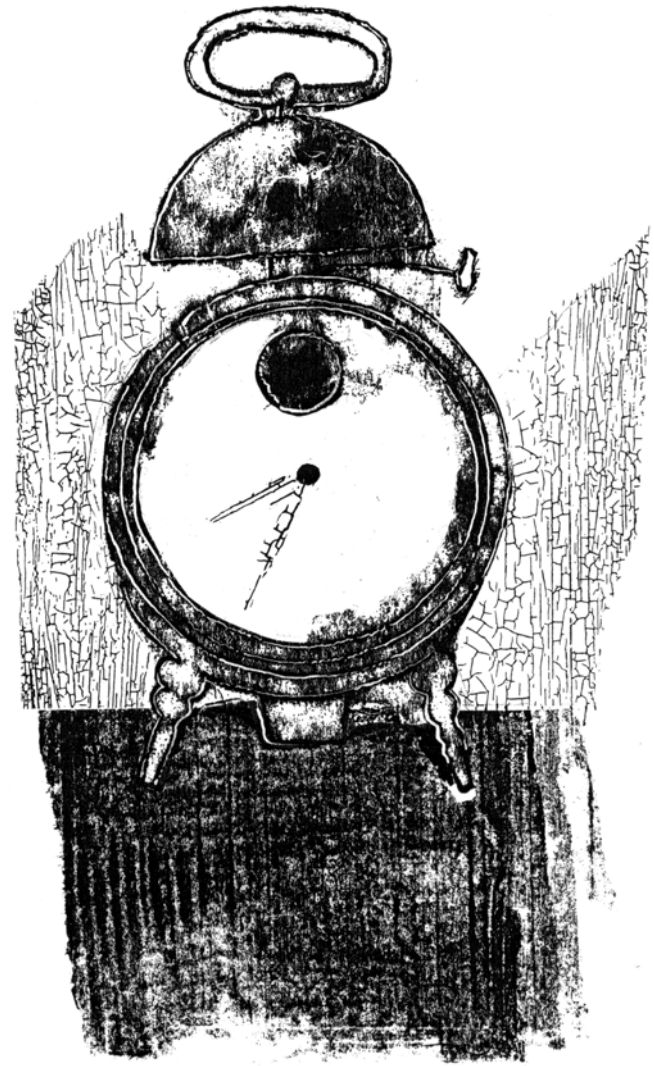


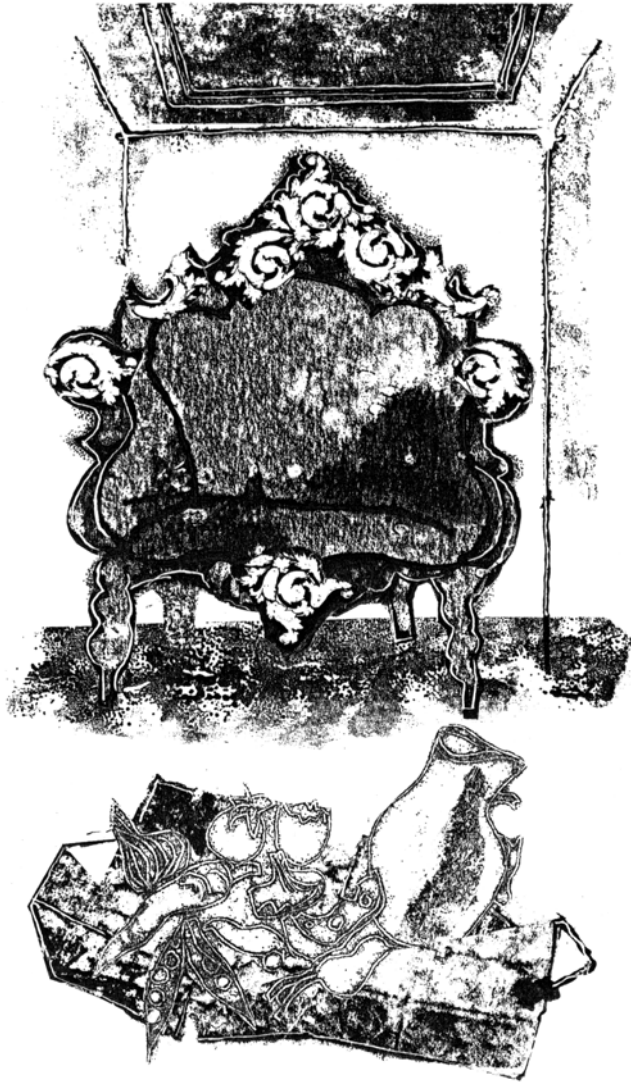
Gregor had never once in his five years of employment been ill. The boss would be sure to arrive with the health insurance doctor, reproach his parents for their lazy son, and cut short all excuses by referring to the insurance doctor, for whom after all only perfectly healthy but work-shy people existed. And besides, would he have been so very wrong in this case? Gregor felt quite fine in fact, with the exception of his drowsiness, superfluous after such a long sleep, and he even had an especially hearty appetite.

As he was thinking all this over at top speed, without being able to force himself out of bed – the alarm clock had just struck a quarter to seven – there was a cautious knock on the door at the head of his bed. “Gregor,” called a voice – it was his mother – “it’s a quarter to seven. Didn’t you have a train to catch?” That soft voice! Gregor got a shock when he heard his voice answering, unmistakably his own voice from before, it was true, but in which an irrepressible, painful squeaking was mixed, as if from below, which retained the clarity of his words only for the first moment, before distorting them so much that one could not be sure if one had heard correctly. Gregor had wanted to answer in detail and explain everything, but given the circumstances confined himself to saying, “Yes, yes, thank you mother – I’m just getting up.” Because of the wooden door, the change in Gregor’s voice was apparently not noticeable from outside, for his mother contented herself with this explanation and shuffled away. But as a result of this brief exchange the other family members had become aware that Gregor was still at home, contrary to all expectations,



worry, and neglect – this just mentioned in passing – your duties to the firm in an outrageous manner. I am speaking here in the name of your parents and your employer and ask you in all seriousness for an immediate and clear explanation. I'm amazed, amazed. I had always believed you to be a quiet, sensible person, and now you suddenly seem bent on making a strange spectacle of yourself. The boss did suggest to me early this morning a possible explanation for your failure to show up – it had to do with the authority to collect payments which we recently entrusted to you – but I practically gave my word of honour that this explanation could not be right. But now that I see your incredible obstinacy, I'm quickly losing all desire to stick up for you in any way whatsoever, and your job is by no means assured. I originally intended to tell you this in private, but since you make me waste my time here so uselessly I don't see why your parents shouldn't hear it as well. Your performance of late has been very unsatisfactory; this is admittedly not the best season for doing exceptional business, this we grant you; but a season for doing no business at all, such a thing does not exist, Mr Samsa, cannot be allowed to exist." "But sir," cried Gregor, beside himself and in his agitation forgetting everything else, "I'm just opening up, this very minute. A slight indisposition, a dizzy spell, has kept me from getting up. I'm still lying in bed, but now I'm feeling quite fine again. I'm just getting out of bed. Just be patient for a moment longer! I'm not quite so well yet as I thought, but I'm all right, really. How something like this can just take a person by surprise. Only last night I felt fine, my parents





had become somewhat bloated from the substantial meal, and he could hardly breathe in this confined space. Between slight attacks of suffocation he watched with bulging eyes as his unsuspecting sister took a broom and swept up not only the remains, but also the foods Gregor had not even touched, as if they were no longer usable either, and then dumped everything hastily into a bucket, which she then covered with a wooden lid and carried out. Hardly had she turned her back when Gregor came out from under the sofa, stretching and inflating himself.

Thus Gregor now received his food daily, once in the morning while his parents and the servant girl were still asleep, and a second time after the midday meal, for then his parents took another short nap and the servant girl would be sent away by his sister on some errand or other. Certainly they did not want Gregor to starve, but perhaps they could not have been able to bear to know any more about his feeding than from hearsay, or perhaps his sister wanted to spare them what were even minor torments, for indeed they really were suffering enough as it was.

Under what pretext the doctor and locksmith had been got rid of that first morning, Gregor could not discover; for since the others could not understand what he said, it never occurred to them, not even his sister, that he could understand them; and so whenever his sister was in his room he had to content himself with her occasional sighs and invocations of the saints. It was only later when she had begun to get used to everything a little – of course there was no question of getting completely used to it – Gregor

THE IDEA FOR *THE METAMORPHOSIS*

When Franz Kafka awoke one morning from his troubled dreams, he found himself in his bed – no not transformed into a monstrous insect, but with an idea in his head that would not let him go.

That was on the 17th November 1912, a Sunday. Kafka lay in bed and wondered what it would be like to wake up, lying on an armour-plated back, with countless legs, flickering helplessly in the air. He probably also felt, like Gregor Samsa, incapable of getting up, after all, he had sat up until far into the night over his novel *The Missing*, while feeling that it was “very

much the worse for it”.¹ As well as this, he had been waiting in vain for days for a letter from his girlfriend, Felice Bauer, and was determined “not to stir from his bed until the letter came”.²

The postman finally delivered the longed-for letter around midday and Kafka answered Felice on the evening of the same day. In the final sentence of his reply, he mentions that he will “write down a little story that came to me during my misery in bed, and which is tormenting me most deeply”³ that very day – the first allusion to *The Metamorphosis*.

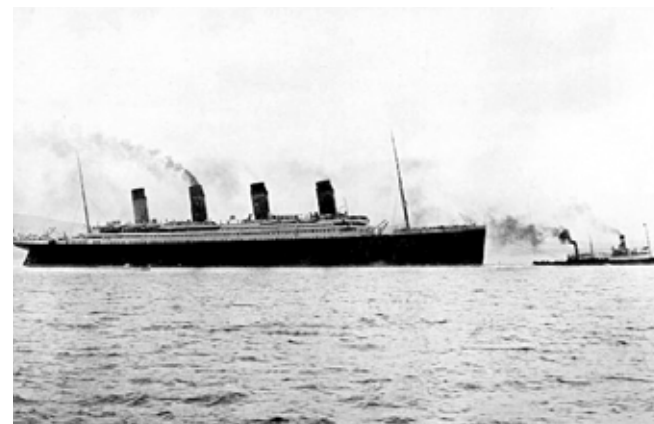


View of the Čech Bridge; behind the right-hand column is the house “At the Ship”, in which Kafka lived in 1912.

THE YEAR 1912

The world was “deeply tormented” by other events in the year 1912, events which were, of course, also the talk of Prague, Kafka’s home city: On the 15th April, the “unsinkable” passenger steamer Titanic went down on her maiden

voyage, taking over one thousand five hundred people with her to their deaths. In October, further catastrophe loomed with the First Balkan War, the conflicts in the Balkans being harbingers of the First World War, which



Top: The Titanic leaving her home port of Southampton.
Bottom: An aeroplane from the year 1912.