

Metamorphosis Revisited

by John Olson

When I met Gregor Samsa he was still a cockroach, erratic and skittish whenever the light came on. We often spoke in the dark. I empathized with the man. I mean bug.

Ok. That isn't fair. You can't call a man a bug because he chirps and eats dried skin cells. A man is more than a mandible, compound eyes and an exoskeleton. He was self-sufficient. He survived. He went about his business without injury to other people.

Identity is always a muzzy proposition, especially after a good night's sleep. I frequently wake up in the morning unclear about my identity and role in life. Breakfast helps get me concentrated. I enjoy breaking eggs with a butterknife, calculating the right amount of pressure, giving the egg a little whack with the blade and if everything goes right the shell cracks easily and the contents slip into the pan where I've already melted some butter and I sprinkle some salt and pepper and begin to stir and it never ceases to fascinate me: that moment when the liquidity of the eggs congeals.

My visits with Gregor were brief. His body repulsed me. It saddens me to admit that, but it's true. Nobody likes hanging out with a cockroach for very long. One is never quite sure which of the legs to shake in greeting. Or what exactly to serve for refreshment. Crumbs? Something gone bad in the refrigerator?

There is nothing more public than a sidewalk, which is where I go when my session with Gregor is finished, and I am able to think and write about other experiences. Things like socks and shoes. My steps are continually haunted by the generality of shoes. The geniality of shoes. The miscellaneousness of shoes. Shoe sizes. Shoe soles. Shoe tongues. Shoe laces.

Or clothing.

People don't wear yellow enough. Why is that? It's such a bright, happy color. Don't people want to look bright and happy? Nobody wants to end up another hapless Gregor Samsa, late for work and hiding under the bed.

Wear yellow, my friend, wear yellow. Be a sun. Be a golden light to the world. Rise and shine and let the world feel what you feel.

What is it that you feel?

Take the armchair: the armchair is the very essence of benevolence. Next time I encounter my friend Mr Samsa I will invite him to crawl into an armchair where he may recover what is most human in him. That delightful warmth that comes over one when we surrender to the persuasions of gravity and let our bones and muscles go into a state of total repose.

Here, in a chrysalis of comfort, we can succeed at some inner metamorphosis. We can empty ourselves of ourselves and drift into other forms of being. Find ourselves smashed by gravity into opulent cognition. A cat's cradle still entangled in our fingers. The predicaments of insects dissolved into trifles and silks. Permissions and emendations. Butterflies in our dreams. The Beatles reunited in eternity.

