

THE METAMORPHOSIS

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One morning, a cockroach woke up and found that she had turned into a human. She tried to move her limbs but quickly realized that she only had four, and they were big, heavy, and hard to move. She tried to wiggle her antennae but she didn't have antennae any more. She wanted to let out a small squeal of surprise, but instead let out a loud grunt. All of the other cockroaches ran away and hid behind the furniture. Her first human thought was, "How unladylike! I'm naked." Her second human thought was, "Disgusting! I need to get rid of these cockroaches."

Thinking was a novelty for an ex-cockroach. In the past, she had simply followed her instincts. Now she needed to think logically. She started exploring the house, staying right next to the wall because old habits die hard. She found a bedroom, a dresser, some underwear, and a dress. She looked at herself in the mirror and was pleased with how she looked – for a former cockroach, that is. She put on makeup. All cockroaches look the same, but a woman needs to highlight her personality. She gave herself a name: Vandirene. She later discovered that just one name wasn't enough. What social class did she belong to? Was she educated? Did she have references? After a lot of work, she was able to get a job as a maid. Her life as a cockroach helped her find all the dirt that no one else knew about. She was a good cleaning lady.

Life as a human was complicated. Cockroaches eat whatever comes their way. Vandirene needed to buy food and money was hard to come by. Cockroaches start their ritual by using their antennae to feel each other out, but humans don't. They get to know each other, date, fight, make up, decide to get married, and then question their decision. Will there be enough money to live on? Then there's the house, furniture, appliances, bedding, bath, and beyond. The first night. Vandirene and her husband, the lathe operator. Difficult. You don't know anything, dear? How do I tell him that virginity doesn't exist among cockroaches? The foreplay, the nervousness. Was it good? I know it wasn't. You don't love me. If I were somebody you would love me. You all talk too much, said Vandirene. She meant you all, humans, but her husband didn't understand; he thought she meant you all, men. So he hit her. Then he

threatened to kill her. Vandirene didn't understand. To cockroaches, the idea of death doesn't exist. Vandirene couldn't believe it. How could someone live knowing they were going to die?

Vandirene had kids. She struggled – welfare lines, daycare, not enough milk. Her husband was unemployed. Finally, she won the lottery, almost 4 million. To cockroaches, having 4 million wouldn't make any difference. A cockroach would continue with the same outlook and keep the same friends. But Vandirene changed. She used her money – moved to a new neighborhood, bought a house, started dressing nicely and eating expensive food. She even worried about using proper grammar. She climbed the social ladder. She hired nannies and went off to a private Catholic University. She started to read everything that she could. Her biggest worry was death. She was going to die. Her children were going to die. Her husband was going to die – although he wouldn't be missed. The whole world, one day, was going to disappear. The sun. The universe. Everything. If space is what exists between matter, what's left when there is no more matter? What do you call the absence of emptiness? And what will happen to me when there is nothing left? Existential anguish doesn't exist among cockroaches.

Vandirene woke up one morning and realized that she had turned back into a cockroach. Her second to last human thought was, "My God. The house was fumigated just two days ago!" Her last human thought was all about her money left in the bank and what her dirt bag of a husband, her legal heir, was going to do with it all. With that thought, she crawled down the foot of the bed and hid behind the dresser. She didn't think of anything else. It was all pure instinct. She died five minutes later, but they were the happiest five minutes of her life. Kafka doesn't mean anything to cockroaches.
