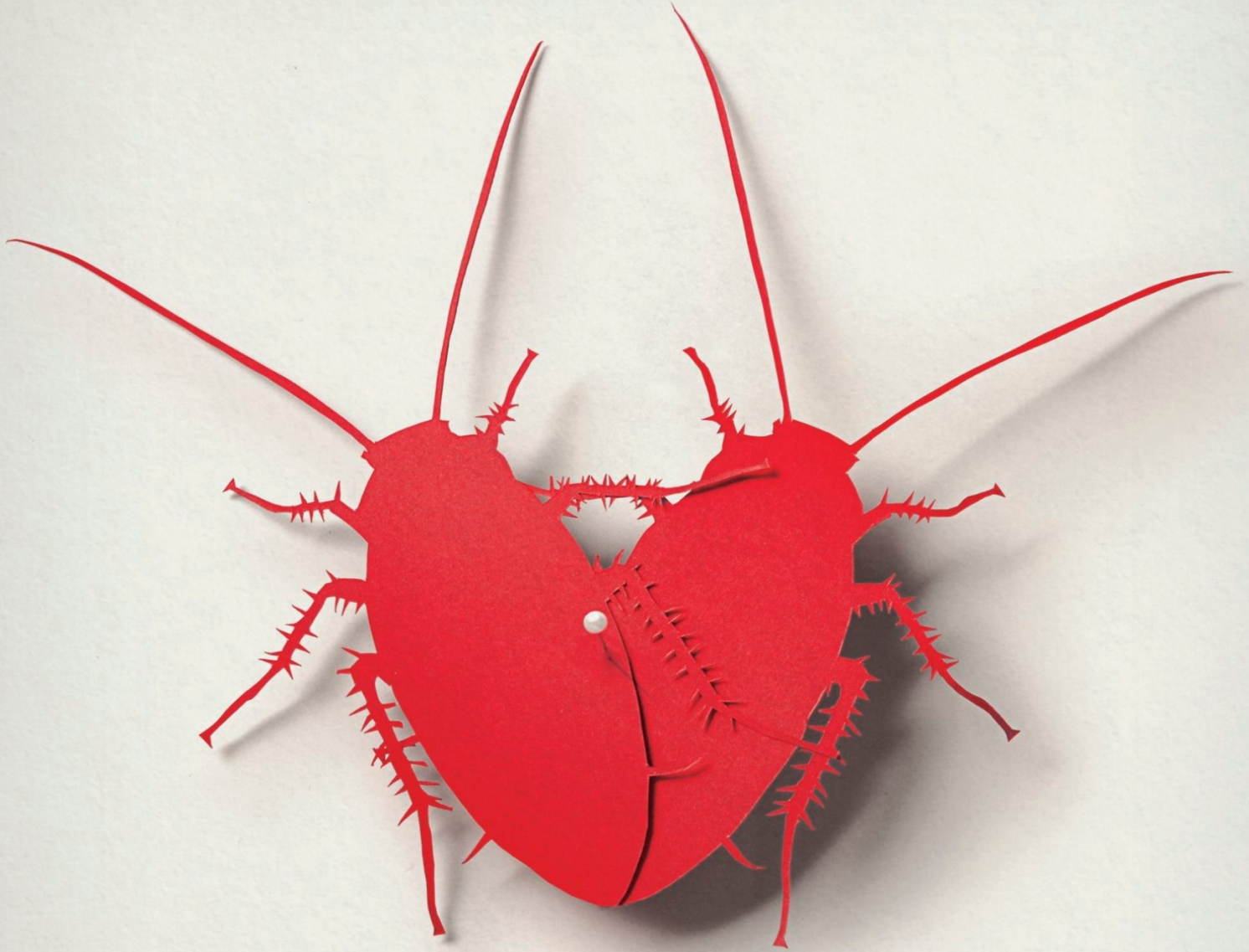




Samsa in Love
Haruki Murakami

Samsa in Love by [Haruki Murakami](#)

October, 2013

Translated, from the Japanese, by Ted Goossen

He woke to discover that he had undergone a metamorphosis and become Gregor Samsa.

He lay flat on his back on the bed, looking at the ceiling. It took time for his eyes to adjust to the lack of light. The ceiling seemed to be a common, everyday ceiling of the sort one might find anywhere.

Once, it had been painted white, or possibly a pale cream. Years of dust and dirt, however, had given it the color of spoiled milk. It had no ornament, no defining characteristic. No argument, no message. It fulfilled its structural role but aspired to nothing further.

There was a tall window on one side of the room, to his left, but its curtain had been removed and thick boards nailed across the frame. An inch or so of space had been left between the horizontal boards, whether on purpose or not wasn't clear; rays of morning sun shone through, casting a row of bright parallel lines on the floor. Why was the window barricaded in such a rough fashion? Was a major storm or tornado in the offing? Or was it to keep someone from getting in? Or to prevent someone (him, perhaps?) from leaving?

Still on his back, he slowly turned his head and examined the rest of the room. He could see no furniture, apart from the bed on which he lay. No chest of drawers, no desk, no chair. No painting, clock, or mirror on the

walls. No lamp or light. Nor could he make out any rug or carpet on the floor.

Just bare wood. The walls were covered with wallpaper of a complex design, but it was so old and faded that in the weak light it was next to impossible to make out what the design was.

The room had perhaps once served as a normal bedroom. Yet now all vestiges of human life had been stripped away. The only thing that remained was his solitary bed in the center. And it had no bedding. No sheets, no coverlet, no pillow. Just an ancient mattress.

Samsa had no idea where he was, or what he should do. All he knew was that he was now a human whose name was Gregor Samsa. And how did he know *that*? Perhaps someone had whispered it in his ear while he lay sleeping? But who had he been before he became Gregor Samsa? *What* had he been?

The moment he began contemplating that question, however, something like a black column of mosquitoes swirled up in his head. The column grew thicker and denser as it moved to a softer part of his brain, buzzing all the way. Samsa decided to stop thinking. Trying to think anything through at this point was too great a burden.

In any case, he had to learn how to move his body. He couldn't lie there staring up at the ceiling forever. The posture left him much too vulnerable. He had no chance of surviving an attack—by predatory birds, for example. As a first step, he tried to move his fingers. There were ten of them, long things affixed to his two hands. Each was equipped with a number of joints, which made synchronizing their movements very complicated. To make matters worse, his body felt numb, as though it were immersed in a sticky, heavy liquid, so that it was difficult to send strength to his extremities.

Nevertheless, after repeated attempts and failures, by closing his eyes and focussing his mind he was able to bring his fingers more under control. Little by little, he was learning how to make them work together. As his fingers became operational, the numbness that had enveloped his body withdrew.

In its place—like a dark and sinister reef revealed by a retreating tide—came an excruciating pain.

It took Samsa some time to realize that the pain was hunger. This ravenous desire for food was new to him, or at least he had no memory of experiencing anything like it. It was as if he had not had a bite to eat for a week. As if the center of his body were now a cavernous void. His bones creaked; his muscles clenched; his organs twitched.

Unable to withstand the pain any longer, Samsa put his elbows on the mattress and, bit by bit, pushed himself up. His spine emitted several low and sickening cracks in the process. My God, Samsa thought, how long have I been lying here? His body protested each move. But he struggled through, marshalling his strength, until, at last, he managed to sit up.

Samsa looked down in dismay at his naked body. How ill-formed it was! Worse than ill-formed. It possessed no means of self-defense. Smooth white skin (covered by only a perfunctory amount of hair) with fragile blue blood vessels visible through it; a soft, unprotected belly; ludicrous, impossibly shaped genitals; gangly arms and legs (just two of each!); a scrawny, breakable neck; an enormous, misshapen head with a tangle of stiff hair on its crown; two absurd ears, jutting out like a pair of seashells. *Was this thing really him?* Could a body so preposterous, so easy to destroy (no shell for protection, no weapons for attack), survive in the world? Why hadn't he been turned into a fish? Or a sunflower? A fish or a sunflower made sense. More sense, anyway, than this human being, Gregor Samsa.

Steeling himself, he lowered his legs over the edge of the bed until the soles of his feet touched the floor. The unexpected cold of the bare wood made him gasp. After several failed attempts that sent him crashing to the floor, at last he was able to balance on his two feet. He stood there, bruised and sore, one hand clutching the frame of the bed for support. His head was inordinately heavy and hard to hold up. Sweat streamed from his armpits, and his genitals shrank from the stress. He had to take several deep breaths before his constricted muscles began to relax.

Once he was used to standing, he had to learn to walk. Walking on two legs amounted to a kind of torture, each movement an exercise in pain. No matter how he looked at it, advancing his right and left legs one after the other was a bizarre proposition that flouted all natural laws, while the precarious distance from his eyes to the ground made him cringe in fear. He had to learn how to coördinate his hip and knee joints. Each time he took a step forward, his knees shook, and he steadied himself against the wall with both hands.

But he knew that he could not remain in this room forever. If he didn't find food, and quickly, his starving belly would consume his own flesh, and he would cease to exist.

He tottered toward the door, pawing at the wall as he went. The journey seemed to take hours, although he had no way of measuring the time, except by the pain. His movements were awkward, his pace snail-like. He couldn't advance without leaning on something for support. On the street, his best hope would be that people saw him as disabled.

He grasped the doorknob and pulled. It didn't budge. A push yielded the same result. Next, he turned the knob to the right and pulled. The door opened partway with a slight squeak. He poked his head through the opening and looked out. The hallway was deserted. It was as quiet as the bottom of the ocean. He extended his left leg through the doorway, swung the upper half of his body out, with one hand on the doorframe, and followed with his right leg. He moved slowly down the corridor, hands on the wall.

There were four doors in the hallway, including the one he had just used. All were identical, fashioned of the same dark wood. What, or who, lay beyond them? He longed to open them and find out. Perhaps then he might begin to understand the mysterious circumstances in which he found himself. Or at least discover a clue of some sort. Nevertheless, he passed by each of the doors, making as little noise as possible. The need to fill his belly trumped his curiosity. He had to find something substantial to eat.

And now he knew where to find it.