

Gregor's Dream

A strange light filters gradually on to the stage — hardening and elongating features — GREGOR's heart is heard beating, the lights adjust to the heartbeats — the movement of the FAMILY seems caught in the motion of the beat — the bodies occasionally pulled by its sound — they appear as if under water.

- GREGOR: *[Screams, drained of any energy.]* The apple's still inside me — I can't move any more — I can't climb — it takes me ages to crawl under the bed.
- MRS. S: His room's filthy, Greta — he's lying there in heaps of filth and dust.
- GRETA: I'm tired — I'm tired of working — trudging out my life in a shop all day.
- MRS. S: We mustn't leave him — he'll think we don't care any more.
- GREGOR: Take it out of me — I can feel it beginning to rot — it's becoming inflamed — covered with dust.
- MRS. S: Oh, Greta, do something.
- GRETA: I can't, Mother, I can't do that.
- MRS. S: Father, do something.
- [Image — FATHER laughs — the pulse of the heart and light snatches the reason from his voice — the words break. End. Shudder — again automation from GREGOR.]*
- MR. S: He's a dung beetle — he's just a dung beetle.
- [Cry is heard — they twist around in their sleep.]*
- MRS. S: We mustn't hurt him any more — he's still our son.
- MR. S: No, not that thing in there, our son's left us.
- GREGOR: I'm hungry — oh, I'm so hungry.
- MRS. S: Feed him, Greta — you're not feeding him any more.
- GRETA: I do feed him — I've always fed him.
- [Image — a giant beetle composed of the FAMILY, the arms moving in stiff staccato rhythm, and bodies twist and join together in agonized conflict.]*
- GREGOR: Yes — any old scraps of food without considering what I like — just throw something in — slam the door and leave me in the darkness again.

- GRETA: He would probably have perished without me.
- MRS. S: I wish we could move to a smaller house — we could save so much money.
- MR. S: How could we move that creature in there without anybody noticing — no, there's nothing we can do. But work — we must work.
- [They all continue with the same word, fading out on it.]*
- GREGOR: *[As he speaks, the FAMILY hold their positions like a fresco.]* Of course you could move me. You could shift me in a box with air holes — no — you're blaming me for your own helplessness.

Phase Three

- MR. S: Work, Gregor. Time to get up.
- [Image — the beetle dissolves, the limbs disconnect. Dreamlike, GREGOR walks to work, MR. SAMSA hangs upside down in the cage, the pace increases, maddens.]*
- GRETA: Time, Gregor — four a.m. — you must catch the five a.m. train.
- MR. S: *[Pulls GREGOR out of cage.]* Pack your samples — come on Gregor, don't be lazy.
- [GREGOR now starts walking on the spot.]*
- MRS. S: He works so hard — he's good to us.
- GRETA: You must hurry, Gregor, hurry — I need violin lessons.
- MRS. S: Only five years to go, Gregor.
- GREGOR: Yes!
- MR. S: What will the Chief Clerk say if you're late?
- GREGOR: Yes!
- MRS. S: Oh, Gregor, hurry! Hurry! Hurry!
- [They repeat their phrases faster and faster. FATHER is in the cage now — whipping him on — MOTHER and GRETA have stood on their stools as if on a grandstand. GREGOR moves faster — the heartbeat accelerates — suddenly GREGOR's movements become jerky, mechanical. He breaks into a run — but a strange hideous run like a beetle scurrying along with a ball of dung — he now moves as a sprinter, so fast it seems his heart will*

burst. He stops, exhausted. FATHER draws his arm back to the whine of the women and throws his apple. GREGOR screams, transfixed — a single spot emphasizes his agony — slowly his body transforms itself, trembling jerkily into SAMSA/INSECT — his arms crossed — fingers bent like hooks — he collapses over a stool — he now appears less human than insect — the FAMILY come downstage and look at him as if witnessing a street accident — they whisper in uninvolved concern. GRETA and FATHER walk to their sleeping positions. MOTHER above, takes him slowly back to his cage.]

MRS. S: Don't worry, Gregor — you're not being forgotten by your old mother — she'll look after you if nobody else does — have it all clean for you to roam around in — don't worry, we won't have a charlady in here — nobody'll have to see you. You'll soon be well — I can feel it — as soon as the weather starts to break and the cold winds go — we'll have a bit of spring in the air and one morning you will wake up and see that it's been a nasty dream.

[Image — MRS. SAMSA takes him back to his room — gently reassuring this is GREGOR — tired, old.]

[End of dream sequence. Fade to darkness. Silence. The lights hard up, morning.]

[Three loud knocks.]

MR. S: That will be the lodgers for the room!
[These THREE LODGERS can be played by one.]

MRS. S: Lodgers!

MR. S: Cash!

MRS. S: Lodgers!

GRETA: Shoes!

MRS. S: Lodgers!

MR. S: Beer!

MRS. S: Lodgers!

GRETA: Books!

MRS. S: Lodgers!

MR. S: Cigars!

MRS. S: Lodgers!

GRETA: Clothes!

MRS. S: [ecstatic] Lodgers . . . Sir, do come in.

[Three men in white harlequins' masks behind each other in exact step as if one person. They copy each other's every move — over-react to everything — concerned for their welfare totally and are greedy. The pig faces of the harlequin masks exactly externalize their inner state. They move fast, acrobatically and energetically.]

1ST L: It's warm.

2ND L: Pleasant.

3RD L: A little cramped, but it'll do.

[They all take the family stools.]

MRS. S: We'll try and make it comfortable.

MR. S: It's a very friendly household — say the word and we'll do our best.

GRETA: [giggling] What funny faces!

MRS. S: Ssshhh!

1ST L: We'd like to be called at eight o'clock.

2ND L: Prompt!

3RD L: Breakfast hot and ready at eight fifteen!

2ND L: Prompt!

1ST L: Coffee, rolls and cheese.

2ND L: Marmalade, if you please.

3RD L: And toast.

MRS. S: I think we'll manage that all right.

1ST L: We're sticklers for order.

2ND L: Especially in the kitchen.

3RD L: Can't bear slovenliness.

MRS. S: You tell us what you need.

1ST L: When we've examined our quarters.

2ND L: We'll tell you all of our objections.

MR. S: [uncomfortably] Hmmph! [clearing his throat] There's er . . . one thing you should know before you make a decision.

1ST L: Yes?

MR. S: We . . . er . . . keep a pet in the back room.

ALL L'S: Oh yes?

MR. S: I wondered if that would bother you?

ALL L'S: Oh no, we're fond of pets.

MRS. S: I'll show you to your quarters and then you can have some supper. [She takes them out . . . as she returns] They seem quite . . .

MR. S: I hope they don't . . . [Indicates GREGOR's room.]

MRS. S: I shouldn't think they'd . . .

MR. S: Mind?

MRS. S: No!

MR. S: Let's hope he doesn't . . .

MRS. S: Of course he won't.

[The LODGERS return.]

1ST L: It suits us moderately well.

2ND L: Except for these articles which we would like to dispose of.

ALL L'S: Please.

[They all raise arms indicating objects.]

MR. S: Greta! Take the lodgers' belongings with you and put them away somewhere.

[They pass the objects to her and she goes away to GREGOR's room and throws them in — GREGOR shrinks back. Meanwhile, the LODGERS are taking their seats.]

GREGOR: Go on, use my room as a junk room. Make the lodgers the chief consideration. Throw food into me, when you remember. You don't speak of me any more — I still would, after a rare night's sleep, wake up, and imagine I was Gregor — I still hope.

[Fade.]

[The LODGERS are still seated downstage eating. The FAMILY wait on them as servants.]

MR. S: Is it more tasty now?

1ST L: I think so. [passing plate]

2ND L: Much better.

3RD L: You're learning . . .

[SECOND LODGER carves joint with elaborate care. Mime carving of meat with hot meat slipping about on the plates — hot potatoes eaten with gulps of breath to cool them down, vegetables spilling on table, etc.]

The potatoes are hot.

1ST L: Hmmm! It's delicious.

2ND L: Nice and juicy.

[MRS. SAMSA looks on, pleased. They continue eating with refinement — from GREGOR's room can be heard noises of crunching of teeth as GREGOR chews food. Every time this happens the LODGERS stop eating — listen for a moment till crunching stops, then shrug

shoulders and carry on — after the third interruption . . .]

MRS. S: Don't let that disturb you, it's his feeding time.

1ST L: I see, well in future do you think you could stagger our meals?

2ND L: It would be preferable . . .

3RD L: To that hideous noise.

MRS. S: Certainly, certainly — I'm sorry it disturbed you, but I hope you enjoyed the meal?

[They all look up at her and then get into a whispering huddle — the FAMILY look on anxiously — after a few seconds during which each one has looked up and turned back, as if to make up/his mind about some fresh point . . .]

ALL L'S: [smiling] Excellent!

[The FAMILY sigh in relief — GRETA goes upstage to play her violin — as soon as GRETA crooks her arm into the position of playing the violin we hear 'The Blue Danube' being played. The THREE LODGERS hear it and react with glee and excitement — they start dancing with their stools and waltzing wildly round the room.]

MR. S: Is the violin playing disturbing you, gentlemen?

2ND L: On the contrary, we find it enchanting!

[The THREE LODGERS freeze into absurd positions as if caught by a high speed camera — the FAMILY on the other side listening attentively.]

GREGOR: I'm not an animal — I can hear the music. No-one in that room can appreciate music like me. Stop playing, spit at these intruders, Greta — play only for me. I'll protect you from these swine — my ugliness could protect you by frightening them away, then I will send you — I announce to you all — I will send you to the Conservatorium! Yes, I know I'm covered in grime and muck — and you all detest me — but I was sending Greta to the Conservatorium, but for my mishap, last Christmas — Oh! Was it so long?

[GREGOR slides into the room. The tableau bursts into life. He is seen by the FIRST LODGER.]

1ST L: Mr. Samsa!

[Points at GREGOR — music stops — silence — LODGERS look at one another, smiling.]

2ND L: Good God!

3RD L: What a sight!

[Image — GREGOR is spreadeagled on the floor — tired, aching, being partially concealed by the skirts of the women.]

MR. S: Gentlemen, gentlemen — please do not be disturbed by what you see, I can only offer my humblest apologies and assure you it will never happen again. [glancing at wife] Never!

[LODGERS seem rather amused by GREGOR.]

Now, if you would kindly go to your room . . .

[LODGERS consider that they should be angry.]

1ST L: I see — just like that!

2ND L: No explanation!

3RD L: Nothing!

MR. S: Somebody must have left his door open, but we'll keep it firmly locked in future.

[FATHER has stepped between them and GREGOR, attempting to hide him and at the same time to shepherd them out.]

1ST L: And are we expected to live with that creature at the end of the corridor?

2ND L: He might escape in the night and creep into our room and attack us in the dark!

MR. S: Please, gentlemen, please! I assure you that no such thing is possible — he is very mild and quite weak as he hasn't been too well lately.

1ST L: [satirically] Oh! Nothing serious, I hope!

MR. S: Oh no — some digestion trouble, no doubt.

2ND L: No doubt!

1ST L: [interrupts] But that doesn't explain your conduct in not informing me before we took the room that you kept a zoo.

MR. S: I did say a pet . . .

1ST L: Look at it — it's probably suffering from diseases!

2ND L: He said himself it's not well.

3RD L: He's probably mephitic!

1ST L: Coprolitic!

2ND L: He's a dung beetle!

MR. S: [struggling] He's really very tame.

1ST L: Pestilence and dysentery!

2ND L: We'll get cankered and decrepit!

3RD L: Deteriorate!

2ND L: And die!

1ST L: It's a dangerous place to live in!

MR. S: [pushing them away from GREGOR] Gentlemen, I assure you, you'll be comfortable and need have no fear — you'll never see him again, and now will you please leave the room so that I can clear him away.

[LODGERS get into huddle.]

1ST L: I beg to announce that because of the disgusting conditions prevailing in this household and family [spits] I give you my notice on the spot. Naturally I shall not pay you a penny for leaving without notice or for the food I've eaten — on the contrary, I shall consider bringing an action for damages against you!

2ND L: } And we, too, give our notice on the spot!

3RD L: }

[They march off. MR. SAMSA staggers to a chair groping through space as if he were being attacked by a vacuum, sits in the chair numbed. GRETA, who has been standing with her head down weeping, looks at GREGOR — GREGOR just remains where he is. GRETA slowly raises her head, suddenly aged and determined. They walk downstage away from GREGOR, who remains in the room, gasping for air as he is now very weak.]

GRETA: [quietly] We must get rid of it — I won't utter my brother's name in the presence of this creature — so all I say is get rid of it. We've tried to look after it and to put up with it as far as is humanly possible — I don't think anyone would reproach us in the slightest —

MR. S: My child, I understand all this but what can we do? [GRETA shrugs in helplessness.] If only he could understand us. [GRETA shakes her head to indicate how unthinkable the idea is now.] If he could understand us — then perhaps we could come to some agreement with him — but as it is there is not much we can do.

GRETA: Yes, yes, you can, Father — you must get rid of the idea that he is Gregor — the fact that we've

believed it all this time is the root of our trouble — of course it's not Gregor — if it were he'd have gone away — he'd have known that human beings can't live with such a creature — so, we wouldn't have a brother, but we'd honour his memory. This creature persecutes us — drives our lodgers away and obviously wants the whole apartment to himself and wouldn't care if we slept in the gutter — Oh! Just look at him now!

[GREGOR is turning round to go back to his room. This involves much effort and panting. GRETA runs behind her FATHER.]

MR. S: [gently] Ssshhh! He's going to his room.

[They all watch him silently, as painfully and laboriously he makes his way back. He slowly crawls up on to his cage — the FAMILY, unable to endure any more, turn away as if to spare GREGOR further agony.]

GREGOR: I felt their eyes on me to the last, full of fears and misery. I sensed the growing agony of their burden and knew I had to disappear. My aching body seems glad to release the life that keeps it bound in agony — the will to keep it is weakening — and Gregor is flying out — I thought of my family only with tenderness and love.

[Cold single light illuminates GREGOR, three o'clock strikes and GREGOR senses death claiming him.]

MRS. S: He looked at me — just as we closed the door — he turned his head — his eyes — Gregor's eyes, full of agony, looked at me in such a way as only a child looks at his mother as if to say — no more — no more pain — I sensed his spirit creeping out of him, reluctant to inhabit such a painful dwelling, releasing him, go Gregor, go — bear no hatred for me — forgive — be free, be free my little boy . . . free . . . free.

GREGOR: [intones with her] Free . . . free.

MRS. S: [as the last faint whisper is expelled from GREGOR] Dead . . .

MR. S: [walking downstage in a pool of light with GRETA — they are entirely isolated from GREGOR's death, whose cage light has gone out] Well now, thanks be to God.

GRETA: Did you see how thin he'd become — it's such a long time since he ate anything.

MR. S: You know what we're going to do today — we're going to take the day off — we'll write letters to our respective employers and take a long stroll in the morning sunshine because that's what we need.

MRS. S: Father, that would be so good.

MR. S: They have returned to me.

[Taking their hands, they hold his as if they had no other means of life — attempting somehow to kindle a new life force through the current of their bodies.]

MRS. S: What a lovely peace rests in my heart.

MR. S: We'll sit in a tram and go into the open country with the warm sunshine flooding the windows.

MRS. S: Our jobs really aren't so bad and might lead to better things.

GRETA: I want to leave this house for ever.

MR. S: We'll get a small house — it'll be cheaper and easier to run — probably the one Gregor selected — we could afford it now. How pretty my daughter's become.

MRS. S: My daughter has bloomed into a pretty girl.

GRETA: My body has grown.

MRS. S: It will soon be time.

MR. S: We must find a good husband for her.

[MR. and MRS. SAMSA, sensing each other's thoughts, turn to look at GRETA — she releases their hands and stretches — their smiles confirm their thoughts are in harmony — slow fade.]

The crocuses will just be coming out.

[Final spot lingers on GREGOR.]

THE END