

METAMORPHOSIS by Steven Berkoff

Characters: Mr Samsa
Mrs Samsa
Greta Samsa
Gregor Samsa

The FAMILY enters one at a time – backcloth lit – figures appear in silhouette. Each one enters in the character he or she is going to play, and performs a small mime condensing the personality into a few seconds. MOTHER is first – describes a sad face – leaves a painted heart and angst. FATHER next strolls boldly on in boots and costume of mid-European lower middle class tradesman – trousers in socks – braces – no jacket, looking like Hindenburg. Then GRETA, as student with violin. Then GREGOR, who just walks on a smiles – an amiable being.

As each speaks they form a line behind each other. On the last line they take on the movement of the insect by moving their arms to a particular rhythm. As no front lighting is used, this has the effect of an insect's leg movement.

Mr S: *[enters]* As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams . . .

Mrs S: *[enters]* . . . he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect .

Greta: *[enters]* His numerous arms, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk waved helplessly before him.

[Movement starts. GREGOR is in front. Suddenly the movement stops – FAMILY dissolve the beetle image by moving away – leaving GREGOR still moving as part of the insect image.]

[Front lights come up revealing family.]

Gregor: What has happened to me:

Family: He thought.

Gregor: It was no dream.

Greta: He looked at the clock ticking on the chest . . .

Gregor: Half past six and the hands were quietly moving on.

Mrs S: Gregor . . . Gregor?

Mrs S: Said a voice.

Gregor: That gentle voice . . .

Greta: It was his mother's,

Mr S: His mother's

Mrs S: His mother's.

[Fade.]

[Slow Tick]

[Lights snap up on the centre area downstage revealing GREGOR standing behind GRETA – scenes of insect life. Each speak their own contrapuntally.]

GREGOR: *[indicates]* I'm Gregor Samsa – there's my sister Greta.

GRETA: *[motionless]* There' my brother Gregor.

GREGOR: Isn't that nice that she waits up for me.

GRETA: I always wait up for him.

GREGOR: Glass of milk on the table then bed – up again at four a.m. Yes, four a.m.! To catch the 5 a.m. train.

GRETA: He doesn't come home often.

GREGOR: Daily! What a life – what an exhausting job, and I picked it.

GRETA: He works so hard.

GREGOR: I picked it? I'm a commercial traveller in the cloth trade – I have to work to keep them.

[Lights snap on downstage left and right revealing MOTHER and FATHER both frozen.]

GRETA: But he also makes things at home.

GREGOR: Who else can do it? Father's ill so they rely on me totally.

GRETA: He recently made a picture frame and in it he put a picture cut out of an illustrated magazine.

GREGOR: ON my back it rests – their fortunes