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Family Plays

THE GHOST SONATA

Drama by August Strindberg

Translated by
JOE MARTIN

Music by
ANNA LARSON



THE GHOST SONATA

Joe Martin's fresh approach to August Strindberg's work won acclaim from audiences and reviewers: "The American Showcase Theatre staged a fascinating version of the classic *The Ghost Sonata* as part of the Strindberg Festival ... The choice of *The Ghost Sonata* was fortuitous. It is mature August Strindberg in top artistic form ... deftly written, provocative and fast-paced with forceful images and a wonderful sense of symbolism ... The presentation includes a marvelously appropriate score ... The music is eerie and unnerving, and at times bears the same mad resemblance to a soundtrack that the characters bear to real people. And what haunting parodies of people they are! The actors give you a whole world of memorable portraits to carry home in your mind." (*Performing Arts News Magazine*)

"Our production was an alternative theatre production with minimalist sets in a relatively small theatre." (Joe Martin, author)

Drama with optional music. By August Strindberg. Translated by Joe Martin. Music by Anna Larson. Cast: 6 to 8m., 6 to 8w., extras. The Ghost Sonata is about two men who enter a mysterious house inhabited by a strange family. Strindberg describes his script as unmasking the secrets that exist in every household. This translation was made for the Washington, D.C., Strindberg Festival and ran for five weeks with acclaim from audiences and reviewers at the American Showcase Theatre in Alexandria, Virginia. Ingmar Bergman has produced *The Ghost Sonata* three times. Your audiences will never forget your production. *Street and int. set. Costumes: 19th-century clothing. Approximate running time: 100 minutes. Music in book. Music/SFX CD available. Video available. Code: GB6.*

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By
August Strindberg

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Joe Martin

With Optional Music by
Anna Larson

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JOE MARTIN

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This translation of THE GHOST SONATA was first produced by The Strindberg Festival at American Showcase Theater, Alexandria, Va., in April and May, 1988, with the following cast:

Director Hummel (Old Man)	Albert St. Denis
Student	Bill Lynch
Milkmaid	Sara Devlin
Caretaker's Wife/Cook	Elizabeth Robelen
Fiancée	Faith Potts
Dead Man/Bengtsson	Robert Vander Linden
Dark Lady/Maid	Estrellita Jones
Colonel	Jim Bradfield
Mummy	Annie Houston
Daughter	Jessica Ferris
Aristocrat	Jim Scott
Johansson	Serge Seiden
Beggars	Ensemble

Directed by Joe Martin

Scenic and Costume Design by Nicole Quinqueton Platz

Music composed by Anna Larson

Choreography by Cynthia Berkshire

Lighting Design by John Burgess

Production Coordinator: Lisa Wormier

The photographs in this playbook are by Stacy Duncan

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This translation was completed with the assistance of a grant from the American-Scandinavian Foundation.

FOREWORD

August Strindberg's name is familiar to almost everybody interested in theatre. But few in America have seen one of his plays. Perhaps we read *The Dream Play* in a high school world literature class or produced a brief scene from *Miss Julie* in a college theatre history workshop. We would probably have gone to see one on stage, if we could have found one . . . but there were none.

Joe Martin, the translator of this new English-language version of *The Ghost Sonata*, wants to change all that. Producers neglect Strindberg's plays, Martin believes, because of the mistaken attitude that Strindberg's works are gloomy, depressing, difficult to stage, difficult to understand.

"This is my contribution to the re-evaluation of Strindberg that is currently going on," he said. Martin translated and directed *The Ghost Sonata* for the Strindberg Festival in Washington, DC, in 1988. It ran for five weeks at the American Showcase Theatre. "This one differs from other translations in that it steers away from British diction and is based on Strindberg's own final draft, bypassing the distortions created by various editors through time.

"We would like to convince creative theatre people that *The Ghost Sonata* can be exciting and manageable despite the highly unusual nature of the script. Our production was an alternative theatre production with minimalist sets in a relatively small theatre." Instead of the elaborate two-story house delineated by Strindberg (see "The Scene" at the beginning of the text), the company used movable screens and flats as shown in the photographs in this playbook. (For another simplification of the set, see the description on p. xiv of Ingmar Bergman's production.) The use of music and improvised sound effects as described on pages 38 and following helped lighten the mood of the play "to get away from that silly and boring myth that Strindberg must always be morose and heavy," Martin said.

The quirks one finds in Strindberg's works can be made to work in fascinating ways by talented actors, Martin points out. As an example, the Old Man early in the play comments on the Student's pronunciation of "window"—but the Student has not spoken the word. How does the performer playing the Student react?

Martin's fresh approach to Strindberg's work won acclaim from audiences and reviewers:

The American Showcase Theatre staged a fascinating version of the classic *The Ghost Sonata* as part of the Strindberg Festival . . . The choice of *The Ghost Sonata* was fortuitous. It is mature August Strindberg in top artistic form . . . deftly written, provocative and fast-paced with forceful images and a wonderful sense of symbolism . . . The presentation includes a marvelously appropriate score . . . The music is eerie and unnerving, and at times bears the same mad resemblance to a soundtrack that the characters bear to real people. And what haunting parodies of people they are! The actors give you a whole world of memorable portraits to carry home in your mind.—Wil Lewis, *The Review*

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THE PLAYWRIGHT

Johann August Strindberg was born in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1849 and died there in 1912.

Most devotees of the theatre know August Strindberg as an unbalanced Swede who, driven by problems with his mother, and women in general, wrote brilliant plays. They might even be aware that Henrik Ibsen, the dramatist against whom Strindberg spent much of his life reacting, kept Strindberg's portrait on the wall above his desk because of the power of his "mad eyes."

But how many are aware that George Bernard Shaw left a portion of his estate to insure that translations of Strindberg's works would be produced? Or that Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams claimed Strindberg as their single most important influence? O'Neill was partly responsible for the introduction of Strindberg's work to the American public, calling him "the precursor of all the modernity in our present theater."

The register and range of Strindberg's writing is vast—as is its sheer quantity. The new Swedish national edition of his work, when completed, will consist of 75 volumes: fiction, drama, poetry, scientific treatises, linguistic studies, social commentaries, and more. Recent ex-

hibitions of his photography and paintings have cast light on yet another facet of one of the world's most restless and productive artists. In his younger years Strindberg was at the forefront of cultural and political movements in Sweden.

In the mid-nineties, after having been separated for a number of years from his first wife, Siri von Essen, and his children, and after the dissolution of his second marriage, Strindberg published the novel *Inferno*, which purports to describe an all-absorbing spiritual crisis, stemming from revulsion against his previous arrogance and pride. He was being tested by "the powers" and began to read signs in nature and human events. This transitional period leads also to his dream plays and pilgrimage plays such as *A Dream Play* and *The Ghost Sonata* among others. And so the writer who had played mid-wife to Naturalism in the theatre became the father of Expressionism in the theatre.

During the last decade of his life Strindberg was more prolific than ever—writing about a third of his dramatic output (including most of his 12 history plays) and a practical volume on the craft of theatre. From 1910 to 1912 he unleashed the so-called "Strindberg Feud" in Sweden with a barrage of articles in the Stockholm press. In his articles he attacked, among other things, the trend toward militarism and war and accused a number of his former liberal colleagues of selling out national culture. He was bypassed, conspicuously, for the Nobel prize—with the result that his admirers in Sweden awarded him an "Anti-Nobel Prize." In 1912 the Stockholm Worker's Commune sponsored a torch-light parade past his residence to commemorate his 63rd birthday. Although Strindberg had requested his funeral not be public, when he died in 1912 tens of thousands of workers and members of Sweden's cultural community marched behind his casket.

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THE TRANSLATOR

Joe Martin, playwright and translator, lives in Washington, DC. His first short play, "The Realistic Offer," was produced at the Washington Theater Lab in 1977. In 1981 he completed an MFA at the University of British Columbia with a concentration in playwriting. He took his Ph. D. in comparative drama from U. B. C. in 1987. From January 1983 to April 1985 he served as dramaturg and associate director of the Open Theatre Company in Vancouver, British Columbia. During 1985-1986 he lived in Norway and Sweden on a fellowship from the American-Scandinavian Foundation, translating and writing about the works of Norway's Jens Bjørneboe and Sweden's August Strindberg. The Strindberg translations were produced at several Washington theatres as part of the Strindberg Festival and the New Sweden '88 festivities in the spring of 1988. He returned to Washington, DC, to live in 1986, where he currently serves as artistic director of Open Theatre and teaches modern drama and theatre history at American University. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

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THE COMPOSER

Anna Larson, also of Washington, DC, was a member of the Washington Ballet Company before leaving dance to study music. Her orchestral works have been performed by The National Gallery Orchestra and The McLean Chamber Orchestra and have been broadcast nationwide by Parkway Productions. She holds a doctorate in composition from The University of Maryland.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Part 1

Posters announcing plays—on column
 Broom—Caretaker's Wife
 Watering can—Caretaker's Wife
 Laurel branches—Caretaker's Wife
 Wheelchair—Old Man
 Newspaper—Old Man
 Milk bottles in wire basket—Milkmaid
 Beret—Milkmaid
 Ladle—on well
 Handkerchief—Student
 Change purse—Student
 Basket of birch branches—Caretaker's Wife
 Watering can—Daughter
 Newspaper—Colonel
 Bracelet—Daughter
 Handkerchief—Daughter

Part 2

Paper, pen—Colonel
 Crutches—Old Man
 Letter—Colonel
 Sheet of paper—Old Man
 Signet ring—Colonel
 Small dinner bell—on table
 Packet of papers—Old Man
 Bell—Colonel
 Tea set (with or without biscuits) on tray—Johansson/Bengtsson

Part 3

Flowers
 Buddha—on table
 Japanese bottle—Cook
 Bell—Daughter

Costumes

The premiere production of this translation used 19th century clothing as shown in the photographs throughout this book. Specific costumes called for in the script include:

An English riding habit for the **Daughter**. Almost immediately she reappears in a different costume.

A burial shroud for the **Dead Man**

Formal suit and mourning clothes for the **Aristocrat**

Hats and coats or blankets for the **Beggars**

Livery or full dress suit for **Bengtsson**

Full dress suit for **Johansson**

Dress uniform for the **Colonel** (plus moustache, wig, corset)

Period dress in black for the **Dark Lady**

Riding coat, top hat, and wig for the **Old Man** (Part 2)

Music, Sound, and Special Effects

The Ghost Sonata may be presented as "A Play with Music," although the music can be eliminated entirely, with "The Sun Song" spoken instead of sung.

Anna Larson, composer of music for "The Sun Song" and other music for use in the premiere, has provide a detailed description (following these production notes) of the sound effects and musical effects as used in the premiere.

The Set

Strindberg describes an elaborate set for his play. As indicated in notes throughout this playbook, the Strindberg Festival production used a much simpler, stylized set and minimal furniture. The set concept was based upon the use of screens, flats, and frames which were moved around the stage and repositioned to create the different environments. A particularly useful set prop was a three-sided poster column which, when opened up and reversed, became the Japanese screen for Part 2. It was also set down on its side by the servants to serve as the table for the "ghost supé"; thus, consistent with the production, it was a set piece that changed its use at different times.



The Ghost Supé

The action took place on a checkerboard floor, metaphorically suggesting that the characters are like chess pieces in some larger "game."

Another idea for handling the set is included with the discussion of Ingmar Bergman's productions in the introductory portion of this book. As in one of Bergman's productions, the Strindberg Festival production reversed Strindberg's setting so that the house was not upstage, but downstage. The "round room" was downstage right, and the Fiancée's window was downstage left. There was a minimalist "door" downstage center. So the audience was "in" the house.



The Mummy, The Old Man



The Student, The Maid, The Cook

Notes on the Music
for the Strindberg Festival's 1988 Production of
The Ghost Sonata

The music for Joe Martin's original Strindberg Festival production of *The Ghost Sonata* was designed and written by Anna Larson and performed by her and Tomas Ohrstrom. Except for the Sun Song (Solo and Trio), the Tango, the Funeral March, and the Benediction, all the music and sound effects were improvised. The musicians were situated to one side of the stage in the manner of Kabuki theater. A wide assortment of instruments were used: exotic bells, gongs, drums, gourds, flutes, and wind chimes as well as a Celtic harp, a harmonium, a clarinet, a transverse flute, and a small metalophone (glockenspiel). Some instruments were homemade, such as the metal fruit cup rubbed with a wooden stick to create a drone resembling a Buddhist bell, or the funeral gong made from a heavy aluminum pot.

The improvised music was used sparingly to give color to characters and to enhance dramatic moments. It was varied in style, from the harp's rather staid salon music accompanying the Ghost Supe, to the delicate flute melodies for the Daughter, to the impulsive, nearly atonal, transverse flute improvisation for the student's rescue speech. The music and sound effects were gradually developed during the rehearsal process in close consultation with the director, actors, and choreographer. The following description of how the various musical elements were handled is offered with the hope that it will serve to encourage groups not necessarily used to working with stylized theater or improvised musical accompaniment to call upon their own resources and to create a unique production with fresh improvisation: not a replica, but a piece of living theater. It is recommended that the musicians attend as many rehearsals as possible so that the music may become an organic part of the dramatic ebb and flow of the play.

At the beginning of our production, the first sound heard, even before the lights were lowered, was the drone of the "Buddhist" bell described above. In the opening scene, in addition to the "church chimes" (a Swedish Christmas bell and the aluminum pot) and the "organ bass notes" (harmonium), we created a fog horn sound, in place of the "steamship bell," using a clarinet mouth piece attached to a three-foot length of Plexiglass tubing. Each time the milkmaid dipped her hands into the well we rustled some wind chimes made of thin flat shells. In the course of the play, improvised music closely accompanied three dramatic narrative speeches: the student's rescue

speech in Part I (flute), Bengtsson's incriminating speech in Part II (harmonium), and, in Part III, the Student's account of his father's death (flute). Examples of sounds used for individual characters are wind chimes of tiny shells and sopranino recorder for the Daughter, small scraped cymbals and a pellet drum for the Dead Man, castanets and an 18" frame drum for the Dark Lady and the Baron, a Fuche Cabasa (large beaded gourd) for the Mummy's parrot motions, a toy nose-flute for the fluttery Fiancee, and a Dumbec drum for the footsteps of the cook, each thump followed by a couple of pats on the flat-shelled wind chimes as the maid bustled around her. Sinister twangs of a jaw harp heightened the moment in Part I when Hummel speaks of how cold he is, and also in Part II as he enters and sneaks up on the servants. The clock was done with a woodblock.

The end of Part I and transition to Part II (without intermission) was handled as follows: the beggars and Hummel entered to raucous, dissonant, carnival-like marching music by the clarinet and Dumbec drum. As the milkmaid emerged from the well, the rubbed "Buddhist" bell began. At the moment Hummel saw her and cried out, there was a tremendous crash of a tambourine together with the flat-shelled wind chimes being dropped onto the Dumbec drum and then shaken violently, and this clatter was maintained until the stage was finally clear. A harmonium and castanet improvisation then accompanied a visible scene change, followed by the Tango, danced by the Dark Lady and the Baron. As the stage lights were momentarily lowered, the castanets gave way to harp music, and, as the lights came up, Part II began with the Daughter miming the playing of her harp on stage.

The end of Part II and beginning of Part III were done as follows: just as the mummy rang the bell for Bengtsson the second time, and the milkmaid appeared, the "Buddhist" bell began, continuing through the dissonant harmonium accompaniment to Bengtsson's speech and ending at the group "Amen." The Student then sang the Sun Song with harp accompaniment, ending with a few notes from the flute as the lights were lowered for intermission. Five minutes before the end of intermission the flute began again, continuing until after the lights were down. Once the drum beat for the Funeral March had begun, the singing started offstage, and slowly the procession moved across the back of the stage in silhouette. As they exited, the cast continued to sing gradually more softly, as if fading into the distance, ending with several strokes of the gong. Overlapping the gong was improvised harp music with an Oriental touch that carried the play into Part III, with the daughter once again "playing" her harp.

The conclusion of the play was organized as follows: The flute improvisation for the Student's "father" speech ended with the words "...where he died!" At the words "It's deaf and dumb!" the rubbed bell began. When the Daughter rang the bell for Bengtsson, a second smaller rubbed bell was added in a rising crescendo (as a shadowy group of beggars moved silently in). Just after Bengtsson placed the screen in front of the dying Daughter, the drone bells ended abruptly. In that same instant, the entire cast, except for the Student, froze motionless. After the Student's "...your hopes will not be disappointed," a soft sigh came from the harp, and selected members of the cast (still shrouded in darkness) sang the Sun Song Trio. During the song's final phrase, the cast began to emit a low, discordant drone, increasing in volume until the Mummy stopped it with a gesture. She then spoke the final lines (originally designated for the Student) over the opening melody of the Benediction (Women's Trio), concluding just before the soprano sang "and when you wake." During the second of the three sung repetitions of "Lord in Heaven grant you mercy on your journey," the music was loudly punctuated several times by a harsh noise from the harmonium made with the whole forearm on the keyboard. This was instantly followed by a single stroke of a very high-pitched bell just prior to the final blackout.

THE GHOST SONATA

The Scene

The [first and second stories of the]* facade of a house, but only the corner of the house is visible—which on the ground floor terminates in a round room [and on the next floor ends in a balcony with a flag staff].

Through the open window of the round room [when the blinds are drawn up] a white marble statue of a young woman [surrounded by palms] is starkly lit by sunbeams. In the window at the left, blue, white, and pink hyacinths can be seen.

[On the balcony railing on the upper floor, at the corner, we see a blue silk quilt, and two white pillows.] The windows at the left are draped with white sheets. It is a clear Sunday morning.

In the front of the house, downstage, is a green bench.

To the right, in the foreground, is a well in the "street"; to the left a poster-column.

To the left, at the back, is the front door [through which the stairwell can be seen with steps of white marble, bannisters of mahogany and brass]. On either side of the door, on the walk, are sheaths of laurel branches.

[The corner with the round room also faces out on a cross-street, which appears to lead off to one side backstage.]

To the left of the front door, at street level, is a window in which there is a street reflector.¹

*Brackets indicate elements of Strindberg's settings or stage directions which were not necessary for the minimal approach of the Strindberg Festival production.

[As the CURTAIN rises, the chimes from several churches are heard in the distance. The front doors stand open; a WOMAN dressed in black is standing, motionless, on the stairs. The CARE-TAKER'S WIFE is sweeping the landing. Later she will sprinkle water on the laurel branches.]

Beside the postered column, the OLD MAN is sitting in a wheelchair reading the paper. He has white hair [and whiskers] and wears glasses. The MILKMAID enters with bottles in a wire basket. She is in a summer dress, with brown shoes, black stockings, and a white beret. She takes off her beret and hangs it on the fountain, wipes the sweat from her face, takes a drink from a ladle, washes her hands, arranges her hair with the help of her reflection in the water.

The BELL from a steamship rings out, and the bass notes from an ORGAN in a nearby church emerge now and then through the silence.

After a few moments of silence, when the girl has finished her toilet, the STUDENT enters, unshaven, looking as though he has gone without sleep. He goes straight to the fountain.

Pause]

STUDENT. May I borrow the ladle? *[The MILKMAID hugs the ladle to her chest]* Won't you soon be finished? *[The MILKMAID looks at him in terror]*

OLD MAN. *[To himself]* Who is he talking to?—I don't see anybody!—Is he crazy? *[He continues to watch in amazement]*

STUDENT. *[To the Milkmaid]* What are you looking at? Do I look so terrifying?—Of course, I didn't sleep last night, and naturally you're thinking that I've been out carousing . . . *[MILKMAID as before]* Punch drunk, eh?—Do I smell of punch? *[MILKMAID as before]* I'm unshaven, I know that . . . Give me a drink of water, girl, because I have earned it. *[Pause]* Well! Then I'll have to explain in plain terms that I have been binding wounds and watching over the injured all night long. I was there, you see, when the house collapsed yesterday evening . . . Now you know. *[MILKMAID rinses the ladle and gives him a drink]* Thanks! *[The MILKMAID stands motionless. The STUDENT begins slowly:]* Will you do me a great favor? *[Pause]* The fact is, I have an inflammation in my eye, as you can see, but my hands have been in contact with the wounded and corpses; therefore, I can't touch my eyes without risk . . . Would you take my clean handkerchief then, moisten it in fresh water, and dab my poor eyes?—Would you?—Will you be a good Samaritan? *[The MILKMAID hesitates, but does as he has asked]* Thank you, my friend. *[He takes out his change*

purse. MILKMAID makes a gesture of refusal] Forgive my thoughtlessness, but I am in a daze . . . [*The MILKMAID goes off*]

*

OLD MAN. [*To the Student*] Pardon me for inquiring, but I heard that you were at the unfortunate event yesterday evening . . . I was just sitting here reading about it in the paper . . .

STUDENT. Is it already in there?

OLD MAN. Yes, the whole thing; and your picture along with it. But they regret that they were unable to get the brave student's name . . .

STUDENT. Really? That's me! Well!

OLD MAN. Who was that you were just speaking to?

STUDENT. Didn't you see? [*Pause*]

OLD MAN. Would you consider me impertinent if I asked—to have the honor of knowing—your name?

STUDENT. What purpose would that serve? I don't like publicity—once you're famous, then the attacks begin—the art of knocking people down to size is developed to such a degree—besides, I'm not asking for any repayment . . .

OLD MAN. Wealthy, perhaps?

STUDENT. Not at all . . . on the contrary! I am destitute.

OLD MAN. Listen . . . it seems to me I've heard that voice . . . I had a friend in my youth who couldn't say "window," but was always saying "win-dau"—I've only met one person with that pronunciation, and that was him. The other is you—is it possible that you are related to Arkenholz, the wholesaler?

STUDENT. He was my father.

OLD MAN. Strange are the ways of fate . . . I have seen you as a little child, under rather difficult circumstances . . .

STUDENT. Yes, I was brought into this world in a bankrupt estate . . .

OLD MAN. Absolutely right!

STUDENT. Might I ask your name?

OLD MAN. I am Director Hummel.

STUDENT. Is that . . . ? Now I recall . . .

OLD MAN. You have often heard my name mentioned in your family?

STUDENT. Yes!

OLD MAN. And mentioned perhaps with a certain disdain? [*STUDENT remains silent*] Yes, I can well imagine!—they said that I

was the one who ruined your father?—Everyone who ruins themselves through stupid speculation finds that they have been ruined by whom-ever they didn't manage to cheat! *[Pause]* Well, the fact of the matter is that your father deprived me of 17,000 crowns, which comprised all of my savings at that time.

STUDENT. It's peculiar how a story can be told in two such contradictory ways.

OLD MAN. Surely you don't believe that what I've said is false?

STUDENT. What am I supposed to think? My father didn't lie!

OLD MAN. That's true, of course. A father never lies . . . but I am also a father, accordingly . . .

STUDENT. What are you driving at?

OLD MAN. I saved your father from misery, and he repaid me with the terrible hatred of those who owe a debt of thanks . . . He taught his family to speak ill of me.

STUDENT. Perhaps you made him unthankful by poisoning your help with unnecessary humiliations.

OLD MAN. All help is humiliating, sir.

STUDENT. What do you want of me?

OLD MAN. I'm not demanding my money back; but if you will do me some small favors, I will be well repaid. You see me as a cripple. Some say that it's my own fault; others blame it on my parents; as for myself, I'd rather think that it's life itself and life's treachery, for no sooner do you escape one trap than you find yourself in the middle of another. In the meantime, I can't go running up the stairs, can't ring bellcords, therefore I'm saying to you: help me!

STUDENT. What can I do?

OLD MAN. In the first place: give my chair a push so that I can read the playbills. I'd like to see what's playing tonight . . .

STUDENT. *[Pushes the wheelchair]* Don't you have a man to help you?

OLD MAN. Yes, but he has gone on an errand . . . coming back soon . . . Are you studying medicine, sir?

STUDENT. No, I'm studying languages, but for that matter, I don't know what I'm going to be . . .

OLD MAN. Ah ha!—Good at mathematics?

STUDENT. Yes, passable.

OLD MAN. Good! *[Reading the posters]* "The Valkyrie" is the *matinée* . . . Then the Colonel will be there with his daughter, and

since he always sits last in the seventh row, then I'll have you sit right beside them . . . Would you go to the telephone booth there and reserve a ticket for Row Seven, Number 82?

STUDENT. Will I be going to the opera at noon?

OLD MAN. Yes! And if you do all I bid you to do, then you shall fare well. I want you to be successful, rich, and honored. Your debut yesterday as the courageous rescuer will make you famous tomorrow, and then your name will be worth a lot.

STUDENT. *[Goes to the telephone booth]* This is an amusing adventure . . .

OLD MAN. Are you an adventurer?

STUDENT. Yes, that's my misfortune . . .

OLD MAN. And we shall change it into a fortune—now call.

[He reads the paper as the STUDENT exits. The DARK LADY has come down on the walk and is speaking to the Caretaker's Wife. The OLD MAN listens, but the audience hears nothing. The STUDENT returns]

OLD MAN. Did you manage it?

STUDENT. It's done.

OLD MAN. You see that house there?

STUDENT. I have noticed it, yes . . . I went past here yesterday when the sun was shining through the window panes, and—imagining all the beauty and luxury in there—I said to my comrade: Whoever owned a flat in there, four floors up, a fine young wife, two pretty little children, and an income of 20,000 crowns . . .

OLD MAN. Did you say that? Did you say that? I too love this house . . .

STUDENT. Do you speculate in houses?

OLD MAN. Well . . . yes! But not in the way you mean . . .

STUDENT. Do you know the people who live there?

OLD MAN. All of them. At my age you know all people, their fathers, and their forefathers, and you are always related to them in some way or other—I have just turned eighty—but no one knows me, not really—I'm interested in people's destinies . . .

[The blinds in the round room are drawn up. The COLONEL is seen, in civilian dress. After taking a look at the thermometer, he walks into the room and stops before the marble statue]

OLD MAN. Look, there's the Colonel, whom you'll be sitting beside at noon . . .

STUDENT. Is that—the Colonel? I don't understand anything about all this, but it's like something out of a story book . . .

OLD MAN. My whole life is a story book, sir; but even though the stories are all different, they all hang together on one thread, and the leitmotif returns with regularity.

STUDENT. Who is that marble statue of, in there?

OLD MAN. That is his wife, naturally.

STUDENT. She must have been quite lovely then?

OLD MAN. We—ell! Yes!

STUDENT. Tell me!

OLD MAN. There is no accounting for a human being, my dear child!—And if I tell you that she left, that he beat her, that she came back, re-married him, and that she is sitting in there now like a mummy, worshipping her own statue, you would think I was mad.

STUDENT. I don't understand!

OLD MAN. I can imagine!—And then we have the hyacinth window. That's where his daughter lives . . . She's out horseback riding, but she'll soon be home . . .

STUDENT. Who is that lady in black who is talking with the caretaker's wife?

OLD MAN. Yes, you see, it's a bit complicated, but it has to do with the dead man, up there where you see the white sheets . . .

STUDENT. Who was he?

OLD MAN. A human being, like us, but the most apparent thing about him was his vanity . . . If you were a Sunday-child,² you would soon see him come out through the door to look at the flag of the consulate at half-mast. He was the Consul, you see, and liked crowns, lions, ruffles in his hat, and colored ribbons.

STUDENT. You mentioned Sunday-children—I was supposed to have been born on a Sunday . . .

OLD MAN. No! Are you . . . ? I could believe it . . . I saw it in the color of your eyes . . . But then you can see what others cannot, have you noticed that?

STUDENT. I don't know what others see, but once in a while . . . well, you don't talk about these things.

OLD MAN. I was almost sure of it! But you can talk about it to me . . . because I—understand such things.

STUDENT. For example, yesterday . . . I was drawn to that obscure street where the house later collapsed . . . I got there and stopped in front of the building, which I'd never seen before . . . Then I noticed a crack in the wall, heard how the double flooring was creaking; I ran forward and clutched a child that was walking under the wall . . . Within the next second the house came crashing down . . . I was spared, but in my arms where I thought I had the child, there was nothing . . .

OLD MAN. That I must say is . . . I thought, in fact . . . Explain one thing to me: Why were you making those gestures just now at the fountain? And why were you talking to yourself?

STUDENT. Didn't you see the milkmaid I was talking to?

OLD MAN. *[Horried]* Milkmaid?

STUDENT. Of course. The one that gave me the ladle.

OLD MAN. Really? Is that what it was! . . . Ah well, I'm not a seer, but I can do other things . . .

[Now a white-haired WOMAN can be seen sitting at a window before a street reflector]

OLD MAN. Look at that old woman in the window! You see her?—Good! That was my fiancée once upon a time, sixty years ago. I was twenty—Don't be afraid, she doesn't recognize me! We see each other every single day without its affecting me in the least, although we swore to be eternally faithful back then. Eternally!

STUDENT. How foolish you were in the old days! We never speak in those terms to girls nowadays!

OLD MAN. Forgive us, young man, we didn't know any better—But can you see that this old woman was once young and beautiful?

STUDENT. It doesn't show. Yes, she is good looking, but I can't see her eyes!

[The CARETAKER'S WIFE comes out with a basket and scatters birch branches on the ground]

OLD MAN. The caretaker's wife, oh yes!—That dark lady there is her daughter, by the dead man, and that's how her husband got his job as caretaker . . . but the lady in black has a suitor, an aristocrat, who expects to be rich. He is in the process of divorcing his wife, you see, who is giving him a manor house to be rid of him. This noble suitor is the son-in-law of the dead man, and those are his bed-linens you see airing up there on the balcony . . . It is complicated, I suppose!

STUDENT. It is horribly complicated!

OLD MAN. Yes it is, inside and out, although it looks simple.

STUDENT. But who is the dead man then?

OLD MAN. You've just asked me, and I told you. If you could see round the corner, where the service entrance is, you would notice a mob of poor people whom he helped . . . whenever he felt so moved . . .

STUDENT. He was a compassionate person then?

OLD MAN. Yes . . . now and again.

STUDENT. Not always?

OLD MAN. Nah! . . . Such are human beings. Listen, sir, push the chair a bit, so that it is out in the sun; I am freezing dreadfully. When you are never able to move about, your blood congeals—I'll certainly be dying, I know that, but before that time I have a few things to attend to—take my hand, you can feel how cold I am.

STUDENT. [*He recoils*] It's beyond belief!

OLD MAN. Don't leave me. I am tired, I am alone, but I haven't always been like this, you understand; I have an endlessly long life behind me—endlessly—I have made people unhappy, and people have made me unhappy; the one cancels out the other—but before I die I want to see you happy . . . Our fates are bound together through your father—and some other things . . .

STUDENT. But let go of my hand, you're taking my strength, you're freezing me—what do you want?

OLD MAN. Patience, and you shall see and understand. There comes the young miss . . .

STUDENT. The Colonel's daughter?

OLD MAN. Yes! Daughter! Look at her!—Have you seen such a masterpiece?

STUDENT. She is like the marble statue in there . . .

OLD MAN. That's her mother, after all!

STUDENT. You are right—I've never seen such a woman of woman born. He's a lucky man, whoever takes her to the altar and home!—

OLD MAN. You can see it!—Not everyone finds her beauty . . . Well, so it is written!

*

[The DAUGHTER enters from the Left, dressed in an English riding outfit,³ walking slowly, without looking at anyone, to the

door, where she stops and says a few words to the Caretaker's Wife—and then goes into the house. The STUDENT has placed his hands over his eyes]

OLD MAN. Are you crying?

STUDENT. When you have no hope, all that's left is despair.

OLD MAN. I can open doors and hearts, if I can just find an arm to do my bidding. Serve me, and you shall rule . . .

STUDENT. Is this some kind of pact? Am I supposed to sell my soul?

OLD MAN. You need sell nothing!—You see, all my life I have *taken*; now I have the need to be able to give! To give! But no one will receive . . . I am rich, very rich, but have no heirs—well yes, a black-guard who pesters the life out of me . . . Be a son to me, inherit from me while I'm alive, enjoy existence so I can watch, from a distance at least.

STUDENT. What do you want me to do?

OLD MAN. First, go and see "The Valkyrie"!

STUDENT. That matter's taken care of. What else?

OLD MAN. This evening you will be sitting in there—in the round room.

STUDENT. How will I get in there?

OLD MAN. Through "The Valkyrie"!

STUDENT. Why exactly have you chosen me as your medium? Did you know me before?

OLD MAN. Yes, naturally! I have had my eye on you a long time . . . But look over there, look at how the maid on the balcony is hoisting the flag at half-mast for the Consul . . . and now she's turning to the bed-linens . . . Do you see that blue quilt? That was for two people to sleep under, but now it's for one . . . [*The DAUGHTER appears now, having changed clothes, and waters the hyacinths in the window*] That's my little girl. Look at her, look! She's talking to the flowers—isn't she herself like the blue hyacinth? She gives them drink, only clear water, and they transform the water into colors and perfume . . . Here comes the Colonel with the paper!—He's showing her the collapsed house . . . Now he's pointing out your picture! She is not indifferent . . . she's reading about your exploits . . . I believe it's clouding over. Just think, if it starts raining, I'll be sitting here in a pretty pickle—if Johansson doesn't come back soon . . .