

The Magician

Written by Ingmar Bergman

Sequence 1

Five people sit by the side of the road, near a carriage, which they all board before it moves off, through a forest. This is Vogler's Magnetic Health Theatre, as led by Albert Vogler, a magician. In the troupe are Vogler's grandmother, who makes the potions they sell, Vogler's assistant Tubal, Vogler's wife Manda (dressed as a man), and Simson, the driver.

Afraid, Simson jumps down into the carriage, insisting there are "ghosts and ghouls" nearby. Vogler exits the carriage and discovers in the forest Johan Spegel, a man who claims to be an actor. He is very ill and is helped to the carriage, where he dies, intently watched by Vogler.

Sequence 2

The carriage arrives in town. The troupe is introduced to Consul Egerman, who welcomes them into his home, and explains that he has "great interest in spiritual matters." Chief of police Starbeck and the Royal Medical Advisor Vergérus are also present. Tubal tells the assembled that Vogler has "developed and perfected the science of animal magnetism." Manda is introduced as his pupil, Mr. Aman.

Egerman and the others question the sensational claims made in advertisements for Vogler's public entertainments. Tubal lets them know that Vogler is mute. Manda explains that they use nothing more than "mirrors and projections" during their magic show. Vergérus speaks of reports of Vogler's recent tour of Denmark during which Vogler, using a different name, posed as a doctor and employed "dubious methods." Vergérus concludes that Vogler is not mute and insists that Vogler attempt to "provoke visions" in him. "What would you have me see?" asks Vergérus. "Something frightening or exciting?" Vogler agrees to the experiment. Vergérus, sitting next to Vogler, talks incessantly, then insists that Vogler has failed to make an impact. Egerman and his wife, however, believe that Vogler has indeed provoked something in Vergérus. "Why are you lying?" Mrs. Egerman asks Vergérus. "Something frightened you terribly, but you don't dare say what it was." Vergérus denies this.

Starbeck announces that Vogler will perform tomorrow morning at Egerman's home, and that they are not to leave the house before then. The troupe go down to the kitchen for dinner as the three men and Mrs. Egerman discuss the wager that has been made between Vergérus and Egerman. The latter "maintains that intangible, inexplicable forces really do exist." Vergérus denies it absolutely. Mrs. Egerman storms out. Vergérus suggests to Egerman that her behaviour may have something to do with the recent death of their child.

Sequence 3

In the kitchen, the troupe eats with Egerman's maids, Sara and Sanna, and servants, Rustan and Antonsson. Tubal reads Sara's fortune and peddles a love potion to Sofia, the cook. Simson and Sara drink a love potion and flirt, and Grandma Vogler talks with Sanna, all as a storm brews outside.

Sequence 4

Johan Spegel, who turns out not to be dead, enters the house.

Rustan and Antonsson, alone in the kitchen, talk about how much they dislike the members of the troupe. Spegel attacks them and runs off.

Mrs. Egerman and Vogler talk. She tells him that her daughter died earlier in the year, adding that the others dislike Vogler because they don't understand him – but she does. She also states that she knows why Vogler has appeared in town: "to explain why my child died." Mrs. Egerman invites Vogler to her room later that night. Egerman watches from behind a curtain.

Spegel appears in Vogler's room. He describes himself as more "convincing" as a dead person, then dies. Vogler seals his body in a coffin. Egerman, who appears to have been watching the whole time, weeps.

Vergérus goes to Manda's room and discovers she is a woman. She tells him the troupe is wanted, so must not be recognised. "You represent what I despise most of all," says Vergérus. "The inexplicable." "Then you can cease your persecution," says Manda. "Our entire act is a fraud from start to finish." Vergérus compares Vogler's Magnetic Health Theatre to religion: "The clergy's in the same sad boat. God is silent while men babble on." Vogler enters and attacks Vergérus, who leaves. Vogler removes his wig and fake beard. He and Manda talk about what has led them to this moment. Vogler insists his powers are real, but that in the presence of unbelievers, he falters.

Egerman enters his wife's bedroom. She initially takes him for Vogler.

Sequence 5

The following morning. An assembled audience watches the performance. Starbeck ruins a trick by pulling back the curtain. Mrs. Starbeck is called up on stage and participates in a trick. She appears to become hypnotised by magnets and spills unpleasant truths about Starbeck, much to his horror. For the next trick Antonsson is bound in invisible chains, which he is unable to break. In fury he attacks Vogler, appears to kill him, and runs out. Simson locks the door as Vogler's body appears to be replaced with Spegel's. Starbeck orders that the body be placed into the coffin, which is carried upstairs into the attic, where Vergérus will perform an autopsy.

Downstairs the servants discuss what has happened. Grandma Vogler finds the body of Antonsson hanging from a rope. The Egermans talk. She accuses him of planning Vogler's death. "You wanted revenge," she says.

Vogler gets out of the coffin and hides in the attic. Manda locks the attic door from the outside while Vergérus is up there, finishing the autopsy report. He finds an eyeball in his inkwell. His papers fall to the ground. A severed hand appears on his desk. Vogler attacks Vergérus, who falls down the stairs. "You induced a momentary fear of death," Vergérus tells Vogler. "Nothing more."

Sequence 6

The troupe prepares to leave. A shocked Mrs. Egerman discovers that Vogler is alive. He asks her for money. Egerman admits to Vergérus that he has lost their wager. Tubal and Grandma Vogler announce that they no longer will be travelling with the troupe. At the last minute Sara decides to go with them in the carriage. Starbeck shows up with the police and announces that the King wishes to see a performance by Vogler's Magnetic Health Theatre. The carriage, escorted by the police, heads to the palace.