

[Strange music. The COMPANIONS leave. ALLERLEIRA packs her gowns in the suitcase and heads toward the woods. It begins to snow. Strange treelike figures enter from all corners: the stairs, the utility closet, the crawl space, the wardrobe. They surround ALLERLEIRA and take her off. The music ends. HEIDI enters from the wardrobe with a book and cardigan sweater. MR. FITZPATRICK appears from the trap.]

MR. FITZPATRICK:
Heidi, will you marry me?

HEIDI:
No, Mr. Fitzpatrick.

[HEIDI places the book and sweater on a chair. MR. FITZPATRICK comes up from the trap. He is not wearing his tail. He goes to the chair, puts on the sweater and a pair of glasses. He sits and opens the book. He is now FATHER OF SEVEN SONS.]

SEVEN SWANS, OR SILENT FOR SEVEN YEARS

FATHER OF SEVEN SONS *[reading by a lamp]*:
Once upon a time, there was a man with seven sons.

[Suddenly, with great, loud energy, seven sons come barreling down the stairs, shouting and playing tag. They swirl around wildly.]

FATHER OF SEVEN SONS *[shouting]*:
NOT IN THE HOUSE!

[The SONS quiet down. The DAUGHTER enters down the stairs politely. The children try to play Red Light/Green Light silently, but they can't quite restrain themselves.]

Once upon a time, there was a man with seven sons

[The DAUGHTER kisses the FATHER OF SEVEN SONS on the cheek.]

and one daughter.

[The SONS can't control themselves, and an argument breaks out over Red Light/Green Light. The children begin to get wild.]

FATHER OF SEVEN SONS:
I'M TRYING TO READ A BOOK!

[The SONS instantly quiet down, but then immediately start to look for a new game. They begin to pull out and arrange chairs.]

Once upon a time there was a man with seven sons

[The DAUGHTER kisses him on the cheek.]

and one daughter.

[The DAUGHTER sits and starts to sing. The children start to play musical chairs. This continues under the FATHER OF SEVEN SONS' following line, growing increasingly loud and out of control.]

FATHER OF SEVEN SONS:
Once upon a time, there was a man with seven sons and one daughter. The sons were young and loud, and one day they were younger and louder than usual. The father, losing patience, uttered this curse:

[The FATHER OF SEVEN SONS slams his book shut. The children notice and fall silent.]

Let me explain something to you:

[The SONS sit down quietly. The DAUGHTER stands aside. The FATHER OF SEVEN SONS speaks in quiet, measured tones.]

Every day I work hard.

I work hard every day.

Every day I leave my home and I go outside to work.

Very hard.

And why do I do this?

Because I love to work?

No. I do not love to work.

I leave my house every day and go outside to work because I have eight children.

Seven sons and a daughter.

But today it is snowing outside. The ground is hard, and because of this I can stay inside for one day. For one day I can stay inside and sit beside a lamp and open a book. And from my warm chair I can look outside at the lake and the wild white swans gliding on the lake, with the snow falling all about them. And I have this one day where I myself can feel silent and calm. Both inside and out. Silent and calm.

But you children wouldn't know anything about that feeling, would you?

No.

Do you know why?

Can anyone tell me why?

No.

[One by one the SONS get up from their chairs and slowly sink to their knees, placing their heads on their arms on the seats of the chairs. They are sad. The FATHER OF SEVEN SONS continues.]

I'll tell you why: Because you are too busy dashing around and making noise and never *ever ever* thinking of the other person.

What's in your heads?

What are you thinking?

What's wrong with you?

Why do you break everything and dash around everything?

Why can't you be silent like the swans upon the lake?

Because you're bad.

You're just bad.

And Andrew—

[The FATHER OF SEVEN SONS looks at ANDREW. ANDREW looks up.]

You are the worst of all.

I'm going back to my book now.

[The SONS slowly get up and sit in their chairs.]

Once upon a time, there was a man with seven sons and one daughter. The sons were young and loud, and one day they were younger and louder than usual. The father, losing patience, uttered this curse:

[He slams his book shut.]

I wish all my sons were swans.

And immediately—they are.

[The SONS begin to flap their arms in a panic. They turn into swans.]

They fly up through the snow, and are gone.

[The SONS fly away. The DAUGHTER comes forward and takes the book from the FATHER OF SEVEN SONS. He exits. She begins to read, as feathers fall from the pages.]

DAUGHTER:

The daughter went out into the courtyard and found the feathers her brothers had left behind. She ran off into the woods to search for them. All night she traveled and all next day. When evening fell she heard the rustle of wings, and seven swans settled down about her.

[The SONS come and roost, squatting on their chairs.]

They blew onto each other and resumed their human shape.

[The SONS sit on the chairs and cross their legs. They are sad.]

Oh my brothers! You are back!

ANDREW:

No, sweet sister, alas. We may only assume our human shape for a quarter of an hour at sunset every day.

DAUGHTER:

Oh my brothers, may I not rescue you?

ANOTHER SON:

No, the task would be too hard.

DAUGHTER:

What task, what is it? Surely I might do it.

ANDREW:

You must remain silent for seven years. Never speak a word, nor utter any sound, nor make any sign to say a thing, no matter what.

DAUGHTER:

My dear brothers—

ANDREW:

And that is not all.

ANOTHER SON:

You must knit us all seven jackets of aster flowers, never breaking a single flower.

ANDREW:

When the seven years have passed—if you have not said a word—when we have put on those garments, we will recover our human form.

[Slowly the SONS reach back with their arms, then turn into swans again.]

[Music. Time passes. In this section we see the following, all performed without language: Three SONS stay on the chairs, sometimes being swans, sometimes changing momentarily back into humans. Alternately, they lie on the stairs on their backs with their heads and arms hanging off into space, and slowly flap their wings. They repeat their actions. The DAUGHTER is discovered where she was by the KING OF SILENT FOR SEVEN YEARS. He raises her up, takes

her home, and marries her. His EVIL MOTHER looks on disapprovingly. The DAUGHTER sneaks away, pulls a bucket of aster flowers from the crawl space and works on them for a moment, then hides them again. A swaddled baby drops in her arms from above. She goes to sleep with the baby. The EVIL MOTHER sneaks up, snatches the baby away, and replaces it with something grotesque. The EVIL MOTHER goes to the KING OF SILENT FOR SEVEN YEARS and in gestures tells him that the DAUGHTER has given birth to something horrible. Meanwhile, the DAUGHTER has hidden the horrible thing. The KING OF SILENT FOR SEVEN YEARS confronts the DAUGHTER, who cannot say a word in her defense. This entire sequence happens three times: he raises her up, takes her home; she works on the flowers, gives birth; the baby is switched; and he confronts her. During the entire sequence, someone drops flower petals, then dried leaves, then snowflakes onto the scene below. Mixed throughout the music are the following, or similar, phrases. They do not always fall exactly on the action they describe; they come and go and repeat several times. The sequence is fragmented, dreamlike.

Recorded phrases:

VOICE OF KING OF SILENT FOR SEVEN YEARS:

Hello, what is your name?

[This is repeated in various languages.]

Come be my bride.

Come live with me and be my bride.

VOICE OF EVIL MOTHER:

Who knows who she is?

MALE VOICE [*as though trying to describe a dream*]:
There was like a . . . a wicked stepmother, or mother, or . . .

FEMALE VOICE:
*Spring turned to summer turned to fall turned to winter. Spring
turned into summer into fall into winter.*

VOICE OF EVIL MOTHER:
Why does she not speak?

MALE VOICE:
She gave birth.

It was stolen by . . . it was stolen somehow.

VOICE OF EVIL MOTHER:
She has eaten up your son.

She must be a witch.

VOICE OF KING OF SILENT FOR SEVEN YEARS:
It isn't possible.

VOICE OF DAUGHTER:
I want, I want to tell you—

I am innocent.

VOICE OF EVIL MOTHER:
She has eaten up another son.

She has eaten up your son.

Why not destroy her?

FEMALE VOICE:

She never said a word.

[At the end of the third repetition of the sequence the KING OF SILENT FOR SEVEN YEARS confronts the DAUGHTER. The music ends, and he speaks out loud.]

KING OF SILENT FOR SEVEN YEARS:

I'm sorry.

FATHER OF SEVEN SONS *[reading]*:

Said the king. He sentenced the silent daughter to death for the destruction of her children. She could not say a word in her defense.

[Music. Everyone disperses. The EVIL MOTHER comes to grab the DAUGHTER and drag her up the stairs. The DAUGHTER's bucket of flowers now contains seven white jackets, one missing a sleeve.]

Now it happened that the day set for her execution was the last day of the seventh year of her silence. All the jackets of aster flowers were finished but one, which was lacking one sleeve. The wicked mother-in-law came to drag her away, and take her up, up to the scaffolding where she was to die. Then all of a sudden, in the last yellow rays of the setting sun, there was a great rustle of wings overhead. It was her brothers.

[The SONS rush forward, wildly flapping their wings. The sound of the wings is made by each SON holding a tie and snapping it back and forth very quickly. The DAUGHTER tosses down their jackets one by one. As each puts on his jacket, he transforms back into a person. The music is melancholy. The SONS put their ties around their necks. They pick up briefcases. They look at their watches. Now they are

normal, grown men. But remnants of their former wildness remain. They take white feathers from their pockets. They kneel and open their briefcases and hide their feathers there. Only ANDREW does not change back all the way. His jacket is missing a sleeve, and his one arm continues to flap wildly. All his brothers leave him, going up the stairs. He remains, flapping his wing. The music ends. In the silence, ANDREW continues to flap his one arm, staring at the FATHER OF SEVEN SONS.]

FATHER OF SEVEN SONS:

For the rest of his life, one arm remained a wing.

[ANDREW continues to flap his wing, staring at his father. Then he stops.]