

DEEP SUBJECT

by

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DEEP SUBJECT

Characters

PRIEST

YOUNG WOMAN

YOUNG MAN

OLD WOMAN

OLD MAN

DOCTOR

POLICEMAN

VILLAGE DRUNK

YOUNG BOY

Time

The present in a land that has been behind the times since antiquity.

Setting

A village square, with a well CS.

DEEP SUBJECT

A village square with a well CS. The stage is bathed in subdued light, predominately from one side, which brightens gradually in a slow march across the stage, signaling the passage of day.

There is a bucket and a dipper on the well's low wall, where VILLAGE DRUNK slumps, sleeping. YOUNG BOY runs across the stage with a stick, striking DRUNK as he passes, then exits, laughing. DRUNK yelps, protesting with an indecipherable cry, then after examining his wine bottle and finding it empty, he huddles defensively and goes back to sleep.

POLICEMAN with a nightstick enters, looking into unseen windows, testing unseen locks, checking for unseen suspicious behavior. POLICEMAN sees DRUNK and crosses to him.

POLICEMAN

You again. Drunk as usual.

No response, so POLICEMAN kicks DRUNK awake.

POLICEMAN (CONT'D)

I thought I told you not to sleep here.

DRUNK

(Sluggishly.)

Not sleeping. Just...resting.

POLICEMAN

You're drunk and you're habitual--a public nuisance. Get the hell out of here before I throw you in jail.

POLICEMAN rouses DRUNK and drives him off with muttered curses and several well-placed blows of his nightstick. After a few moments, YOUNG WOMAN enters with a basket under her arm. She crosses to the well and extracts a dipperful of water from the bucket. Lifting the dipper...]

YOUNG WOMAN

To the infant dawn, may you show us the way to this day's joy. I salute your possibility.

(Drinks, sighs with contentment. To audience.)

This is the center of it all. This well is the source of the water which gave life to our mothers and to which we are born and grow strong. This well refreshes us and sustains us and our village. Without it, all around would be barren.

YOUNG MAN enters from behind YOUNG WOMAN. He beams, sneaks up to her and grabs her waist, making her jump and squeal with delight. They kiss, then...

YOUNG MAN

Fancy meeting you here.

YOUNG WOMAN

You always find me here at the start of day. You count on it.

YOUNG MAN

(Laughs.)

That I do.

She offers him the dipper. He drinks. They kiss again...

YOUNG MAN (CONT'D)

When we're married, I won't have to come looking for you. You'll be right beside me, where you belong.

YOUNG WOMAN

(Teasing.)

And I won't have to make myself pretty for you because you can't get away.

YOUNG MAN

Be careful--if it becomes a contest between which of us is more disheveled upon waking, I'll best you easily.

YOUNG WOMAN

Then this is what you'll win--

YOUNG WOMAN flicks water from the dipper in YOUNG MAN's face and runs off stage, giggling, with YOUNG MAN in playful pursuit. OLD WOMAN and PRIEST stroll in together in time to see the young lovers exit. PRIEST carries a basin of dirty laundry.

PRIEST

There! Young love! That is a sight to renew your faith!

OLD WOMAN

Yes. Faith in the power of love to befuddle and hex.

PRIEST

You remember it then.

OLD WOMAN

(Laughs.)

I remember it now, Father--no matter how hard I try to forget.

They stop at the well. PRIEST sets down the basin for the OLD WOMAN and empties the bucket into it. OLD WOMAN begins to scrub the clothes and PRIEST refills the bucket, while...

PRIEST

(To audience.)

Here we join couples and create families. Here, by the grace of the ceremonial bonds of matrimony, we water the tendrils of relationships that intertwine to unite this village.

OLD WOMAN

(To audience.)

It's the daily rituals of labor that make the rituals of the church possible. No daily bread-making, no daily bread to be thankful for.

OLD MAN enters and joins them.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

(To PRIEST, indicating OLD MAN.)

Good thing your declaration of matrimony is official, Father, considering the hereditary laziness that afflicts some of the men around here.

OLD MAN

I heard that. And if it wasn't so much trouble, I'd dispute the accusation.

PRIEST

(Keeping the mood light.)

Then I'll defend you both, and attest to your having done the work of several lifetimes.

PRIEST salutes them with a dipperful.

OLD MAN

Which is exactly why I'm on my way to take a well-earned nap in honor of today's workforce.

OLD WOMAN

(Scrubbing.)

While I continue to work.

OLD MAN

That doesn't have to be.

(Leering.)

You can join me in a nap any time you want.

OLD WOMAN

(Conscious of the PRIEST's presence.)

It will take more than a drink of water to make that happen.

PRIEST

Call me, then, if you want me to make your relationship official. There's no upper age limit for marriage.

OLD WOMAN

That day will never come, Father.

OLD MAN

(To audience.)

I'd sooner jump into this well with a stone tied to my feet than marry that old biddy...

(Chuckles in confidence.)

Especially not as long as she lets me jump her bones without.

OLD WOMAN

Give me a hand, you old goat.

OLD MAN

(To audience.)

Oh, that I will!

OLD MAN helps OLD WOMAN to her feet while the PRIEST wrings the wet clothes and pours out the dirty water onto the square's cobblestones. OLD WOMAN and OLD MAN depart together. He offers her his arm, which she refuses with a flap of her apron, but she walks off with him nonetheless. PRIEST watches them go.

PRIEST

(To audience.)

It is ever thus, thank God. A cycle of mutual dependence and support--all centered here, beside the wellspring of society. And it's not just the marriages we celebrate here by this free-flowing spring. Soon after, there are always babies to baptize, and children's birthdays to observe in play, festivals for flirting and business deals to formalize. And then, when all has been fulfilled, here we begin the final journey back to our Maker. It's all very tidy and reliable.

PRIEST sprinkles water toward the audience, blessing it with the sign of the cross. POLICEMAN enters. PRIEST blesses him too.

POLICEMAN

Thank you, Father. Now would you also drive off the deadbeats and criminals that plague this village.

PRIEST

With this water, I can cleanse their souls. Clean hands, however, are up to them.

PRIEST exits to one side as DOCTOR enters from the other.

POLICEMAN

Hey, Doc.

DOCTOR

Just the man I wanted to see. How's that medication suit you?

POLICEMAN

Well, I can't say that it's made much difference. I'm still getting no more than three hours of sleep a night. Some nights, only two.

DOCTOR

Can't be my fault. Must be a guilty conscience, ha, ha.

POLICEMAN

Come on, Doc. Ain't you got anything else?

DOCTOR

You have to give the drug time to work. You'll see--a few more weeks, you'll be sleeping like Rip the Winkle.

POLICEMAN

Huh, the criminal element would like that.

DOCTOR steps up to the well, lowering the bucket and drawing it up again.

DOCTOR

In the meantime, I advise you to partake of the healing waters of our village well.

(To audience.)

These waters come to us from prehistoric times, seeping through eons of rock, absorbing traces of vital minerals, before rising through an immense layer of sand, to be stripped of all organic contaminants. The end result is a perfect cocktail of nutrition mixed with the purest nectar of our aged Earth.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 (To POLICEMAN.)

Here, drink up.

*POLICEMAN does, nodding with pleasure.
 DOCTOR exits as...*

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
 Cup or two a day. That's all you need.

*YOUNG BOY enters running. As he passes
 POLICEMAN, he knocks the bucket into
 the well with his stick, then exits
 with POLICEMAN in furious pursuit.*

POLICEMAN
 Hey! Stop!

*The light has reached the opposite side
 of the stage now and after a few
 moments more, the VILLAGE DRUNK enters,
 drunk once more.*

DRUNK
 (To audience throughout.)
 Still here, I see. Suppose you got nothing better to do. Oh,
 well..

*DRUNK crosses to the well,
 contemplating it...*

DRUNK (CONT'D)
 Let me give you some advice. Never, never let the bastards
 steer you away from your life's ambition. They may think they
 know what's best for you, but that's why you drink, isn't it?

*DRUNK steps up to the well with his
 back to the audiences. There, he tests
 his balance while he fumbles with his
 crotch, unbuttoning. He continues to
 address the audience over his shoulder.*

DRUNK (CONT'D)
 Village had its way, I wouldn't be here. I'd be permanently
 locked up or, worse, rehabilitated.

*DRUNK sighs over the tinkling sound of
 his bladder emptying into the well.*

DRUNK (CONT'D)
 But if that was the case--if I wasn't here to do my duty--
 what you might call the "Transubstantiation of Beer"--this
 whole village would be the poorer. How? No holy water for the
 priest. No phosphates for the old woman's laundry. No breath-
 freshener for the old man's trysts.

(MORE)

DRUNK (CONT'D)

No trace elements for the doctor's potions. No glow of good health for the young couples in love. And no salts for the street urchin who works up a sweat by tormenting me.

DRUNK finishes, shakes himself, and buttons up. He turns to the audience.

DRUNK (CONT'D)

No syrup for the soda pop, so to speak.

(Beat, swaying on his feet.)

They call water the elixir of life. I call it justice. Without my diligence, there would be no consequences for the way we choose to live.

(Beat, gesturing.)

Well. So there you have it. There it is: We are damp and unto damp we shall return.

DRUNK exits unsteadily as the lights begin to slowly dim. As soon as DRUNK is out of sight, POLICEMAN enters opposite to perform his security routine. When gets CS, he stops, removes his hat to wipe his brow. He fills the dipper, and is about to drink when he notices the audience. He turns and offers the dipper.

POLICEMAN

You look thirsty. Care for a drink? Best water in the world...

Fade to black.

THE END