

The Superstitious Man's Story

Written by

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Based on Thomas Hardy's eponymous short story

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1 INT. COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - DAY 1

The elderly wife, Betty Privett, in early to mid C19th Southern English peasant costume, is on her knees before the fire, making it up.

Her husband, in his jacket, hat and neckerchief clumps down the stairs and heads off towards the door without saying anything to her.

Betty looks and kneels up as William heads to the door.

BETTY

Bill! ... Yer not going THERE,
again, are ya?

But Bill opens the door, goes out and closes it, without speaking.

Betty sinks back down on her knees, again, looks sad and shakes her head.

2 EXT. EDGE OF REEDY POND - LATER 2

Bill stands by the pond, a lone figure.

He looks to his left and then his right.

Bill then stares sadly down, into the pond.

3 INT. COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - LATER 3

Bill comes in at the door, takes off his jacket and hangs it up.

Betty is sweeping and she stops and looks up.

BETTY

Bill! Yer've got ta stop this...do
y'ear? ... It's bin fifteen years,
now. ..Stop going there!For
YOUR sanity, and for me own, as
well!

Bill just shakes his head and makes to go through to the back scullery.

Betty takes hold of his shirt, to arrest him, so he stops and sighs, looking down.

BETTY
Will yer promise me, Bill?
Will yer promise yer own wife, as
asks ya?

Bill sighs, again and slowly, resignedly nods his head.

BETTY
There, love!

She leans over, kisses his cheek and lets go her hold.

He walks away.

Betty watches his retreat and sighs.

4 EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

4

The sexton is on his knees clearing some grass from around a grave.

Philip Hookhorn walks towards him, along the path and nods his head.

PHILIP
Mornin', sexton.

SEXTON
Mornin', Philip...didn't see you at service.

PHILIP
No. ..me tetterers were playin' up
someat awful so I stayed in.
...Anything come up?

The sexton sits back on his knees and looks up at Philip.

SEXTON
Not exactly, but yunno..... the
bell went very heavy..... all of a
sudden!

PHILIP
Heavy in yer 'and?

SEXTON
Yup! Not known that since
old 'enry died.

PHILIP
Ya CAN be a bit superstitious,
sexton..... but, if it's
true.....Ya know what it means!

SEXTON
Ay..... Someone else's turn!

Philip sighs.

PHILIP
So long as it's not me, sexton

SEXTON
Nor me, neither!

Philip nods and starts to walk away

PHILIP
'Day to yer!

The sexton nods and resumes his grass clearance

SEXTON
'Day!

5 INT. COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - EVENING 5

Betty is ironing at the big table, and the clock is ticking.

Betty hears her husband come down stairs, stop to put his boots on at the foot of the stairs, and then head out of the door.

She looks up and sees him go out of the door, but has goffering pegs in her mouth and so can't say anything.

Time passes and Betty has finished her ironing and put her gear away.

Betty looks, irritably and worriedly, up at the clock.

6 INT. SCULLERY - LATER 6

Betty comes into the scullery and puts on her apron.

She washes up the pots, dries and puts them away and then sighs and looks around, distractedly.

Betty opens the back door and strolls down, in the moonlight, between the vegetable beds.

She stops and looks around what she can see of the garden, in the dark.

BETTY
(Half whispered call)
Bill?Ya there!?Bill?!

She sighs and returns to the cottage.

Betty looks at the clock. It is late.

She frowns and blows out her sigh through swollen cheeks.

She shakes her head, picks up her burning kitchen candle, and then heads to the front door, where there is an oil lamp burning on the table, nearby.

Betty puts her hand upon the draw bolt, and is about to lock the door, when she realises that, of course, Bill is still outside, so she takes her hand away.

She then deposits her burning candle on the table, goes back to the dresser for some tailoring chalk, and returns to the door.

Betty then opens the door and writes on the front (outside) of the door:

BETTY (V.O.)
Don't forget to lock the door!

She closes the door: not locking it.

Betty then extinguishes the lamp, takes up her candle and turns to the stairs, moving forward carefully, in the gloom.

She suddenly stops, with a startle.

Betty sees her husband's boots at the foot of the stairs.

She looks fearfully around herself, and then finally tiptoes gingerly past the boots, up the stairs.

9

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

9

Betty apprehensively opens the door and peers at their bed, in the gloom.

There is her husband, Bill, asleep in the bed, snoring, softly!

Betty is amazed. Her mouth drops open and she looks around the bedroom, to the window, but this is presumably closed, as the curtains are drawn.

She finally tiptoes quietly across the floor, sits down on the bed and starts to unbutton her blouse, fearfully.

10

INT. COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - NEXT MORNING EARLY

10

Bill comes downstairs, in his work clothes, but no hat and jacket, yet.

He sits at the bottom of the stairs and puts on his boots.

Bill goes over to the dresser and he then takes out a piece of bread, from the crock, and goes towards the door, biting off and chewing a piece.

Bill grabs and puts on his jacket and hat.

He slowly/quietly opens the door and, as he does, he notices that it has not been locked.

He then notices the message on the front of the door, reads it half aloud to himself, and is further perplexed.

Bill shakes his head, and steps out into a beautiful dawn, as the cock crows.

He closes the door.

11

INT. COTTAGE LIVING ROOM - LATER IN THE DAY

11

Bill opens the door and steps back into the house, later in the morning, for his breakfast.

Betty is setting the table and she looks up.

BILL

Me breakfast ready?

BETTY

Yeh. ..you 'ave yer dew bit, then?

BILL
Yeh, but what's the meaning o' them
words chalked on the door?

Betty goes to dish the bacon and eggs.

BETTY
A saw ye go aat, last night, so a
left a message to close the door.

BILL
But ya was in bed WITH me, ya great
hap'oth...

BETTY
No! A saw ye go aat afore that!

BILL
No, I didn't! A were fagged and
went straight to bed and slept.
.....Ya KNOW a did!

Betty brings the first plate of food, to the table.

She shrugs as she puts it down before him.

BETTY
Well. ..huh.... I must a bin
DREAMIN', then!

Bill picks up his piece of bread and mops up his bacon
grease, shaking his head.

12

EXT. VILLAGE/LONG PUDDLE STREET - DAY

12

Betty is wearing her bonnet and shawl and carrying a basket
with a couple of small, brown paper parcels in it.

She is walking down the street.

A young woman comes towards her, also shopping. She is
yawning.

BETTY
Well YOU look sleepy today, Nancy!

Nancy looks conspiratorial and mischievous.

NANCY
It were old Midsummer Eve, last
night ...

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)

and don't tell anybody, but some of us went down ta' church porch and didn't get home till near one o' the clock!

BETTY

Faith, I'd that much ironing to do, I wouldn't 'uv known if it were Midsummer, or MICHAELMAS!..... So how many spirits went in ... and did thi all come aat, then?

Nancy suddenly looks a bit uncomfortable

NANCY

(Self deprecatingly)

Well. ... It's all just a bit o' silly fun!

Betty is suspicious

BETTY

WHO went in and WHO didn't come aat?

NANCY

Oh, yunno. ...Old Gaffer Doodum's spirit went in ... and then ... then 'e come out, again.

Betty is more pressing and she looks into Nancy's eyes.

BETTY

AND?

Nancy becomes mortified, but realizes that she can't hide it anymore.

NANCY

It, were ... were ... just
(whispers)
your Bill!

BETTY

What? ... 'is spirit just ... walking in, like?

NANCY

Yes, but it were dead queer. He were wet through! Wet and wi' a crown o' reeds around 'is 'ead! ... Just like Jesus!

BETTY
Our Lord wore thorns!

NANCY
Yeh, LIKE that
(more quietly)
but wi' reeds!

She looks down and away.

Betty looks stricken

BETTY
Well. ... Ya needn't tell me this,
Nancy....if you don't want..
..... but 'is spirit didn't
come AAT again.....DID it?

Nancy hangs her head and shakes it slowly and sadly

NANCY
(Quietly)
No, Mrs. Privett!

Betty nods her head, sadly.

BETTY
(Sighs)
Well, it WERE Midsummer's Eve ...
and the spirit of a man can do what
it WANTS, then, can't it?
..... Off ya go, Nancy.

Betty puts her hand over her eyes and remains standing there.

Nancy nods, in agreement and hurries away

NANCY
Bye! ... Am sorry! Sorry!

13

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

13

Bill and another labourer (John) are cutting the grass with sickles.

They finish for lunch and walk over to a tree where they have left their food and drink.

They eat lunch, and then fall asleep, under the tree, in the sunshine.

14

EXT. MEADOW - LATER

14

John, the other labourer wakes up and calls to his friend, Bill.

Bill does not answer, so John gets up, goes over to him and shakes him.

Bill does not respond, so John kneels down, calls his name and puts his hand on his face.

The body is cold and John recoils as he realizes that Bill is dead.

15

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

15

Betty, in sober black, gets up from the graveside where she has been leaving flowers and communing with her dead husband.

She walks sadly away.

The sexton and Philip Hookhorn are nearby and they watch her go.

The sexton is clearing grass, again, and Philip is talking with him.

PHILIP

A SAW him, yunno down at
Longpuddle Spring when a were
fetching some water afore going
home fer the day.

SEXTON

Well, yer couldn't have, cos 'e
were dead by then ... 'e died after
his nunch.

PHILIP

Well mebbe I foresaw it, then. ...
Bill being down at t' pool where
his little Will died.

SEXTON

Aye. ... Well.... we now know for
oo the 'eavy bell tolled.

PHILIP

But she can't STOP him, anymore,
now....

SEXTON

...No-one can stop him now, poor
soul!

16

EXT. EDGE OF REEDY POND - DAY

16

Bill, looking a little transparent, stands by the pond and
stares into it.