

The Preparer

A Monologue by Dan Kehde

Selected from his collection, "1400 Boxes of Jello and Other Monologues"

Cast: 1

Length: 1 page of dialogue (1131 words)

Performance time: About 7 minutes

The Story

An older servant directs a younger one in preparing the king's body for burial. After specific procedures and treatments with special oils and herbs, the body is ready. The older servant then tells the younger one how to die peacefully herself as the two servants are finally sealed in the royal tomb to serve their master in the afterlife.

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THE PREPARER

Look at him. So young. Such a beautiful body to be wasted ... oh, I know I shouldn't say such things – the gods have their needs, perhaps? Such a boy he was, don't you think. There ... I saw him once, did I not tell you? On the steps, by the palace gate before his sickness. He was more beautiful even than now, with his gold headdress and staff and robes. He nodded to us, to his priests and those who would prepare him and to his teachers. I believe he knew even then that he'd have a greater need for us than any of the others. It was in his eyes. Those eyes. How deep even now.

Use the hook, dear. You must break through the passages, before it will come out. No, here, allow me. You see, you must steady the head thus, then take the hook and up through ... there, hear the crack? Now you're through, see. Now just use the hook and it will all start to drain out. That's right, in this vessel ... the third of the holy ones. It shall be sealed for all ages. Take your time and get it all, time is all he has now. That's it. That's just right.

It is a fine oil, is it not? Jasmine blossoms ... smell? Smooths the skin and warms it. See? Feel his hand, see how warm it seems. He will wear it well on the other side too. Such shoulders. They say he was a true marksman, they do. With the staff and spear and sling. You can feel it in his muscles here, and here. How are you doing there? Almost done? Take your time. There's no rush now. We'll take the second knife, do you see it there? Let me have it. And we'll cut from here all the way down ... to here.

Such a fine instrument to be used so little, don't you think. I do. Death wastes so much.

So many children he should have had. So many that could have been his dynasty and now just ... this. Hand me that first vessel please. This will be cherished by all gods. And this, to the second the vessel. Careful not to lose the liquids. All is sacred here. All we touch is sacred. And now for the rest ... you and you come, help. You may touch it – see it is cold, death makes us all cold sooner or later. Careful not to let it all slip between your fingers. That's it, in the largest vessel. That's it.

Are you done? Very nice. Now then help me turn him over, you there, take the shallow pan and hold it here, to catch the liquids that remain. Here we go then. So heavy for such a young man. See his back? See the mark? That is the mark of the god. All have them, they say. Even one so young as this. Hold the pan steady now. It is almost dry. Such fine hair. Now, turn him back and prepare the spices.

We were children, do you remember? And they taught us first of the spices, the coriander and clove and sea salt and the juniper. To the sacred gardens and the hills by the sea, do you remember, "Gather them for your moment, gather them for your time with the gods." How the sun felt on our skin! And the wind from the sea. Bring them to me.

We rub the spices inside like this, see? Very slowly so they stay. With each spice comes a dream and with each dream comes another god to comfort him. That's it.

Reach your hand in here, palm up, feel the grains of the salt? Feel the leaves and ground juniper berry? Now take the spices and stretch ... all the way up now. *(Laughs.)* Such a face you make! It is a god you touch, not a dead cow. That's better. Feel it there? Good, good.

It would have been good to feel the sun again. To be back along the sand, and feel the night fall. Don't you think?

We shall send him with his favorite – the fig, I think – wrapped and spiced here, and here, no, one more there and placed inside, so he might enjoy them on his journey. That's it. Oh, go wash then. You still smell only the stench of death and not its perfume. But that will change. Trust me.

Now, bring me cloth and vessels of cedar. Smell the eastern forests? Smell? First the cedar on the body, how it grabs the skin – it almost comes alive again, see? You, all of you, take and rub the skin, coat the skin until it shines and moves and feels alive. Take your time. Coat our god well. His journey is long. That's it. And now we wrap, here at the heel and here at the knee. Three wraps and our cedar, three more wraps and more cedar. That's it. Coat the cloth. It must shine. Feel it on your hands – see his skin through the fabric. More now, that's it.

Were you with us when we went to the forests for the sap of the cedar? You were too young perhaps. High on the bluffs, bleeding giants. And the slaves loading the vessels like fine wine on the backs of the camels. Many days in the sun and the sand and the wind. How I miss the wind.

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