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Family Plays

THE MAGIC WELL

Comedy by
HERMAN AMMANN



THE MAGIC WELL

"Twelve elementary schools were included in our Children's Theatre tour of *The Magic Well*." (John Klug, Golden Senior High School, Colo.)

Comedy. By Herman Ammann. Cast: 4 to 8m., 6 to 10w. Here is another delicious mixture of fairyland fantasy and modern social realism as only Herman Ammann could do it. Children love his plays because of the make-believe, and adults love them because of the subtle jabs at human foibles. For those who are young in spirit, Ammann is a master of putting real everyday people with real current problems beneath the fairyland costumes. King Cole is un-merry because he has three daughters of marriageable age—and no prospective sons-in-law to take them off his hands. The king also has the problem of all political leaders: "To never be able to admit you are wrong ... it is a curse." A professional hunter comes to rid the kingdom of a dragon, but the local environmentalist thinks dragons should be protected as an endangered species. There's a well with magic powers and a frog. An Old Hag is troubled with inflation—the price of lizard tongues has gone out of sight! There is humor in the villagers' reactions to all this. *The Magic Well* can be played by adult actors or by pre-adults of virtually any age. This show is an extremely popular contest play. *One ext. set: may be a simple outdoor scene with cutout trees and a cardboard well. Costumes: any period, or—like the original production—a kaleidoscope of all periods. After all, the play is as modern as ecology and as old as Fairyland. Approximate running time: 30 to 35 minutes. A director's script is available which gives full details and drawings of set, costumes, props, etc. Code: ML3.*

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A Comedy in One Act

by

Herman Ammann

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HERMAN AMMANN

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(THE MAGIC WELL)

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THE MAGIC WELL

Cast

Old King Cole, a merry old soul
An Old Hag
An Old Man
An Old Woman
*The Town Poet
*The Town Fool
Mrs. Blinky, a nearsighted birdwatcher
Prince Arlo Marlowe, a professional hunter
Tissy, the pretty daughter of the king
Prissy, the clever daughter of the king
Lissy, the smart daughter of the king
*A Prologue
*A Dragon
A Frog

and, of course,

The Magic Well

Place: Way off somewhere

Time: You name it

[*May be played by men or women]



"The Magic Well" was first presented at the 19th annual Schulenburg Theatre Festival on April 7 & 8, 1972, under the direction of Pat Castle of Texas A & M University with the following cast of junior high students:

Prologue	Robin Clark
The Dragon	Neal Richter
Old King Cole	Phil Lippman
Old Woman	Sheryl Simpson
Old Man.	Mark Fitch
Town Poet	Michael Lebeda
Town Fool	Clay Rightmer
Old Hag	Glenda Getschmann
Mrs. Blinky	Susie Deterling
Prince Arlo Marlowe	Greg Mikesky
Tissy	Ginger Holub
Prissy	Debbie Frank
Lissy	Linda Valchar
Frog	Eddie Winkler

NOTES ON THE PLAY

“The Magic Well” is another of Herman Ammann’s delightful plays for children of all ages. For those who are young in years, there’s Old King Cole . . . *not* a very Merry Old Soul as the play begins. And there’s a real live dragon, and three beautiful — er, well — *interesting* princesses; and a frog that has been bewitched and made to live in the well for a hundred years.

For those who are young in spirit, Ammann is a master of putting real everyday people with real nowadays problems beneath the Fairyland costumes. King Cole is un-merry because he has three daughters of marriageable age — and no prospective sons-in-law to take them off his hands. And the King has the problem of all political leaders: “To never be able to admit you are wrong . . . it is a curse.” Then there’s an old witch who has to fight inflation — the price of bats and lizards has gone out of sight.

Ammann’s usual subtle satire is also here. The professional dragon hunter decides to reform; he will never kill an animal again. “From now on,” he proclaims, “I shall let the butchers do all the dirty work, like killing. I shall enjoy eating meat and never give another thought how it came about.” There is the near-sighted president of the Birdwatchers Club and . . . but part of the fun in reading a playscript is discovering these delights for yourself.

“The Magic Well” can be played by adult actors or by pre-adults of virtually any age. The set may be a simple outdoor scene with cut-out trees and a cardboard well. (See the ‘*Stage Magic*’ Production Script for full details and drawings of set, costumes, props, etc.) Costumes can be of any period, or — like the original production — a kaleidoscope of all periods. After all, the play is as modern as ecology and as old as Fairyland.

“The Magic Well” is the kind of play that ‘*Stage Magic*’ likes to offer — it will help you do enchanting things on your stage.

THE MAGIC WELL

By Herman O. Ammann

[As curtain rises the stage is empty except for the stone well about four feet high at Stage Center. It has four posts and a thatched roof. There are three large rocks to the right and three to the left of the well. These rocks are large enough to sit or stand on. At Down Right is a bench; another just like it is at Down Left. Several trees form a background for the set. Lights are low, for the time is midnight.]

The PROLOGUE enters and delivers the following speech, beginning with the tone of a mother telling a fairy tale to a little child.]

PROLOGUE. Once upon a time about a thousand years ago, there was a little village somewhere in Central Europe. I would tell you the name of the village, but it isn't important, and anyway, you never heard of it. In the very center of the village was an old well from which all the villagers got their water. Now that wasn't very unusual except for one thing — *[in a mysterious voice, pointing at the well]* the well, the one you are looking at, was a magic well . . . *[whispering]* and no one in the village knew it! This was a very peaceful and serene community and nothing ever happened. Nothing unusual or exciting had happened for hundreds of years. Really there was no need for a magic well — *[very mysterious]* until one night . . .

[A DRAGON enters Left. He has a horrible head and tail with bumps on the top side. The tail drags behind as he crosses below the well.]

DRAGON. Gronk, gronk, gronk, gronk-gronk-gronk-gronk. *[He moves slowly across the stage saying "gronk" at measured intervals; then interspersing with four or five rapid gronks in a row, as though he was enjoying his midnight stroll. He leaves the stage at Right.]*

PROLOGUE. With the arrival of the dragon, the well knew that things in the village would never again be the same. And then came the dawn . . . [*PROLOGUE again points toward the stage and – as the lights get brighter and the audience’s attention is directed toward the action – backs off and disappears.*]

[A man dressed as a KING enters. He sits down on a bench, unrolls a scroll and starts studying it. He takes out a quill, scratches on the paper, writes on it, and in general seems to be engrossed in his composition. Three men – the OLD MAN, the TOWN POET, and the TOWN FOOL – and the OLD WOMAN enter. They are talking excitedly and do not notice the king.]

OLD WOMAN. Mrs. Blinky said she saw one with her own two eyes.

OLD MAN. [*Beside the Old Woman, leaning on a gnarled walking stick*] Mrs. Blinky can’t see the end of her nose.

TOWN FOOL. [*Speaking like a dunce*] If Mrs. Blinky said she saw a dragon in the big forest, I believe her.

TOWN POET. That’s why they call you “Town Fool” and “Bumpkin.”

You, Town Fool, have a head like a pumpkin.

[He sits and writes down his immortal words.]

OLD MAN. The Town Poet is right. It is your kind who believes every bit of gossip.

OLD WOMAN. When people hear others’ news, they always say it’s gossip. If you had heard it first, Old Man, you’d be bragging and believing it a fact for sure.

OLD MAN. Even if it was true, I wouldn’t care. They don’t make dragons like they used to. The knights killed all the bad ones. Those that are left are shy. Why, Old Woman, they’d never come into the village. They’d be afraid of you!

[OLD WOMAN takes his cane and hits OLD MAN on top of head. He covers up and falls on the ground. TOWN FOOL watches with glee.]

OLD MAN. Stop it, woman, stop it!

THE KING. [*Rising*] Cease this violence in the street. Stop this caterwauling and flogging in public.

[At the sound of the King's voice, all turn and kneel.]

TOWN POET. Well, bless my soul;
It's Old King Cole.

[He writes it down.]

KING COLE. *[Sits]* You'd better believe it, sonny.

OLD WOMAN. Oh, your Majesty, I didn't see you. I would never have beaten my Old Man in public.

OLD MAN. *[Speaks in an aged, whiny voice.]* She always beats me at home. *[Rubs head]* Ow-oo-o-o-oo!

KING COLE. Is this true? Do you beat this old man at home? Where there is no one to see, no one to bear witness?

OLD WOMAN. *[Hangs head until it nearly touches the ground]* I'm afraid I do, your Majesty.

KING COLE. Well then, take him home and beat him. I can't stand his caterwauling. And give him a couple of extra licks for me!

[OLD WOMAN rises, takes OLD MAN by the ear and leads him to Left exit.]

TOWN FOOL. *[Bouncing jubilantly to exit]* I seen the King; I seen the King!

TOWN POET. *[Follows Fool; stops at exit and addresses audience]* What a democratic feat,

To meet and greet
The King on the street.
But, Dragons, alas!
What's coming to pass?

[He takes out his pad and jots these immortal lines down as he exits.]

[The KING looks after them, then resumes studying the paper. He makes more corrections. An OLD HAG enters carrying an old black pot in one hand and an old broom in the other. Not recognizing the King, she sits on the bench beside him and drops the pot and broom noisily on the ground. The KING jumps and gives her a dirty look.]

OLD HAG. Am I ever beat. Business is terrible; no one wants me to cast a spell, my feet hurt, and the price of lizards,

bats, and snakes has gone out of sight. [*She notices the King for the first time and jabs him in the ribs with her elbow.*] Say, aren't you . . . why I bet you really are that fellow that does all the laughing. What is that name again? I always forget.

KING COLE. [*Looking at her disdainfully*] Old King Cole.

OLD HAG. That's right. Old King Cole. But they call you something else. You've a nickname. Some crazy thing that rhymes.

KING COLE. [*Anything but merry*] The Merry Old Soul.

OLD HAG. That's it. That's the name I was trying to think of. Whoever hung that one on you should be fed to the dragon.

KING COLE. Who else would bestow it except the town poet?

OLD HAG. What are you doing with that paper? You are not acting very merry today. Do you have a king-size hang-up?

KING COLE. I am working on a proclamation which I am going to make from the center balcony tomorrow. [*Rise, importantly*] It is going to be an official edict.

OLD HAG. An edict, eh? Say that is going to be important . . . I will have to be there.

KING COLE. It will be the most important edict I have ever concocted.

OLD HAG. Hey, slow down there a minute, King. I don't even know what an edict is, much less a concocted.

KING COLE. An edict is an official statement which I am making to announce to the public that my three daughters are ready to take husbands.

OLD HAG. You want them out of the house.

KING COLE. Something like that.

OLD HAG. What is the problem . . . each one is prettier than the other?

KING COLE. That's what you think . . . only one of them is pretty. The other two spend all their time and my money in beauty salons.

OLD HAG. This should be a happy time for you. The Queen will take care of the daughters. You have no worries.

KING COLE. You still don't understand. I know they will

all find husbands, but the one that marries first will become the Queen . . . when the wife and I have gone to our rewards. Since we have no son, the dynasty will pass to the first-wed daughter.

OLD HAG. Then the suitor that first takes a wife will be marrying a Queen?

KING COLE. Yes, but he won't know it. It is most important that it be kept a secret.

OLD HAG. A secret that everyone knows is the biggest secret of all.

KING COLE. What does that mean?

OLD HAG. O, King, get smart. Every man thinks he's marrying a queen. [*KING exits. HAG, following, stops, gets idea, comes back onstage.*] What is the matter with me? This is a magic well. Why don't I take advantage of it! I know what I'll do . . . I'll make a magic potion, and between us we'll solve the village problems . . . and a few of my own problems, too! [*Exit excitedly*]

[The OLD MAN, OLD WOMAN, MRS. BLINKY, TOWN POET, and TOWN FOOL enter.]

OLD MAN. Mrs. Blinky, tell us again how you thought you saw a dragon while you were out birdwatching.

MRS. BLINKY. [*She wears very large glasses.*] I didn't think I saw a dragon . . . I did see one . . . big as life! I had just taken note of a Speckled Belly Woodpecker when this enormous creature appeared. He was looking down at me through the boughs. He was bigger than a pachyderm.

TOWN FOOL. What's a pach-y-derm?

OLD MAN. It's an elephant. An animal smaller than a dragon. He has a tail on both ends, and the one in front is bigger!

TOWN FOOL. A tail on both ends, eh? Then how does he know which way he's going?

OLD MAN. It doesn't matter. When you are that big, everything gets out of your way.

[TOWN FOOL retreats to a rock and sits to ponder this statement.]

OLD WOMAN. I heard the King has brought in a pro-

fessional hunter.

MRS. BLINKY. I think that is terrible. Our Birdwatchers Society is joining with the Society for the Preservation of Dragons in petitioning the king to call off the hunt. Our dragons are an essential part of our heritage.

OLD MAN. I don't think you have anything to worry about. I don't believe you saw a dragon in the first place.

TOWN POET. Well, we won't be long in doubt.

Here comes the man we've been talking about!

[A handsome young man — PRINCE ARLO MARLOWE — backs in; he appears to be looking at something way off in the forest.]

PRINCE ARLO. I never heard such bellowing in my life. It's not much fun when they act like that.

OLD MAN. What are you talking about? Who are you?

PRINCE ARLO. *[Turns, sees them, switches on the charm]* Oh, excuse me. Permit me to introduce myself. I am Prince Arlo Marlowe. I'm a professional dragon hunter . . . among other things.

OLD MAN. Glad to meet you, sir. I am known as the Old Man in this village, and this is my wife, the Old Woman. *[He indicates each as he introduces them.]* This fellow here is the Town Poet. *[POET bows sumptuously and gracefully. FOOL tries to imitate his bow and nearly falls.]* And that other one, obviously, is the Town Fool. The lady with the large glasses is Mrs. Blinky. She's a bit nearsighted, the head of the local Birdwatching Society and an ardent conservationist.

MRS. BLINKY. What were you talking to yourself about? You mentioned something about some animal crying for help.

PRINCE ARLO. The dragon. *[He looks into the distance offstage; MRS. BLINKY looks with him, peering and blinking through her big glasses.]* I just caught a glimpse of him and hurled my spear. I don't know if I struck a vital spot or not, but he disappeared into the brush bellowing in a rather pitiful manner. I will have to get some dogs and go after him. It was my best spear!

MRS. BLINKY. I am going to get Old King Cole to issue

an edict against dragon hunting.

TOWN FOOL. Speaking of the King, he gave me some sort of paper this morning. [*Holds up a piece of parchment.*] I was supposed to post it on the well. [*He goes over and sticks paper on a nail on the well.*]

MRS. BLINKY. [*Goes to well and begins to read, her nose about three inches from the paper*] "The King's Edict: Be it known throughout this land, my three daughters are ready to be courted and wed. Signed, Old King Cole. P.S. The Merry Old Soul."

PRINCE ARLO. When he hired me, the King didn't mention he had three daughters. I should like to look into this. It sounds interesting.

OLD WOMAN. They are very pretty! But one is prettier than the others.

OLD MAN. All young girls are pretty!

OLD WOMAN. Oh, shut up, you silly Old Man. [*To Arlo*] You can judge for yourself, Prince Arlo . . . here they come now.

[*KING and his three DAUGHTERS enter.*]

KING COLE. Oh, there you are, Prince Arlo Marlowe. I want you to meet my three daughters: Tissy, Prissy, and Lissy.

TISSY. [*Curtsies prettily*] I'm Tissy; I'm the pretty one.

PRISSY. [*Curtsies cleverly*] I'm Prissy; I'm the clever one.

LISSY. [*Curtsies smartly*] I'm Lissy; I'm the smart one.

PRINCE ARLO. [*Bows gallantly*] Pretty, clever, and smart! I'm glad those traits are split up. I'd hate to find them all in one woman.

KING. You haven't met their mother. She's ugly, sneaky, and dumb.

DAUGHTERS. Father!

PRINCE ARLO. I understand these girls are making their debut.

TOWN POET. 'Tis true, 'tis true,
And watch your step
Or one of them
Will marry you!