

UISCE BEATHA

A short, silent play

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CHARACTERS

WOMAN: over the age of 18; dressed in any manner; She has a bag of some sort with her – a rolling case, a large laptop bag, an overnight bag

SETTING: any place where you create your coffee, preferably public, with a coffee carafe that requires pushing down on the top for the coffee to come out. On the coffee counter are the coffee carafe, cups, little containers of cream, sugar, stirrers, etc. No lids.

TIME: early (or late) – whatever resonates for you and your designers/actors

NOTE: For those of you who do not know, UISCE BEATHA is the Gaelic for “water of life”, aqua vitae. It typically refers to distilled alcohol (um...whiskey). For WOMAN, coffee is her “water of life”.

NOTE ABOUT SILENCE: While I call this a “silent” play, we should hear the soundtrack of her breathing, her sighs (of frustration and relief), the sound of her making the coffee. You may choose to add soft music, but we must be able to hear her presence over it. The words in ALL CAPS are meant to be seen and felt, not said aloud.

SCENE ONE

WOMAN enters.

She is bleary-eyed.

It's been a long night – no sleep, too much work, too much bad news, she is seeking that small joy to keep her going.

She moves slowly, painfully, towards the self-serve coffee counter.

She sets her bag down on the ground next to her feet.

She carefully removes a cup from the stack of cups – they stick together. She sighs, just one more frustration. She shakes the cups until the top one comes loose, and the rest of the stack tumbles to the ground.

WOMAN looks around fearfully – did anyone see her? Hear the noise? No one seems to notice.

She picks up the cups and puts them back in a stack, including her own.

SHIT.

She removes the top cup, again, from the stack, it comes off easily this time.

She searches for the sugar; it's not a large container, but all those little packets. She picks up three, looks around again, adds three more.

She neatly stacks the sugar packets in one hand, shaking each one to get the sugar to the bottom and then rips the tops off all at once. A little sugar spills on the counter, and she absent-mindedly brushes it to the ground.

She pours the sugar into the cup.

She looks around for a trash can. There isn't one.

SIGH

She sets the empty sugar packets on the counter. For now.

She looks for a cream/milk carafe. Does not find one. Only the little containers. She grabs one and tries to peel the top off the container. She struggles. Her fingernails are too long or not long enough or she's just too tired. She decides to use her teeth to rip off the top. The top rips off and cream spills down her shirt.

GODDAMNIT

She looks around for napkins, paper towels, anything. They're hidden. She finally finds them, but it's already too late. There are milk stains on her shirt. She wipes them off as best she can. Once again, looks for the non-existent trash can. Sets the paper towels on the counter.

She is amassing a pile of trash.

She picks up another creamer. Studies it, trying to decide what to do.

She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a pen (or pencil or keys). She pokes a hole in the top of the container and pours it into the cup.

INGENIOUS

She grins like she just discovered the cure for cancer.

She repeats the process with two more creamers.

She makes a little stack of the creamer containers; shoving them into one another, then carefully folding the empty sugar packets and stuffing them into the top one, setting them next to the used paper towels. Trying to make her trash pile as small as possible.

FINALLY

She picks up the coffee cup, containing her magic mixture of cream and sugar, and puts it under the spout of the carafe.

She takes in a deep breath, and as she exhales, she pushes down on the top of the carafe for the coffee.

It makes a spurting noise, as little droplets of coffee spray out.

MOTHERFUCKER

She looks around. No one.

YOU'VE GOT TO BE FUCKING KIDDING ME.

She sets down the coffee cup, rubs her hands over her face, breathing, trying to breathe. Counting to ten. Her face is a mask of anger, nearing tears.

She reexamines the carafe. Opens it, closes it. Picks it up.

Notices another carafe behind it.

SIGH (of relief)

She sets the front carafe on the floor.

She picks up the coffee cup, containing her magic mixture of cream and sugar, and puts it under the spout of the carafe.

She takes in a deep breath, and as she exhales, she pushes down on the top of the carafe for the coffee.

The coffee comes streaming out of the carafe into her cup.

She repeats the inhalation/exhalation ritual of filling the cup at least three times until the cup is filled to the brim. The last press of the carafe results in this carafe being emptied as well.

She sets the cup on the counter. She finds a stirrer and lovingly stirs her coffee.

WOMAN examines the counter top again, looking for lids. She moves things around, looks under the counter, looking all around her. Seeing no one and no lids.

BIG SIGH

[And, this, dear reader/director/actor, is where it gets interesting. If you choose the happy ending, continue to page 5. If you choose the tragic ending, continue to page 6. You can rehearse both endings and let your audience choose, if you so desire. This can be accomplished by giving them two different colored index cards with their programs (or even thumbs-up/thumbs-down). If they want the happy ending, raise the pink card in the air; if they want the tragic ending, raise the blue card. Then proceed as they vote.]

[HAPPY ENDING]

She nods. She can do this.

WOMAN picks up her bag, cup still on the counter.

She turns to walk away, picks up the cup.

She faces the audience, raises the coffee cup to her lips.

She closes her eyes and takes a large sip.

She lowers the coffee cup, as a smile spreads across her face—

As the smell of the coffee tells her brain caffeine is on its way—

As the smile spreads to her eyes—

Her breathing becomes deeper—

She stands a little taller.

She takes another swig of coffee.

AHHH

Her whole energy has changed. The pain is gone, the weariness lifted. She practically skips as --

WOMAN exits.

THE END

[TRAGIC ENDING]

She nods. She can do this.

WOMAN picks up the coffee cup.

As she turns toward the audience, her foot catches on her bag.

She stumbles, trying to maintain her balance –

Trying not to spill the coffee –

Trying not to fall –

Trying not to get coffee on her blouse –

On her computer –

On her bag –

On the floor.

She worked so hard for this coffee. Almost as if in slow motion, she loses the fight. The coffee cup falls from her hand.

It splashes. On her. On her bag. It covers the floor.

For a moment, she stares. Unable to believe what she is seeing. What just happened.

She falls to her knees.

And weeps.

BLACKOUT

THE END