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Professor Eric Miller COLT 28: Mind Reading

**Final Paper Part 2: A Country Doctor**

The groom addresses the horses as "brother" and "sister". Yeah, he's a groom; that's his job, but there seems to be more going on than that. But what?

A Country Doctor is a short story by Franz Kafka about a doctor's trip to a distant patient. Initially, the doctor cannot travel because of the lack of a horse. His previous horse had died from exhaustion, and the doctor needed to travel through a severe snowstorm across the countryside to reach his patient. With his servant girl, Rose, frantically asking the other villagers to lend their horses to the doctors with no luck, the doctor kicks the door of an abandoned pigsty that “had not been used for years.” Surprisingly, a groom emerges from the abandoned pigsty with two fully healthy horses. While calling the horses, the groom says, “Hey, Brother, hey Sister,” to refer to the two horses. This remark about bringing the two horses could symbolize the doctor’s ignorance of the state of affairs in his home and the world around him through the intimate relationship between the two horses and the groom as their primary caretaker.

The groom could have said, “Hey, Brother, hey Sister,” intentionally in front of the doctor when referring to the horses to make the doctor aware of the damage his ignorance of the world around him has caused on both his relationship with the people and things around him and the detrimental toll on those serving the needs of the doctor despite his ignorance for their wellbeing. In the beginning, the doctor is without a horse to pull his carriage to the patient’s house because the previous horse the doctor had been using had died from exhaustion. The groom could have intentionally mentioned the words “brother” and “sister” to make the doctor aware of the close relationship between the two horses. Since horses are social animals, the groom could have been fearful about the well-being of both horses, given the doctor’s ignorance, which would also affect even the other horse not involved in any mishap or accident.

Another equally valid explanation is that the groom calls the horses “brother” and “sister” because of his close relationship with them as their primary caregiver. The audience is made aware of the doctor’s ignorance at the start of the story, with him even laughing once with Rosa when she remarks, “One doesn’t know the sorts of things one has stored in one’s own house.” Horses require a lot of attention, and the groom would likely have developed a bond with the horses because he alone might have been the primary caregiver. We can assume that the groom has been working for the doctor for an extended time, given the doctor’s need to constantly travel the countryside to get to his patients’ homes. If the groom had raised both the horses from their birth, most of his life would revolve around the upbringing of the horses, as Kafka describes them as adult horses by saying they are “powerful animals with strong flanks.” As a result, the groom would have grown into adulthood and as a person alongside the horses. Because the two horses and the groom grew up together, it is justifiable for the groom to think of the two horses as his siblings. Because of the intimate relationship between the groom and the horses, he might have preferred to call them “brother” and “sister.” This relationship might further explain why the groom might have been fearful for the wellbeing of the horses, given the doctor’s ignorance, as argued earlier.

Another explanation for why the groom shares such an intimate relationship with the horses is the suffering they endure together from staying in the pigsty due to the doctor’s ignorance. The Association for Psychological Science reports that pain is a powerful tool in creating bonds between people who go through painful experiences together (Association for Psychological Science). By staying in impossibly cramped quarters, the groom and the horses get closer to each other through their shared suffering.

In conclusion, A Country Doctor is a short story by Franz Kafka that contains seemingly impossible and strange events. Kafka forces the readers to create their unique interpretations to understand the story. One such puzzling event is the appearance of two horses and a groom from an abandoned pig sty, with the groom referring to the horses as “brother” and “sister.” Using existing knowledge of horses and contextual details about the doctor’s ignorance of the world around him and the well-being of those who help him, we can assume that the groom calls the horses “brother” and “sister” to make the doctor aware of the intimate relationship he shares with the horses and the horses share. Additionally, the groom could be subtly nudging the doctor to pay attention to the world around him by reminding him of details regarding his household he most likely would have forgotten.