THE BEATING HEART

By Craig Sodaro

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Ivy McEwin, a history major in college, is so intrigued by the photograph of a young woman who lived during the Civil War that she travels to the woman's last home, Ravensgate, an old Southern plantation in Georgia. Ivy hopes to unlock the secrets of the woman's life, but instead meets the woman in death.

The new owners of Ravensgate, who are trying to turn the restored house into a bed and breakfast, have already noticed a number of strange things going on: the sounds of a woman crying all night, the frequent, unrelenting beating of a heart, and a rocking chair which rocks all by itself.

As ghosts appear and horrific events frighten off the last of the guests, Ivy is more determined than ever to stay, even when Mrs. Dyer, the housekeeper, echoes the forbidding walls of Ravensgate by trying to make her leave.

Gradually, a story of murder and revenge unfolds, reaching a climax when a teenage girl possessing "the gift" enters the spirit world and lays bare secrets held for 150 years.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 11 w, doubling possible)

NORA DAMON TYRRELL: Early 20s, owner of Ravensgate Plantation House.
JEMMA DAMON: Nora's teenage sister.
MAGGIE DAMON: Nora's older sister, 28.
IVY McEWIN: A Boston college student, 21.
COLIN CARTER: Ivy's boyfriend, 22.
CHLOE ROSE: Owner of Ravensgate B&B, late 20s.
ALLEN ROSE: Chloe's husband, late 20s.
MRS. DYER: The housekeeper, late 60s.
ED HUXLEY: A guest at Ravensgate, 50s.
ARDELLA HUXLEY: His wife, 50s.
ESTELLA GARTH: The birdwatching school teacher, 50s.
EULA GARTH: Estella's sister, 50s.
CHARLOTTE CLAIR: A local woman, late 40s.
SHARON CLAIR: Her daughter, 17.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I
Scene 1: Ravensgate plantation, February, 1865.
Scene 2: A Boston street, a February morning in the present.
Scene 3: Ravensgate B&B, the following evening.
Scene 4: The same, later that night.

ACT II
Scene 1: The same, the following afternoon.
Scene 2: The same, that night.

NOTE: See back of playbook for Production Notes.

SETTING

The play takes place in the great room of the Ravensgate Plantation in Georgia. When we see the room first in Act I, Scene 1, it is very dimly lit. A small fire burns in the fireplace, giving off an amber light. DSR is lit, for that is where the dying soldier lies. UPS we can make out the door to the room, USL. A large French window is USR. The fireplace is USC. A few pieces of furniture sit here and there. Curtains are torn and the entire room is in disrepair. When we see the room again in Act I, Scene 3, the structure is identical, but brightly lit with a pleasing appearance. A hotel desk stands USL, between the door and fireplace. Over the fireplace hangs a picture of early plantation life. Curtains now adorn either side of the French window which opens onto a terrace with a railing. DSR sits a small couch and rocker. A bookcase stands against the SR wall. DSL is a small table, like a game table set with two chairs. Several palms or plants decorate the room along with lamps, pictures, or other works of art which gives the room a feeling of quality and comfort.

PROPS

JEMMA: Broom, small wooden chest containing bandages, starter pistol.
NORA: Letter in apron pocket.
MAGGIE: Tea tray including pot and cups.
IVY: Overnight case, photograph in metal frame, credit card, photo albums.
COLIN: Ivy's briefcase, money in wallet.
MRS. HUXLEY: Handkerchief.
MRS. DYER: Duster, butcher knife, tea tray, diary.
ESTELLA: Binoculars, robe, coat with stuffed bird in pocket.
EULA: Binoculars, robe, coat.
CHLOE: Old photo albums and scrapbooks with newspaper clippings and a loose, very old photo.
ALLEN: File folder, business contract.
PRE-SET: Guest register and pen; candles.
"BODY" of YANKEE SOLDIER: Bloody bandage, blankets.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: Ravensgate Plantation, the main house, February, 1865. NORA kneels DS in LIGHT by figure on floor. FIGURE is completely covered, head swathed in a bandage through which we see bloodstains. Nora adjusts the dirty covers, dabs the "forehead" of the patient, and then stands. JEMMA has been sweeping the floor in the background, which is very dimly lit. We hear the sound of GUNFIRE far off.)

NORA: We've done what we can. He's in God's hands now.
JEMMA: *(Leaning broom against wall.)* He'll make it, Nora. He's gotta.
NORA: His breathing's getting shallower every minute.
JEMMA: Isn't there something we can give him?
NORA: What? We've run out of everything. I don't even have enough scraps of cloth for bandages.
JEMMA: Except for what's in here. *(SHE holds up small wooden chest.)*
NORA: You put that back, Jemma!
JEMMA: You got bandages in here. You got quinine and ginger root and things that'll kill the pain.
NORA: He's not in pain.
JEMMA: The war can't last much longer.
NORA: We cannot use those supplies.
JEMMA: But Sherman's army's cleaned out every man for miles around.
NORA: But it's not over, yet. Not until ... the last man returns.
JEMMA: *(Gently.)* You still think Mr. Tyrrell is going to come back?
NORA: *(Disguising HER fear.)* He is comin' back and he might need those supplies, so I'll mind you to put them right back where you found them.
JEMMA: You really do love him, don't you?

NORA: Mr. Tyrrell is my husband, Jemma. I am Mrs. Thomas Tyrrell. We are bound in life and in...death. My love is all I've got to keep me goin'.

JEMMA: What if he doesn't come back?

NORA: *(Angrily.)* Stop talkin' nonsense! Mr. Tyrrell promised he would return to me. He promised no matter what...no matter how...he would make it back to Ravensgate.

JEMMA: You know men and promises! Mr. Jenkins promised to clean out the well and that was four years ago. It's so dirty now we can't even drink from it.

NORA: I don't give a hang about Mr. Jenkins. His promise was not from the heart like Mr. Tyrrell's. We can survive without a clean well, without a roof, without food ... but I'll never survive without Mr. Tyrrell. And he'll be here tonight. Mark my words!

JEMMA: I believe you've been eatin' crazy berries, Nora. You couldn't know a thing like that.

NORA: No? *(SHE takes letter from her apron, reads.)* "And if it be God's will, and I cannot think but He would have it so, I shall return to Ravensgate by midnight of your birthday two months hence. My arms long to hold you, my lips long to kiss yours, but I will have to live on the memory alone 'til we meet again."

JEMMA: You let Maggie hear that 'n she's likely to take a belt to you.

NORA: She wouldn't dare. I'd send her from Ravensgate so fast her head would swim.

JEMMA: Good thing Pa left the house to you, that's all I can say. Sometimes I think Maggie would like Ravensgate all for her own. Like a pretty little doll house. And given half a chance, she'd send us away, that's for sure.

NORA: Which is exactly why Pa left me the house and Maggie the fields. We'll just have to learn to depend on one another. I don't think Pa wanted any of us leavin' here.

(MAGGIE enters SR carrying tray set for tea.)

End of Freeview

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