

Crime Scenes

By Linda Berry

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DEDICATION

*Always to my husband, Jerry, (yes, Jerry Berry)
who seems to like what I write, mostly.*

STORY OF THE PLAY

These three short plays all involve crime and they feature people so rotten, you don't care if they come to a bad end.

In "What It Looks Like" (2 m, 2 w), a trio of thieves sets out to rob a place where one of them is house-sitting. They hope to get away with the theft by arranging the scene to make it tell the story they want it to tell—that somebody from outside broke in. But none of the three is trustworthy, and, it turns out, neither is the owner who hired the house-sitter. Nothing is really what it looks like.

In "Mad Passionate Cliché" (1 m, 2 w), we seem to be witnessing nothing more than a work session between an experienced writer and a younger woman who wants to learn from her, but their conversation gradually reveals tangled relationships and a real murder plot. Twists and revelations keep the secrets of who knows what, who is planning to murder whom, and who ultimately succeeds, until the very last moments.

In "Taking Care of Business" (2 m, 2 w), we see a couple preparing for a dinner party. Soon, we see interlocking plots for each of them and their guests to murder one of the others. By the time the curtain falls, only one is left standing. Or is she?

These three stand-alone one-acts run about thirty minutes each. All three plays can be produced with the same basic set and the same four actors.

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ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

All three plays were produced by the Players Guild of the Festival Playhouse (Arvada, Colorado) under the title "Triple Threat."

AWARDS

"Mad Passionate Cliché" was a winner and was produced as part of a Boulder (Colorado) Museum of Contemporary Art One Act Festival and at the Salida (Colorado) Steam Plant by the Mountain Valley Players.

"Taking Care of Business" was a winner and produced as part of the New Colorado Voices contest by the Crystal Mountain Players in Westcliffe, Colorado.

What It Looks Like

A Botched Burglary in One Act

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CHARACTERS

(2 m, 2 w)

PHIL is smarter, tougher, and older than Larry.

LARRY is not especially bright and is easily led and confused.

DEANNA is Larry's protective older sister.

BURGLAR wears all-black slacks, turtleneck, and ski mask.

SETTING

A living room with doorways up left and up right; a sofa down left, at an angle; a side table with papers on it; a small rug by the door right; and a painting of two large poppies (*which reverses to a similar painting with three poppies*) displayed up center on either the wall, a table top, or an easel.

TIME

The present.

What It Looks Like

(AT RISE: PHIL is talking as he paces, hefting a crowbar, studying the room, disarranging things. LARRY lies face down on the floor in front of the sofa.)

PHIL: What does this scene say about what happened? Okay. There are pry marks on the front door. *(Gestures left.)* Okay. It looks like somebody broke in and helped himself to whatever he wanted. Cleaned the place out. Yeah, that's what it looks like.

(DEANNA appears in the doorway right holding a magazine, some rubber gloves, and a pair of heavy boots. She watches and listens without being noticed as PHIL talks and disarranges things.)

PHIL: *(Cont'd.)* Yeah. Good. Okay. *(Sweeps the papers off the table onto the floor.)* And then, let's see—yeah—she came in and caught him and he hit her over the head with, okay, yeah, this crowbar. *(HE drops the crowbar beside LARRY.)* That's good. Have I missed anything? *(A pause, then he kicks Larry.)* Get up and help me out here, unless you want to go back to jail. Have I missed anything?

LARRY: *(Sitting up.)* I dozed off. Were you talking to me?

PHIL: Yeah, goofus, I was talking to you.

LARRY: What did you say?

PHIL: Have I missed anything? The way a crime scene looks tells a story. We have to make sure it tells the story we want it to tell. It has to be so obvious what happened that the cops don't look too hard for another explanation.

LARRY: Sure. I know that. You've told me and told me. It isn't what really happened that matters, it's what it looks like. *(HE gets up, picks up the crowbar, and puts it on the arm of the couch.)*

PHIL: Well, what does this look like to you?

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LARRY: (*Looking around.*) It looks like a big mess. Deanna's not gonna like it. She's supposed to be taking care of the place.

PHIL: Don't worry about that. Deanna knows how important it is to get everything right. Anyway, she won't have to clean it up.

LARRY: Aw, man! Are you going to make me clean it up?

PHIL: Don't sweat it. I don't know who'll clean it up, but it won't be you or Deanna.

LARRY: Why won't Deanna have to clean it up?

PHIL: If you really want to know, she'll be off at some hospital, taking it easy while people wait on her, hand and foot.

(*DEANNA registers surprise at this but remains unnoticed.*)

LARRY: Why will she be at a hospital? I don't get it.

PHIL: She's going to be slightly injured in the course of the robbery, a little bump on the head, that's all.

LARRY: (*Angrily.*) I don't want Deanna to get hurt. Who's going to bump her on the head?

PHIL: The robber.

LARRY: But we're the robbers. I don't get it.

DEANNA: I don't get it either, and I don't think I want to get it. (*Startled, PHIL starts to protest, but DEANNA continues.*) I don't remember this part of the plan, Phil.

PHIL: How much—

DEANNA: (*Working up to a rant.*) How much did I hear? Enough to remind me what a lowlife you are, as if I needed reminding. It isn't enough that you keep pulling Larry into your schemes and getting him in trouble. It isn't enough that you find a way to stink up this honest, legitimate house-sitting job of mine.

LARRY: I told him—

DEANNA: (*Interrupting.*) I heard you, Larry. You told him you didn't want me to get hurt. I appreciate that. (*Back to PHIL, continuing her rant.*) It isn't enough that you convince my simple-minded brother that robbing this place is a good idea.

End of Freeview

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