

The Hand

Adapted by Burton Bumgarner

from the tale by Guy de Maupassant

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PUBLISHED BY

ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY

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"The Hand" is an adaptation of the famous horror tale by the nineteenth century French writer Guy de Maupassant. An arrogant hunter shocks his dinner guests by showing them his prized trophy, a human hand chained to a board and mounted on the wall of his library. The next morning the hunter's mother demands he make amends to the guests and remove the hand. But the police have now heard about it and plan to check it out. The hunter wants to hide the hand but admits to his maid he feels safer keeping it in sight. The hand is the only thing he fears because the person it used to belong wants it back. That night the hunter finds the hand has disappeared! A fight ensues between the the hunter and the hand, the action lit only with a flashlight for maximum effect. (This one-act is excerpted from the full-length play, "All Hallows' Eve.")

Cast (3 m, 3 w, 4 extras)

Mr. Roswell: An avid hunter.
Albert Brimmer: A business associate.
Theodora Brimmer: Albert's wife.
Mrs. Roswell: Mr. Roswell's mother.
Hannah: The maid.
Inspector: A police inspector.
The Hand: 4 actors, 4 right hands

Setting: The library of a New York brownstone in 1940.

Production Notes: A "severed hand" from a store that sells gag gifts or Halloween accessories can be chained to a board to be the trophy. Four actors in black, long-sleeved turtlenecks should hide in designated places on the set and their right hands should appear and disappear quickly as indicated during the struggle, which is lit only by Roswell's flashlight. Some of the bookshelves should be accessible from behind so books can be pushed to the floor giving the impression that the Hand is running along the shelves. Great care should be taken so that the four actors are not seen.

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(AT RISE: A hand, mounted to a backboard like a trophy, hangs on an upstage wall. Around the wrist is a chain which is connected to the backboard. MR. ROSWELL enters with his guests, ALBERT and THEODORA BRIMMER. They look around the room, then cross to the sofa and chair and sit.)

ROSWELL: And this is the library. I thought we might have coffee in here this evening.

ALBERT: A stunning room, Mr. Roswell. Stunning.

THEODORA: It's truly lovely. You've done wonders with this old house in the short time you've lived here.

ROSWELL: The house suited my needs perfectly.

ALBERT: It had been empty for quite some time, I understand.

ROSWELL: For almost twenty years. And it was completely overrun with mice. It's taken quite a while to dispose of them all.

THEODORA: However did you get rid of them?

ROSWELL: I killed them ... one at a time.

ALBERT: Not at all a pleasant business, I imagine.

ROSWELL: Quite the contrary. I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

THEODORA: Who would have thought that a man with your interest in the outdoors would be such a voracious reader of books.

ROSWELL: Actually, the books came with the house.

ALBERT: Really? How very odd.

THEODORA: All of the houses in this neighborhood have such a rich history. Why, our house is thought to have been a residence of the writer Mr. Edgar Allan Poe. You know, the man who wrote all of those awful stories about ... about ... I'm not sure what they're about, but I know they're horrible.

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ALBERT: They're tales of the macabre, Theodora. People being buried alive, dying from the bubonic plague, killing their house cats. That sort of thing.

THEODORA: It all sounds so tedious.

ROSWELL: Did Edgar Allan Poe really inhabit your house?

ALBERT: If he did I haven't run across his ghost.

THEODORA: Well, I have. I've seen him and I talked with him.

ROSWELL: What does he say?

THEODORA: He gives me advice. I'm not really sure who the ghost is, but he is real. Or as real as a ghost can be.

ROSWELL: *(With mock sincerity.)* That must be very interesting.

THEODORA: It's nothing compared with your life, Mr. Roswell. You've lived in such exotic places ... Egypt, India, Brazil.

ROSWELL: My one true avocation is hunting. I've hunted game on five continents, and I have the trophies to prove it.

ALBERT: I am truly impressed with your trophy room. You've killed animals I've never seen before. Hippopotamus, rhinoceros, lions, tigers, elephants, gorillas, even polar bears.

THEODORA: I think there's something dreadful about killing animals.

ROSWELL: *(To THEODORA.)* Would you prefer that the animals kill us?

THEODORA: Of course not!

ROSWELL: Then it is our destiny to kill them. One way or the other, something has to die.

ALBERT: Come, dear. We've had this conversation before. If someone doesn't kill the cow then we don't get our Sunday pot roast.

THEODORA: I suppose you're right. But to travel great distances to kill animals that you otherwise would never come in contact with

ROSWELL: Suppose I told you I cooked and ate the gorilla. Would that make you feel better?

THEODORA: I suppose.

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ALBERT: How did you come to choose this house?

ROSWELL: The main reason I chose this house was this extra parlor. Everyone in New York needs a parlor. But not everyone needs two. I need one for my guests, and one for my animals.

ALBERT: But that still doesn't tell us why you came back?

ROSWELL: My father does not share my passion for hunting, for wildlife, or for the outdoors. He also refuses to finance anymore of my safaris. I must use my formal education, which is the practice of the law, to make my own way in the world.

ROSWELL: *(Continued.)* I've entered his law practice as a junior partner. I agreed to it on the condition that I would have time for my safaris. I intend to travel to Mexico later this year. I have yet to kill a javelina. That will be my next trophy.

THEODORA: And what, pray tell, is a javelina?

ROSWELL: A very large, very angry, very dangerous wild pig.

(HANNAH enters through the left doorway.)

HANNAH: Are ya talking about me?

ALBERT: *(Laughs.)* Of course not, dear Hannah.

ROSWELL: We were discussing another large, angry, dangerous wild pig. *(ROSWELL laughs heartily. THE BRIMMERS laugh with discomfort.)*

THEODORA: I believe Mr. Roswell is teasing you, Hannah.

HANNAH: Oh. Is that what's he's doing?

ROSWELL: Surely you should be used to me by now.

HANNAH: I just never know.

ROSWELL: Well, I believe we're ready for coffee. Is that all right with you?

HANNAH: It makes no difference to me. If ya want your coffee I'll bring ya coffee. *(Exits.)*

ROSWELL: You'll have to excuse Hannah. She's about the most disagreeable servant I've ever employed.

THEODORA: How did you end up with her?

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ROSWELL: She was the only servant that the agency could get to work here. She was employed by the Burr family who lived here twenty years ago.

ALBERT: Oh, yes. The family with the young daughter who had the breakdown.

ROSWELL: Hannah came with fair recommendations. And she seemed good enough when I interviewed her. But once she came to work she grew irritable. Not that I care.

(HANNAH enters with a tray of cups, saucers and a coffeepot.)

ROSWELL: Why, Hannah, we were just talking about you.

THEODORA: Yes, dear. Do you remember what happened to the Burr family who used to live here?

(HANNAH places the tray on the desk and pours and serves the coffee.)

HANNAH: They moved.

THEODORA: Do you remember why?

HANNAH: So the little girl could recover from the shock.

ALBERT: And what shock was that?

HANNAH: The shock of seeing the ghost.

THEODORA: And where did this child see the ghost?

HANNAH: In this room. Almost frightened the poor child to death.

ALBERT: Good heavens, Roswell! You may have indeed purchased a haunted house.

HANNAH: Ya think it's funny? People getting scared out of their wits?

ALBERT: No. Of course not.

HANNAH: Poor child had to go to the lunatic asylum. It's nothing to be glib about.

THEODORA: Hannah, Mr. Brimmer meant no disrespect to your former employer.

HANNAH: I don't care if he respects them or not. *(To ROSWELL.)* Will ya be wanting anything else?

ROSWELL: Have you cleaned the kitchen?

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