# Murder Box

**A play in one act**

*By*
*Reid Conrad*

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## DEDICATION

*To Cheyenne*

## STORY OF THE PLAY

At the end of the 1940s an old theatre building is about to be torn down. As the theatre's acting troupe is packing up the props, costumes and set pieces, an old magician's trunk is wheeled onstage. Suddenly, members of the company are turning up dead. Margaret, the director's assistant, is the only witness to these crimes, and no one will believe her!

"Murder Box" was originally performed at the District III Thespian Festival at Stetson University, DeLand, FL., on December 14th, 2007.

Original cast members included:
*Binky: Ryan Hoffman*
*Louis: Dylan Pratt*
*Margaret: Gracie Winchester*
*Eve: Ashley Marzullo*
*Marshall: Alex Glover*
*Vera: Courtney Veatch*
*Emily: Michelle Underwood*
*Madigan: Samphyre Searle*
*Stan: Ryan Bathurst*
*Julia: Becky Abramowitz*
*Priscilla: Rachel Schimenti*
*Jeanie: Samantha Smith*

Original crew members included:
*Lindsey Akins, Stage Manager*
*Cody Sumerix, Llighting*
*Elizabeth Pappa, Sound*

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(4 m, 8 w)*

LOUIS: A stagehand.
BINKY: A stagehand.
MARGARET: The director's assistant.
EVE: An actress.
MARSHALL: The director.
VERA: An actress.
STAN: An actor.
JULIA: An actress.
EMILY: A chorus girl.
MADIGAN: A chorus girl.
PRISCILLA: A chorus girl.
JEANIE: A chorus girl.

## SETTING

As 1949 comes to an end, so too does the life of an old theatre. The entire play takes place on the stage of that theatre.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

We used a representational, 1940s film noir approach to our production including costuming, physically-created sound effects and acting style. Since much of the action is played for Margaret's benefit, our actors employed at those moments a more heightened melodramatic style. The magician's box was created specifically for this production. We made sure it was large enough to easily accommodate a body and placed it on hidden wheels to make movement easier. Also, the box was constructed with a false back. When we brought it to the backstage area, where others outside our group were present, we left the back on so as to create the illusion of a solid unit. However, just prior to our play we removed the back allowing access for actors and actresses during the blackouts. This proved quite effective for the audience, especially those who had been backstage during our load-in. You, however, may not be in a competitive situation and therefore not need the deception of including a false back on your "murder box."

## Murder Box

*(AT RISE: Lights up on stage. SFX: Distant thunder is heard, then again a little closer. A woman, MARGARET, enters from SL. She moves to center and stops, where a full costume rack stands. She takes off her coat and hangs it on the rack. Two men, LOUIS and BINKY, enter SR carrying a large black box, of the steamer trunk variety. Louis wears overalls, a jacket and a driving cap; Binky is in baggy jeans and a bulky pullover sweater. The trunk they carry is old and has decorations on the sides including the still visible name "Malvolio the Magician" scrolled across the front. As the two men approach right center, they stop.)*

BINKY: I ain't lookin' forward to goin' back out in that weather.
LOUIS: Shoulda wore a cap. Yer ears are still red as beets.
BINKY: Wait a minute. I gotta warm them up.

*(The two men lower the box to the stage floor. BINKY makes an elaborate show of massaging his ears. LOUIS sits on the box. MARGARET moves to them.)*

MARGARET: Louis! Binky! What do you think you are doing?
LOUIS: We're movin' this box out.
MARGARET: Where did you find it?
LOUIS: Down in storage. In the back.
MARGARET: What's in it?
LOUIS: Don't know.
MARGARET: What do you mean you don't know? Didn't you look?
LOUIS: Nope. They want the place cleared out. We're gonna clear it out.

*(MARGARET moves to box, pushes LOUIS, who stands, and tries to open it. It appears locked. She kicks it.)*

LOUIS: *(Cont'd.)* They didn't say nothin' about goin' through every box to see what's in it.
MARGARET: Sounds empty.
BINKY: That's what I said.
MARGARET: *(Shooting BINKY a look.)* Well, leave it here. I can fill it with props and then you can come back and take it.
LOUIS: If we're still here.
MARGARET: Where else would you be?
LOUIS: O'Brien's.

*(The TWO MEN start off left.)*

MARGARET: Oh, no you don't! You won't be drinking on *my* watch!

*(SFX: There is a loud clap of thunder and the LIGHTS go off. MARGARET screams.)*

LOUIS: Everything aw-right, Maggie?
MARGARET: Yes, I'm fine, and don't call me Maggie. Now go and find the light switch.
LOUIS: Storm must have tripped the breakers.
MARGARET: Well, find the breakers then, and fix them. We can't get our work done in the dark.
LOUIS: *(Snapping on a flashlight.)* Don't bother me none. You, Binky?
BINKY: *(Turning flashlight on.)* Nope. Not a bit.

*(The TWO MEN continue to exit left.)*

BINKY: I can still find my way to O'Brien's.
MARGARET: Not before you get those lights on!

*(MARGARET is left in total dark as the THEY exit. There is silence. A crash of thunder. Margaret screams. Silence again.)*

MARGARET: *(Tentatively.)* Anybody there? *(Loudly.)* Is anybody out there? Yoo-hoo! *(Silence again.)* Somebody, please.

*(Two lights flash onto the faces of LOUIS and BINKY who are standing directly behind MARGARET. She turns and screams, and falls to the floor.)*

LOUIS: Thought you might be needing one of these. *(Handing her the flashlight.)* Some people get spooked in the dark.
BINKY: Especially in this old theatre. It's haunted, ya know.
LOUIS: Oh, Maggie knows all about that.

*(The TWO MEN exit off left MARGARET tests out the flashlight. It flickers and goes out. She bangs it and it comes on and then goes out again.)*

MARGARET: Very funny, you … idiots!

*(At the sound of voices approaching, MARGARET speaks to herself*.)

MARGARET: You *better* get back here.

*(A WOMAN giggles loudly in the dark. MARGARET becomes silent.)*

EVE: *(In hushed tones.)* Marshall, stop that.
MARSHALL: Oh, you want it that way, do you?
EVE: Wait! Come back. Marshall, I can't find you!
MARSHALL: I'm over here.
EVE: Where?
MARSHALL: Here!

*(EVE screams, causing MARGARET to scream.)*

EVE: What was that?
MARSHALL: The ghost.

## End of Freeview

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