

FRIGHT NIGHT

Three Tales of Terror

By L. Don Swartz

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PUBLISHED BY
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Dedication

*In memory of Tom Bergman for setting the standard of
excellence I'm still trying to achieve.*

*The Playwright,
L. Don Swartz*

STORY OF THE PLAY

Fright Night consists of three one-act tales of horror. Both of the classics, "The Monkey's Paw," by W. W. Jacobs, and "The Tell-Tale Heart," by Edgar Allan Poe, have been dramatized and updated here. The third tale, "Midnight Wax," is an original play by L. Don Swartz.

"The Monkey's Paw" tells the story of a family destroyed by a grisly talisman that promises to grant three wishes. The "Tell-Tale Heart" is set in the contemporary American judicial system where clinical experts delve too deeply into a killer's scarred psyche, only to discover that the motiveless murder is anything but. "Midnight Wax" is the story of an ambitious reporter who agrees to spend the night alone in a wax museum to write a Halloween piece, only to discover that she is not the only one in the museum with a secret.

FRIGHT NIGHT was originally produced by the Ghostlight Theatre Company at the Grant Street Theatre in North Tonawanda, NY, on October 16, 1997. The production, which consisted of three original one-act plays, was directed by Chris Fire, Scott Lesinski and L. Don Swartz.

THE TELL-TALE HEART

A mystery in one act
Based on the short story by Edgar Allan Poe
Adapted by L. Don Swartz

STORY OF THE PLAY

The familiar Edgar Allan Poe short story is updated here, set in the modern American judicial system. As part of a competency hearing to determine the suspect's mental ability to stand trial, the caged murderer faces a panel of legal and psychological experts as his confession is videotaped for all to see. As the experts probe deeper into the killer's psyche, the apparently motiveless murder starts to come into focus, and we discover the victim's "evil eye" was just the tip of the iceberg. One interior set.

"THE TELL-TALE HEART" was originally was directed by Chris Fire. The cast in order of appearance was as follows:

OFFICER GRISWOLD	<i>Carl Tamburlin</i>
OFFICER GRAHAM	<i>Michael Leszczynski</i>
COUNSELOR VALDEMAR	<i>Andras Brem</i>
DR. TARR	<i>Gelia Woodward</i>
PROFESSOR FETHER	<i>Julie Senko</i>
PROSECUTOR BLOOD	<i>JoAnn Mis</i>
MR. BLACKWOOD	<i>L. Don Swartz</i>

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 3 w)

OFFICER GRISWOLD: (M) Intimidating physically.

OFFICER GRAHAM: (M) Good with a video camera.

COUNSELOR VALDEMAR: (M) Slick. Dramatic. Very good at what he does.

DR. TARR: (W) A sensitive psychologist. More interested in feeling over fact.

PROFESSOR FETHER: (W) A hard-boiled academic. Sticks with the facts. Skeptical.

PROSECUTOR BLOOD: (W) Intense. Direct. Sometimes fierce. A woman with a cause.

MR. BLACKWOOD: (M) A highly intelligent murderer. Not to be trusted.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A basement conference room in the Municipal Courthouse, Boston.

COSTUMES – PROPS

OFFICER GRISWOLD: Prison guard uniform; gray pants, white shirt, gray tie, black shoes. Gun holster with gun, cuffs, billy club, badge. Carries a key for the cage in his shirt pocket.

OFFICER GRAHAM: Same as Griswold. Carries a key for room door in his pocket. Handles video camera.

COUNSELOR VALDEMAR: Expensive dark suit and shoes, white shirt. Carries a file of the crime photos with him. It is important that he place Griswold's room key in his suit coat pocket, so that Blackwood could presumably steal it when he grabs him through the bars.

DR. TARR: Matching skirt and jacket, bright blouse, sensible shoes. Soft hair style. Uses reading glasses. Carries a leather-bound file on the suspect. Expensive pen.

PROFESSOR FETHER: Dark pant suit, man's tie, mannish black shoes, black academic glasses. Hair pulled back in a screaming bun. Severe looking briefcase. Clicky pens.

PROSECUTOR BLOOD: Scarlet-colored dress with matching pumps, black decorative neck scarf with brooch and gold bracelets. Attractive hairstyle. Carries a small leather bag to hold papers, files, pens.

MR. BLACKWOOD: Orange or red prison scrubs: linen pants and short-sleeved shirt, like a hospital nurse would wear. No shoes or socks. (He needs to be bright in the cage.) Real handcuffs work best, with a long enough chain so that he can reach out through the bars. In the original production the two keys he needs at the end of the scene were hidden in the cage as the actor was worried they would fall out, if hidden on his costume.

SETTING

A conference room in the basement of the City of Boston Municipal Courthouse. There is a long table SL with three chairs angled towards the audience. There is a sturdy metal cage, with a locking door SR. Seven-foot high by three-foot wide, it resembles the kind of structure one might find at the zoo to temporarily house a medium-sized animal. CS is a metal cart with a large television screen on it. The only door to the room is SL behind the table.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

A note on the set: We built the cage out of conduit pipe, (cheap and light) and placed it on a rolling platform. The cage was 3'x7' with a wooden floor and barred top. We spray painted the pipe silver. Table and cage must be set on extreme opposite sides of the playing area so that even the audience in the back row has to ping-pong their heads to follow the action, forcing them to drag their eyes across the stage every time someone else talks. As the interview becomes heated, this process makes the audience increasingly on edge.

Use of television and camera: It is important to place the screen directly center and directly at the audience. We were expecting glare from the stage lights, but there was none. The bigger the screen the better. It is important that Blackwood only look at the camera at the two spots indicated. The first time he looks directly at the audience as he is describing the murder we got an audible gasp from the audience every time. It gives the illusion that he is looking right at them. The actor playing Graham must be good with the camera. The dynamic use of the camera and screen provides constant movement to staging that could become static.

End of Freeview

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