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# **AN EVENING WITH EDGAR ALLAN POE**

**adapted by Robert Mason**

**BASED ON THE STORIES BY EDGAR ALLAN POE**

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# THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

## Cast of Characters

MONTRESOR, he is a self-professed wine expert, about thirty-five years old. He is a smaller man, perhaps half a foot shorter and fifty pounds lighter than Fortunato. He is dressed in conservative clothes of the era. He has a grudge against Fortunato, but he won't show it.

FORTUNATO, a larger man with a taste for good wine. Wealthy wine expert. He is an overbearing, large man—about fifty years old. He is wearing party clothes from the current era of early nineteenth-century France, including a conical hat with three ringing silver bells dangling from the top. He is drunk.

## Place

On a Paris street corner. Three step units about the stage, shown at different times to suggest movement downward to an underground vault. The final scene is outside the vault in the depths of the cellar. The vault is suggested by a door unit. Inside the vault, a shackle is attached to the wall.

## Time

Early nineteenth century.

## Properties

Trowel  
Tub of cement  
Large Styrofoam bricks  
Various wine bottles in racks

---

*(Midnight under a lamppost on a Paris street corner.)*

*(MONTRESOR is DL under the lamppost.)*

**MONTRESOR.** Fortunato! Someone to be feared, ordering about men's lives, controlling men's lives. Fortunato... I've born all his injuries as best I could, but he's ventured upon insult, and I vow my revenge. Revenge... Revenge at no risk to myself. For what good is revenge unless it is committed with impunity? Yet, what good is it unless the avenger makes himself known to the one who has done him wrong?... Hah! I've uttered no threat to Fortunato. At every meeting, I've been my *most* obsequious, my *most* ingratiating... Fortunato has a flaw. He is a dilettante in all the arts...except for wine. He fancies himself a wine connoisseur, and...eh, he knows a little... I, myself, am skillful in the Italian vintages and buy largely whenever I can.

*(FORTUNATO enters from SL., stumbling. He is wearing party clothes with a conical hat with bells.)*

**MONTRESOR.** Ah, the height of carnival season.

**FORTUNATO.** Montresor!

**MONTRESOR.** Ah, slobbering drunk.

**FORTUNATO.** Huh?

**MONTRESOR.** Fortunato! How well you're looking, today.

**FORTUNATO.** Well. Yes. I feel well... I feel pretty good.

**MONTRESOR.** And what a happy coincidence. I was hoping you'd stop by.

**FORTUNATO.** Huh? And why would you want to see me, little man?

**MONTRESOR.** I have a cask of what passes for Amontillado.

**FORTUNATO.** Amontillado? A cask? In the middle of Carnival? Impossible!

**MONTRESOR.** I, too, have my doubts. And I was silly enough to pay the full price without consulting you.

**FORTUNATO.** Amontillado!

**MONTRESOR.** I have my doubts.

**FORTUNATO.** Amontillado.

**MONTRESOR.** I must satisfy my doubts.

**FORTUNATO.** Amontillado?

**MONTRESOR.** I can see that you are engaged in other matters. I will find Luchesi. He can tell me...

**FORTUNATO.** Luchesi can't tell Amontillado from sherry.

**MONTRESOR.** Yet, some fools think his taste is a match for your own.

**FORTUNATO.** Phew! Come, let us go.

**MONTRESOR.** Where?

**FORTUNATO.** To your vaults.

**MONTRESOR.** My vaults? No, you're busy. I won't impose upon you. I'll get Luchesi...

**FORTUNATO.** Luchesi! No! *I will see if this is Amontillado*

**MONTRESOR.** I will not impose. It is just that you are busy, and I can see that you have a severe cold. The vault is insufferably damp. It's encrusted with nitre.

**FORTUNATO.** The cold. I don't care about the cold. You say this is Amontillado. To your vault... *(As they exit:)* Luchesi wouldn't know Amontillado from sherry.

*(Fade out.)*

*(Fade up US on the cellar stairs. Sound: slight echo.)*

**FORTUNATO.** Where is it?

**MONTRESOR.** It's farther on... Observe the white web work.

**FORTUNATO.** Nitre?

*(FORTUNATO coughs.)*

**MONTRESOR.** Nitre. How long have you had that?

**FORTUNATO.** It's nothing.

**MONTRESOR.** We'll go back. Your health is precious. You are rich, adored, and beloved...as I once was... You are a man to be missed. For me, it is no matter. But, you... You will take ill and I can't be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi...

**FORTUNATO.** Enough! It's just a cold. It will not kill me. I won't die of a cough.

**MONTRESOR.** True. True. I had no intention of alarming you. Maybe a bit of this Medoc will defend us from the damp.

*(MONTRESOR takes a bottle from the rack in the wall and knocks off the top.)*

**MONTRESOR.** Drink.

*(FORTUNATO takes the bottle, and nods to MONTRESOR. The bells on FORTUNATO's hat jingle.)*

**FORTUNATO.** I drink to the buried that repose around us.

**MONTRESOR.** And to your long life.

**FORTUNATO.** *(As they exit:)* These vaults are extensive...

*(FORTUNATO's hat bells jingle as the lights fade.)*

*(Fade up, in a small pool DL. Sound: a touch more echo. MONTRESOR and FORTUNATO, drinking wine, walk down several steps and pause.)*

**MONTRESOR.** The nitre. See how it increases. We are below the riverbed, now... Ah, the moisture. Your cough. We should go back.

**FORTUNATO.** My cough is nothing. We go on! But first, another bottle of that Medoc.

*(MONTRESOR exits. FORTUNATO sits down and mumbles.)*

**FORTUNATO.** Maybe I better save myself for the Amontillado.

*(Pause.)*

**FORTUNATO.** Amontillado, hmmph.

*(Pause.)*

**FORTUNATO.** I could use a drink. Where is that little man?

*(Pause.)*

**FORTUNATO.** Luchesi, hmmph.

*(MONTRESOR returns with another bottle.)*

**FORTUNATO.** Here! Give me that.

*(FORTUNATO gulps from the bottle, then swirls it over his head.  
MONTRESOR looks at him, confused.)*

**FORTUNATO.** You do not understand?

**MONTRESOR.** Not I.

**FORTUNATO.** Then you are not of the brotherhood.

**MONTRESOR.** What?

**FORTUNATO.** You are not of the Masons.

**MONTRESOR.** Yes... Yes, I am.

**FORTUNATO.** You? A Mason? Impossible.

**MONTRESOR.** I am a Mason.

**FORTUNATO.** Then show me a sign.

**MONTRESOR.** How's this?

*(MONTRESOR produces a trowel from under his coat and waves it around.)*

**FORTUNATO.** A trowel? What a little joker you are. Let us proceed to the Amontillado.

*(They walk out of the light.)*

**FORTUNATO.** ...What a little joker.

**MONTRESOR.** As you say...

*(Fade out.)*

*(Fade up UC on a vault. It is about six feet long, dark inside, going US. It is open on the DS front. Sound: more echo.)*

**FORTUNATO.** *(Drinking:)* Well?

**MONTRESOR.** Proceed. Herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchesi...

**FORTUNATO.** He is an ignoramus.

*(FORTUNATO stumbles into the vault. He is confused when he comes up against the back wall. MONTRESOR jumps in and quickly shackles him to it. MONTRESOR steps back into the light, shows the key, then pockets it.)*

**MONTRESOR.** Feel the nitre on the walls. Indeed it is very damp. Once more, let me implore you to return.

**FORTUNATO.** *(From within. Confused:)* Huh?

*(MONTRESOR pulls some bricks and mortar from the shadows.)*

**MONTRESOR.** No? You wish to stay? Then, I must leave you. But first, one more detail.

**FORTUNATO.** The Amontillado!

*(MONTRESOR begins walling him in.)*

**MONTRESOR.** Ah, yes, the Amontillado.

*(After a pause, FORTUNATO's intoxication begins to wear off as he realizes what is happening and he moans. MONTRESOR continues working. There is a long silence from within. MONTRESOR is halfway finished when there comes a furious rattling of chains and the inane tinkling of bells from FORTUNATO's party hat. MONTRESOR stops his work to listen. The noise stops and MONTRESOR goes back to bricking FORTUNATO in. FORTUNATO screams.)*

**MONTRESOR.** *(Laughing:)* No one can hear you down here, Fortunato.

*(FORTUNATO screams. MONTRESOR screams with him, then laughs.)*

**MONTRESOR.** We're far too deep below the surface.

*(MONTRESOR continues bricking up the opening. He stops to hear laughter from within.)*

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# THE PURLOINED LETTER

## Cast of Characters

DUPIN, the pre-cursor to Sherlock Holmes. He's a middle-aged detective, neatly dressed in a plain brown suit.

DAIGNAULT, a long-time friend of Dupin. In his mid-fifties, he too is dressed in a modest suit.

PREFECT, the chief of Parisian Police. A self-important bumbler. He wears the uniform of an early nineteenth century police captain along with a few medals.

HER HIGHNESS, (No lines.) In her early thirties and pretty. She is dressed casually, as she is not expecting company.

HIS HIGHNESS, (No lines.) Middle-aged. Casually dressed.

PRIME MINISTER, (No lines.) Middle-aged. Formally dressed.

THREE POLICEMEN, (No lines.) Early twenties.

## Place

The apartment of Detective Dupin (two chairs; table). To the side, in the dark, is a large space for simulating Her Highness's and the Minister's apartments. Her Highness's Room consists of three chairs; table; lamp. Minister's Room consists of three chairs; bookcase; end table; letter rack.

## Time

The early nineteenth century.

## Properties

Four letters; One on wall, one for the minister, one for Her Highness, one for Dupin.

Stationery; pens

Tobacco pipes; brandy glasses

Checkbook

*(It is in the small and starkly lit study of DETECTIVE DUPIN. DAIGNAULT and DUPIN are sitting in comfortable chairs.)*

*(It is evening. DAIGNAULT and DUPIN are drinking brandy, smoking pipes and discussing a recent case.)*

**DUPIN.** Now, the mystery became merely a matter of rudimentary logic. Easily constructed from the newspapers.

**DAIGNAULT.** But, totally dissimilar to the murders in the Rue Morgue... Dissimilar in construct... Dissimilar in the approach.

**DUPIN.** Oh, no. Not at all. Outwardly, it would seem that it were, but in fact there were many similarities...

*(There is a knock on the door.)*

**DUPIN.** Come in.

*(The PREFECT of Parisian Police enters.)*

**DAIGNAULT.** And what is the difficulty, now? Nothing in the way of assassination, I hope.

**PREFECT.** Oh, no. Nothing of that nature. The fact is the business is very simple, very simple indeed. I have no doubt that we can manage it ourselves, but I thought Mr. Dupin would like to hear the details because it is so odd, so very odd.

**DUPIN.** Simple and odd.

**PREFECT.** Why yes, and not exactly. The fact is we have all been puzzled because the affair is so simple, yet it baffles us altogether.

**DUPIN.** Perhaps it is the very simplicity that puts you at fault.

**PREFECT.** What nonsense you talk.

**DUPIN.** Perhaps the mystery is a little *too* plain.

**PREFECT.** Oh, good heavens. Who ever heard of such an idea?

**DUPIN.** A little *too* self-evident.

**PREFECT.** Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha. Oh, Dupin, you'll be the death of me, yet.

**DAIGNAULT.** And what, after all, *is* the matter at hand?

**PREFECT.** I will tell you. But first, let me caution you that this is an affair of the greatest secrecy. I should probably lose my position if it were known I confided it to any one.

**DAIGNAULT.** Proceed.

**DUPIN.** Or not.

**PREFECT.** Well, then... I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known—this is beyond doubt—he was seen to take it. It is also known that it is still in his possession.

**DUPIN.** How is this known?

**PREFECT.** From certain events not happening...the robber must not have employed its knowledge.

**DAIGNAULT.** Be a little more explicit.

**PREFECT.** The letter gives its holder a certain power in such quarters where such power is immensely valuable.

**DUPIN.** Still, I do not quite understand.

**PREFECT.** No? Well, the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring to question the honor of a person of a most exalted station. This fact gives the holder of the document power over that person.

**DUPIN.** But, he would be exposed as a thief. Who would dare...

**PREFECT.** The thief is the Prime Minister, who dares everything, both those things that are becoming and those that are unbecoming a man...

**DUPIN.** Hmm.

**DAIGNAULT.** What are you talking about?

**PREFECT.** Let me demonstrate...

*(Lights down on DUPIN'S study, SR. Lights up on HER HIGHNESS'S apartment, SL. She is the only one in the room. As the PRE-*

*PECT speaks in voice-over, the action is pantomimed in HER HIGHNESS's apartment.)*

**PREFECT.** The letter had been received in the royal boudoir. While Madame was reading it, the entrance of His Highness interrupted her...

*(HIS HIGHNESS enters.)*

**PREFECT.** ...the very person from whom she had to hide this letter. She put it back in its envelope and thrust it on the table... At this time, in comes the Prime Minister.

*(The PRIME MINISTER enters.)*

**PREFECT.** He sees the letter...recognizes the handwriting...sees that Madame is distraught...and instantly fathoms her secret... He conducts some ordinary business with his Highness...talks about affairs of state...talks about the problems of the common people...then he proceeds to pull out a letter of his own, he pretends to read it, then thrusts it down on the table next to Madame's letter... Then, for some time, he converses upon public affairs. As he takes his leave, he picks up a letter from the table, but it is Madame's letter, leaving his own insignificant letter on the table.

*(The MINISTER exits. Lights fade out on HER HIGHNESS's apartment. Lights fade up on DUPIN's study.)*

**DUPIN.** So, she knows he has it.

**PREFECT.** Yes, and the power attained has been wielded for some months, for political purposes, and to a dangerous extent. She needs the letter back, but because of its contents, she cannot ask for it openly. Alas, she has committed the matter of reclaiming the letter to me.

**DUPIN.** No more sagacious an agent could be desired or imagined.

**PREFECT.** You flatter me...but that could be true. My first care was to make a thorough search of the Minister's hotel...without his knowledge. As you know, as Prefect, I have keys to fit any chamber and cabinet in Paris. I fancy I have investigated every nook and cranny of his premises.

**DAIGNAULT.** Is it possible that it is not on his premises?

**DUPIN.** No. The instant availability of the document is a point nearly equal to its possession.

**DAIGNAULT.** And we may consider the chance of it being on his person as out of the question?

**PREFECT.** Entirely. He has twice been waylaid and his person rigidly searched under my supervision.

**DUPIN.** You might have spared yourself that trouble. I presume the Minister is not altogether a fool, and would have anticipated these searches.

**DAIGNAULT.** Suppose you detail the particulars of your search.

*(Fade out on DUPIN's study. Fade up on MINISTER's apartment. Three POLICEMEN enter and pantomime the action as the PREFECT speaks in voice-over. The POLICEMEN's search, however, is not as thorough as the PREFECT says.)*

**PREFECT.** We took the entire building, room by room. We examined every drawer. And I presume you know that to a trained police agent, such a thing as a secret drawer is impossible... We checked out the cabinets. We probed the cushions on the chairs with fine long needles... We removed the tabletops...for a letter could be concealed in one of the legs, and surrounded by cotton, so that the leg did not sound hollow... We examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel. We examined every joist by the aid of the most powerful lenses... There was no disorder in any of the gluing.

**DAIGNAULT.** *(Voice-over:)* I presume you checked the mirrors, between the boards, the beds, the bedclothes, the curtains, the carpets.

*(Lights X-fade to DUPIN's study.)*

**PREFECT.** Of course... The curtains, the carpets, every piece of floorboard beneath the carpets. Every particle of every piece of furniture in the apartment. Then, the entire hotel, itself. Then, the two adjoining houses.

**DAIGNAULT.** The adjoining houses! You must have had a great deal of trouble.

**PREFECT.** We had. But the reward for this is prodigious.

**DAIGNAULT.** Did you include the grounds about the houses?

**PREFECT.** All of the grounds. We examined the moss between the bricks. It was undisturbed.

**DAIGNAULT.** You looked among all his papers and books, of course.

**PREFECT.** Yes. We opened every package. We not only looked through every book, but every page of every book.

**DAIGNAULT.** The wallpaper?

**PREFECT.** Yes.

**DAIGNAULT.** The basements?

**PREFECT.** Yes.

**DAIGNAULT.** Then, you have been making a miscalculation. The letter is *not* on the premises.

**PREFECT.** I fear you are right, there. And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?

**DUPIN.** To make a thorough re-search of the premises.

**PREFECT.** Absolutely needless. As sure as I breathe, the letter is not at the hotel.

**DUPIN.** I have no better advice to give you.

*(Fade out. Pause. A month has passed. Fade up on DUPIN's study. DAIGNAULT and DUPIN are seated, smoking pipes. There is a knock on the door.)*

**DUPIN.** Yes... Come in.

*(The PREFECT enters.)*

**DAIGNAULT.** Well, Prefect, what of the purloined letter? Have you given up?

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# THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

## Cast of Characters

RHODES, Roderick's long-time friend. He is middle-aged and neatly dressed. He's occasionally sarcastic.

RODERICK USHER, a tall man, he is the master of the house. He, too, is middle-aged. He's bitter, self-centered and ill tempered.

MADELINE USHER, Roderick's twin sister. She is emaciated.

A DOCTOR, he is middle-aged. His clothes are mildly disheveled.

## Place

The studio of Roderick Usher in the family mansion. Dim lighting. Bookcase; couch; chair; drapery over scenery and window. Roscolux Steel Blue works well for the graveyard scene.

## Time

The early nineteenth century.

## Properties

Guitar, horns, books for bookcase

At gravesite: A lantern, false bottom casket

Doctor's bag; jar; leeches

Painting on easel

*(It is in the large studio of RODERICK USHER. Dark draperies are on the walls. Antique furniture, books and musical instruments are scattered about the room. It is dimly lit.)*

*(It is late afternoon. RODERICK USHER is seated on a sofa UC. A DOCTOR is pulling leeches off him and putting them in a jar. RHODES enters.)*

**RHODES.** Roderick... How are you feeling?

**DOCTOR.** I've done all I can for now. You need to get some rest.

*(DOCTOR exits. USHER gets up from sofa. He alternately speaks slowly, then rapidly.)*

**USHER.** My friend! How are you? How was your journey?

*(USHER embraces RHODES.)*

**USHER.** You look well. Very well, indeed.

*(They sit.)*

**RHODES.** I received your letter last week. It's been a long, long time, my friend. You sounded...upset. What is this mental disorder you wrote about?

**USHER.** It is a part of the curse of the Usher's. A nervous condition, an acuteness of the senses. I can only stand the faintest of sounds, perhaps a light violin, the lightest of scents, flowers are too strong, and the dimmest of light, as you can see.

**RHODES.** Yes,... Was that a doctor that just left?

**USHER.** He does nothing. I will die. I will die in this folly, and not otherwise. Oh, the events that will operate on my soul. Mind you, I have no fear of death, except in the terror. I feel when death arrives I will abandon reason in the struggle with fear.

**RHODES.** You're overwrought.

**USHER.** This fear has its origins within this house, with Madeline... Madeline, my last relative on earth... *(Pause.)* She is close at hand.

*(MADELINE crosses through US, oblivious of RHODES and USHER. At her exit, USHER has his face in his hands.)*

**USHER.** Did you see her wasted state? How she doesn't see us? It is also the disease of the Usher's—Catalepsy!

**RHODES.** Catalepsy?

**USHER.** The pallor of the lips, the lusterless eyes, the cold rigidity of the body...all the appearance of death.

**RHODES.** Catalepsy is in your family?

**USHER.** Over the centuries that we've been in this house, some of the Usher's who had been thought dead, awakened out of their stupor to find themselves buried...prematurely. When we had them exhumed, we found their fingernails ripped out of their hands from clawing at the casket lid, bones broken from trying to force open the lid.

**RHODES.** Can't you do something?

**USHER.** Nothing helps.

**RHODES.** What about Madeline?

**USHER.** She's born up against it, but I fear she's soon to take to her final bed.

**RHODES.** What about the doctor?

**USHER.** He can't help her.

**RHODES.** Has he bled her?

**USHER.** Yes, yes. He can't help her.

*(Fade out.)*

*(Fade up. It is now morning. RHODES and USHER are in USHER's studio. There are paintings on easels. USHER plays a guitar.)*

**USHER.** In the greenest of our valleys,  
By good angels tenanted,  
Once a fair and stately palace—  
Radiant Palace—reared its head.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,  
Assailed the monarch's high estate,  
Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow  
Shall dawn upon him desolate!

While, like a rapid ghastly river,  
Through the pale door,  
A hideous throng rush out forever,  
And laugh—but smile no more.

You see my friend, that there is sentience in all things, in all vegetation and in the very stones of these walls.

**RHODES.** Perhaps you read too much.

**USHER.** No, no. You can see it! In the very way of their arrangement, in the fungi that covers them, and in the decayed trees in the yard. There's intelligence in the rank sedges, which for centuries, has molded the destiny of the house of Usher.

**RHODES.** Perhaps you should...

**USHER.** The house is dying.

**RHODES.** Roderick...

**USHER.** The lady Madeline is no more.

**RHODES.** What?

**USHER.** The bed has taken her.

**RHODES.** You mean she's...

**USHER.** Gone...

**RHODES.** Dead?

**USHER.** Perhaps... It is my intention to preserve her corpse in the family vault for a fortnight just to be sure. It is because of the unusual nature of her malady that we must keep her this way.

**RHODES.** The catalepsy.

**USHER.** (*Distantly:*) Maybe it's this house. Maybe it's this land... I do not wish to inter her in the family burial ground, remote and exposed as it is, where the curious cannot be kept out.

**RHODES.** Yes.

**USHER.** You will help me in this.

**RHODES.** Of course.

*(Fade out.)*

*(There is the sound of a heavy iron door opening. Fade up. It is night. The scene is inside the family vault. The DOCTOR and RHODES are carrying a coffin. USHER carries a lantern.)*

**USHER.** There. Put her up against that wall.

**RHODES.** The air is stifling. I can hardly breathe.

**USHER.** Place her up here...carefully...carefully...

*(The DOCTOR and RHODES place the coffin in a semi-vertical position.)*

**DOCTOR.** Usher, we can't do this. We must do an autopsy and write out a death certificate. She should be buried in the family plot.

**USHER.** In good time, doctor, in good time. In a fortnight, we will take her to the family plot, but for now, I wish to see my sister one last time.

**RHODES.** Your sister?

**USHER.** Madeline is my twin sister.

**RHODES.** In all the time I've known you, you never told me she was your twin. She was just...Madeline. I didn't know.

**USHER.** Yes, my friend, she is...she was my identical twin. She is thought to suffer from catalepsy. And now, I must confirm it. For if she has it, then I have it, too.

**DOCTOR.** If she has it, she'll wake up in her coffin.

**USHER.** Yes, doctor.

**DOCTOR.** We must embalm her.

**RHODES.** Yes.

**USHER.** No. And now, I must have one last look.

*(USHER opens the top half of the coffin to reveal MADELINE.)*

**USHER.** So young. Do you see the family resemblance?

**RHODES.** Yes....so young...

*(USHER replaces the lid of the coffin. The lights fade out. There is a sound in the dark of the heavy vault door closing.)*

*(The lights fade up on daytime in USHER's studio. There is the faint sound of scratching in the background. USHER is pacing about the room.)*

**USHER.** So many, so many hours.

**RHODES.** My friend, you need to rest.

**USHER.** Rest, rest. I haven't slept for the last four days.

**RHODES.** A fourth night, now? I know I've been uneasy in my sleep, but you, four days... You're not well. You've got to consider your health.

**USHER.** How can I sleep when I know what is happening?

**RHODES.** That?

**USHER.** You hear it.

**RHODES.** That's the wind blowing the tree branches against the house.

**USHER.** It's Madeline.

**RHODES.** I'm getting the doctor for you.

**USHER.** No doctor on earth can help me.

**RHODES.** Perhaps if we read, it will calm you.

**USHER.** We shall read.

*(Slow fade out.)*

*(Fade up. It is night. There are more sounds of scratching.)*

**RHODES.** Seven days, Usher.

**USHER.** I know, I know.

*(There is the sound of the wind as a storm picks up momentum.)*

**RHODES.** I'm having trouble sleeping, myself. I keep hearing you pacing all night.

**USHER.** I'll never sleep. Madeline won't allow it.

**RHODES.** I wasn't hearing any ghosts and I wasn't hearing Madeline. I was hearing you.

**USHER.** You haven't seen her? Stay. Stay. You'll see her.

*(The sound of the storm builds. USHER runs to the window and opens it.)*

**RHODES.** Stop! These aren't apparitions. They are just electrical phenomena. Close the window. It's cold. You are not in good health.

**USHER.** You hear her?

*(RHODES picks up a book.)*

**RHODES.** Here. One of your favorite books. I shall read and you shall listen and the storm shall pass. *(Reading:)* "...And Ethelred, feeling the rain on his shoulders and fearing the rising tempest, took his mace and ripped open the door with a noise that reverberated throughout the forest."

**USHER.** Listen...

**RHODES.** *(Pause. Reading:)* "Ethelred was amazed to find a dragon, scaly and prodigious, and of fiery tongue which sat in guard of the palace gold... And Ethelred raised his mace and struck the head of the dragon, which shrieked so horridly, and harsh that Ethelred had to hold his ears as he watched the death throes.

*(USHER takes his chair and positions it in front of the door. He sits and watches the door, then hangs his head.)*

**RHODES.** *(Pause. Reading:)* "And now, the champion, having escaped the terrible fury of the dragon, approached the shield upon the castle wall..."

**USHER.** You don't hear it?

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# THE SYSTEM OF DR. TARR AND PROFESSOR FETHER

## Cast of Characters

LEMONDE, short and middle-aged, he is well dressed and well to do. He is on vacation in France.

A TRAVELING COMPANION, well dressed. Middle-aged.

MONSIEUR MAILLARD, supposed Headmaster of the Asylum.

FOUR MEN, members of the dinner party.

FOUR WOMEN, members of the dinner party.

THE REAL KEEPERS, large men. They have been tarred and feathered.

## Place

An Insane Asylum in France. Large dining table; Eight chairs.

## Time

The 1830s. Summer.

## Properties

Eight place settings for table

Candles

Violin; flute

*(Outside the front of a castle-like lunatic asylum.)*

*(LEMONDE and a TRAVELING COMPANION are at the front gate of a lunatic asylum. It is mid-afternoon.)*

**COMPANION.** Absolutely not.

*(The COMPANION knocks on the door to the castle.)*

**LEMONDE.** But, this is the madhouse of which I've heard so much.

**COMPANION.** I will not go in.

**LEMONDE.** But, you know the headmaster. I can't get in without you.

**COMPANION.** I will introduce you, and then I'm leaving.

**LEMONDE.** But, why?

**COMPANION.** I can't stand the sight of a lunatic.

*(MONSIEUR MAILLARD opens the door.)*

**MAILLARD.** Why, hello. What a surprise.

**COMPANION.** Meet Monsieur Maillard, headmaster of the asylum, Maison de Sante. *(He turns to MAILLARD:)* This is my friend, Monsieur Lemonde. He wishes to inspect your establishment so he can better understand the "System of Soothing."

**MAILLARD.** He is your friend?

**COMPANION.** He is.

**MAILLARD.** Then it would be my pleasure to show him the grounds.

**COMPANION.** Thank you. And now. I must take my leave.

**MAILLARD.** You can't stay?

**COMPANION.** I won't stay in a place... 'er, that is...

**MAILLARD.** You insult us.

**COMPANION.** I don't wish to. No, no. It is just...

**MAILLARD.** Our "System of Soothing?"

**COMPANION.** No, no...it's...I have pressing business. Legal business. I can't put it off...um, but my friend, he is a vacationer. He has the time...

**LEMONDE.** Oh, and I'm very interested in the "Soothing System."

**MAILLARD.** Yes...

*(LEMONDE turns to COMPANION.)*

**MAILLARD.** And you say you can't stay?

**COMPANION.** I am so sorry.

*(The COMPANION exits.)*

**MAILLARD.** He is afraid... Monsieur, let me show you our hospitality.

**LEMONDE.** But, the lunatics...are they...are they free?

**MAILLARD.** No, no... "The System of Soothing?"... We dispensed with that many months ago. Mind you, it had great successes. A fine method of treatment. But recently, we adopted the methods of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether to much greater...to overwhelming success... Let me introduce you to our household...

*(Lights up full stage. They are in a meeting room with food, drink, and musical instruments on a large long table. WOMAN #1 is seated, humming softly.)*

**LEMONDE.** I had heard of the "System of Soothing" while I was in Paris. That all punishment of the inmates was avoided. That even confinement was seldom resorted to. That they were permitted to roam the house in the ordinary apparel of persons in their right mind.

*(LEMONDE nods toward WOMAN #1.)*

**MAILLARD.** Oh, no, no...a member of the family...my niece, and a most accomplished woman.

**LEMONDE.** A thousand pardons. But of course you will excuse me. The excellent administration here is well known in Paris, and I thought it possible, you know...

**MAILLARD.** Say no more. It is myself who should thank you for the prudence you displayed. More than once some unhappy event has occurred because of the thoughtlessness, in the past, of our visitors. While the former system was in operation, my patients were allowed to wander to and fro and they were often aroused to a frenzy by injudicious persons who called to inspect the house.

**LEMONDE.** And you no longer use it?

**MAILLARD.** It's been several weeks since we concluded to renounce it forever.

**LEMONDE.** Indeed.

**MAILLARD.** Yes. We found it absolutely necessary to return to the old ways. The advantages of the "Soothing System" were overrated and the dangers were appalling. I believe we gave it a fair trial. I'm sorry that you couldn't have seen it in practice, but I presume you know its details.

**LEMONDE.** Well, not altogether.

**MAILLARD.** We humored them. We contradicted no fancies that entered their brains. If a man imagined himself a chicken, we fed him a diet of corn and gravel.

**LEMONDE.** And...this was all?

**MAILLARD.** By no means. We had many amusements: music, dancing, card games, books... We treated each individual as if he had some minor disorder, and the word "lunacy" was never employed. A great point was made to have each lunatic guard the others. This was to give confidence to the madmen...and this allowed us to dispense with the keepers.

**LEMONDE.** No punishment?

**MAILLARD.** None.

**LEMONDE.** You never confined your patients?

**MAILLARD.** Very rarely...only the raging maniacs.

**LEMONDE.** And now, you have changed all this.

**MAILLARD.** Yes. And decidedly for the better. After dinner, I will take you on a tour and you can witness our new operation.

**LEMONDE.** This new operation. It is your own invention?

**MAILLARD.** In some measure.

*(Dinner is brought in, filling the large table.)*

**MAILLARD.** After dinner, I will show you the process. But, we must wait, for it is somewhat shocking and I wouldn't want to spoil your appetite.

*(Four MALES and four FEMALES, well dressed but with ill-fitting costumes have brought in the dinner, light the candles and sit at the table to eat. Two do not. They softly play musical instruments.)*

**MAN #1.** We had a fellow here once that fancied himself a teapot. And, you know, there's scarcely an asylum in France that doesn't have one of those. Our lunatic was careful to polish himself every morning with buckskin and whiting.

**MAN #2.** Then, we had a person who had taken into his head that he was a donkey. Which, allegorically speaking, you could say was quite true. For a long time, he would eat nothing but thistles, but we cured him by *insisting* he eat nothing else. Then, he was always kicking out his heels—so—so—

*(He kicks his heels.)*

**FEMALE #1.** Mr. DeKock, please keep your feet to yourself! Indeed, you are nearly as much a donkey as that poor man imagined himself to be.

**MAN #2.** A thousand pardons M'am'selle Laplace. I will do the honor of taking wine with you.

**MAILLARD.** *(To LEMONDE:)* Allow me to send you a morsel of this veal.

**LEMONDE.** Thank you, no. I don't believe it agrees with me. I will, however, have some rabbit.

**MAILLARD.** Pierre, give this man a sidepiece of this rabbit-*auchew*.

**LEMONDE.** The what?

**MAILLARD.** The rabbit-*auchew*.

**LEMONDE.** A...no, thanks. I'll just have the ham.

**FEMALE #2.** And then, among other oddities, we had a patient who maintained he was Cordova cheese, and went about with a knife, soliciting friends to have a small slice from his leg.

**MAN #3.** He was no doubt a great fool, but not to be compared with the man who took himself to be a bottle of champagne, and always went off with a pop and a fizz, in this fashion.

*(With a finger in his cheek, MAN #3 makes a popping noise, followed by making a fizzing noise through his teeth.)*

**MAN #4.** *(He is holding his violin on his knee:)* Then there was an ignoramus who mistook himself for a frog, which by the way, he resembled in no small degree. I wish you could have seen him, sir, the airs he put on. But, that man was *not* a frog, though it was a pity he was not. His croak thus: o-o-o-o-gh—o-o-o-gh! It was the finest note in the world—B-flat. And when he put his elbows on the table, *(He does these things as he talks:)* and distended his mouth, and rolled his eyes, and winked with excessive rapidity, why then, sir, you would have been lost in the sheer genius of the man.

**LEMONDE.** I have no doubt of it.

**FEMALE #3.** *(She has a flute on her knee:)* Then there was Petit Gail- lar, who thought of himself as a pinch of snuff, and was truly dis- tressed because he could not take himself between his own finger and thumb.

*(She gestures with her finger and thumb.)*

**FEMALE #4.** And then there was Jules Desoulieres, a very singular genius, who went mad with the thought that he was a pumpkin and persecuted the cook into making him into a pie. Which I assure you the cook did not do. However, for my part, I believe pumpkin pie *a la Desoulieres* would make capital eating.

**LEMONDE.** You...you...

*(He looks at MAILLARD.)*

**MAILLARD.** Ha! Ha! Ha! He! He! He! Ho! Ho! Hmm. Hmm... Very good indeed. You must not be astonished, *mon ami*. Our friend, here, is a wit... You must not take her to the letter.

**MAN #2.** And then there was Bouffon Le Grand. He fancied he possessed two heads. It is not impossible that he was wrong, but he would have convinced you that he was right. He had an absolute passion for oratory. For example, he would leap up on his chair, thus, and—and—

*(MAN #1 pulls at him, whispering. MAN #2 sits back down.)*

**FEMALE #2.** Your Monsieur Boullard was a madman, a very silly madman. Now, Madame Joueuse was a more sensible person. She found, upon mature deliberation, by some accident, that she had been turned into a rooster. But, she behaved with propriety. She flapped her wings with prodigious effect.

*(She flaps her arms.)*

**FEMALE #2.** —so—so—so—And as for her crow: Err-er-errr. Err-er-errr. Er-er-errr-er-er-er-er-errrrrrr!

**MAILLARD.** Madame Joyuese! Behave yourself! You either conduct yourself as a lady or quit the table forthwith.

**LEMONDE.** Madame Joyuese?

**FEMALE #3.** Madame Joyuese was a fool! Now Eugenie Salsafette was really of much sound sense, a painfully modest young lady, who thought the ordinary mode of dress indecent, and so dressed herself *outside* her clothes, thus...

*(She begins to disrobe.)*

**MAILLARD.** Ma'maselle Salsafette!

**OTHERS.** What are you doing! Enough! Forebear!

**MAILLARD.** Enough! We see how it is done!

*(Offstage there are screams and yells. The table quiets. There are more yells. The people around the table shrink in their seats, terrified. Louder yells. Pause. Then, quieter yells. Pause. Quieter yells. The table people regain their frivolity.)*

**LEMONDE.** Monsieur?

**MAILLARD.** The lunatics. Every now and then they get up a howl, like dogs in the night. Occasionally, though, the yells are followed by an effort at breaking loose. So, there is some worry of danger.

**LEMONDE.** How many of them are there?

**MAILLARD.** About ten.

**LEMONDE.** Principally females, I presume?

**MAILLARD.** Oh, no. Every one of them men, and stout fellows, too, I can tell you.

**LEMONDE.** Indeed! I have always understood that the majority of lunatics were of the gentler sex.

**MAILLARD.** It is generally so, but not always. Some time ago, there were twenty-seven patients here, and of that number, eighteen were women. But lately, matters have changed. Very much, as you can see.

**FEMALE #1.** Yes, changed very much.

**OTHERS.** Changed very much. Changed. Yes.

**MAILLARD.** Hold your tongues, every one of you!

*(They fall silent. FEMALE #1 literally holds her tongue.)*

**LEMONDE.** And this gentlewoman, the one who gives us the cock-a-doodle-do, she, I presume, is quite harmless?

**MAILLARD.** Harmless! Why—what *can* you mean?

**LEMONDE.** *(Touching his head:)* Only slightly touched? I take it for granted that she is not particularly—not dangerously affected?

**MAILLARD.** *Mon dieu!* What is it you imagine? Madame Joyuese is absolutely as sane as myself. She is merely a little eccentric.

**LEMONDE.** To be sure, to be sure...and the rest of these ladies and gentlemen...

**MAILLARD.** Are my friends and assistants.

**LEMONDE.** All of them? ...The women?

**MAILLARD.** We could not do without the women. They are the best lunatic nurses in the world.

**LEMONDE.** To be sure, to be sure... They behave a little oddly, though...a little queer? Don't you think...?

**MAILLARD.** Odd? Queer? You really think so? We are not very prudish, to be sure—do pretty much as we please—enjoy life, and all that sort of thing, you know...

**LEMONDE.** To be sure, to be sure... By the by, monsieur, did I understand you to say that the system you have adopted, in place of the "Soothing System," was of very rigorous severity?

**MAILLARD.** By no means. Their confinement is rather close...by necessity...but the treatment, the medical treatment, is rather agreeable to the patients.

**LEMONDE.** And the new system...is one of your invention?

**MAILLARD.** Not altogether. Some portions of it are referable to Professor Tarr, of whom you have heard, and there are modifications in my plan, which I am happy to acknowledge as belonging to Dr. Fether, with whom, if I am not mistaken, you have the honor of an intimate acquaintance.

**LEMONDE.** I am ashamed to confess...that I have never heard of either of these men.

**MAILLARD.** Good heavens! Surely, I don't hear you right. You did not intend to say that... You have never heard of either the learned Dr. Tarr of the celebrated Professor Fether?

**LEMONDE.** I'm forced to acknowledge my ignorance. I'm humbled to the dust, not to be acquainted with the works of these, no doubt, extraordinary men. I will seek out their writings forthwith, and read them with deliberate care. Monsieur Maillard, you have really—I must confess it—you have really made me ashamed of myself!

**MAILLARD.** Say no more, my good young friend... Join me in a glass of Sauterne.

*(All at the table drink. They make the noise of chickens, donkeys, frogs, etc.)*

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# THE OBLONG BOX

## Cast of Characters

RENELLE, a thirty-year-old, well-dressed and educated friend of Cornelius Wyatt.

CORNELIUS WYATT, thirty-year-old artist. He's well dressed. He has a moody and sullen temperament. He knew Renelle in college.

CAPTAIN HARDY, in his fifties. A large man.

WYATT'S WIFE, in her early twenties, she is plain looking, uneducated, and at times giddy.

WYATT'S TWO SISTERS, they are in their late twenties, educated and reserved.

VARIOUS PASSENGERS, all are adults. All are well dressed.

CREW MEMBERS, young adults. Many with beards. They are all loyal to Captain Hardy.

## Place

The deck of the "Independence," a medium sized passenger ship, preparing to sail up the East Coast of the United States. Preferably the set should have at least two door units on each side.

## Time

The early nineteenth century.

## Properties

Suitcases for passengers

Passenger list

Coffin-sized rectangular box

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*(The deck of the passenger ship "Independence.")*

*(RENELLE is walking up the gang plank where he meets CAPTAIN HARDY. Three other PASSENGERS are milling on the deck.)*

**RENELLE.** Captain. Captain Hardy.

**HARDY.** Ah, Renelle, early as always.

*(They shake hands.)*

**HARDY.** Your stateroom is right over there. Number fourteen.

**RENELLE.** Let me just unload my bags

*(RENELLE walks over to door number fourteen and deposits his bags inside, then walks back to CAPTAIN HARDY.)*

**RENELLE.** What do you mean "early?" Are we starting late again?

**HARDY.** Owing to circumstances, I rather thought the Independence might not sail for a day or two.

**RENELLE.** It seems like a good southerly breeze.

**HARDY.** Good breeze. Could turn into a storm. Why don't you go back to your hotel. I'll send for you when we're ready to sail.

*(One of the upstage PASSENGERS exits to a stateroom. The other two exit down the gangplank. RENELLE stares at the two.)*

**RENELLE.** Captain Hardy, let me see your passenger list.

*(RENELLE takes the list from HARDY.)*

**RENELLE.** Why... Cornelius Wyatt is going to be on board... with his wife. We went to college together... so he's married, now.

*(HARDY takes back the list.)*

**RENELLE.** Those were his sisters. They're coming along, too... I've always found them to be very charming.

**HARDY.** Well, I don't know about that. You'll see them tomorrow...if the weather is better.

*(Fade out.)*

*(Fade up, the next day, as RENELLE is again coming up the gangplank.)*

**RENELLE.** Hello, Captain.

**HARDY.** Hello, Mr. Renelle

**RENELLE.** So we're sailing today? There's a storm coming up.

**HARDY.** You don't have to go, if you don't want to, but I've got cargo that has to.

**RENELLE.** Well, I need to, too. Has my friend Mr. Wyatt come aboard, yet?

**HARDY.** No, but he is on his way.

**RENELLE.** You know when I was looking at your passenger list, yesterday, I couldn't help but notice that Mr. Wyatt had booked three rooms. One of them for a servant, but the word "servant" had been crossed out. He hasn't fallen on hard times, has he?

**HARDY.** I don't know about that, Renelle. But, the extra room was meant to store a rather large package Mr. Wyatt was transporting.

**RENELLE.** Oh, extra baggage, of course. Something he wishes not to be put in the hold. Something to be kept under his own eyes—a painting maybe—he is an artist, you know.

*(Wyatt's two SISTERS arrive up the gangplank followed by WYATT and his WIFE.)*

**MARIAN.** Captain, I am Marian Wyatt and this is my sister, Madeline.

*(WYATT and his WIFE board.)*

**MARIAN.** And this is my brother, Cornelius Wyatt and his wife.

*(CAPTAIN HARDY makes a check on his passenger list.)*

**RENELLE.** Cornelius Wyatt.

**WYATT.** Huh?

**RENELLE.** It is I, Renelle.

**WYATT.** Oh, yes. How do you do?

**RENELLE.** Why, I'm just fine. How are you?

**WYATT.** Mmm.

**RENELLE.** Is this your wife?

**WYATT.** Hmm? This is Mrs. Wyatt.

*(MRS. WYATT lifts her veil briefly.)*

**RENELLE.** *(Bowing:)* It is a great pleasure to meet you, madam.

**MRS. WYATT.** Thank you.

**WYATT.** We must be going, now, Renelle, Captain.

*(WYATT and MRS. WYATT exit to their cabin. MARIAN and MADELINE exit to their cabin.)*

**RENELLE.** *(To the CAPTAIN:)* They seemed tired. Now, I can understand that with Wyatt. He's always been rather aloof, but it seems odd in his sisters.

*(A pine box, six feet by two and a half feet is brought up the gang-plank. The CAPTAIN directs it to WYATT's cabin. WYATT opens the door and takes it inside.)*

**RENELLE.** Did you notice the size of that package he had delivered? It's the size of Rubini's copy of "The Last Supper." It's been in the possession of Nicolino for some time. But, I know, too, that it's been up for sale. I don't know why Wyatt wouldn't say something about it, if he had it.

**HARDY.** Maybe, as you say, he was tired.

**RENELLE.** Maybe. Did you notice that he took it into his cabin, instead of the one he had reserved for it?

**HARDY.** Hmm?

**RENELLE.** The cabins can barely hold two people, let alone a package of that size.

**HARDY.** This is a ship, Mr. Renelle. The cabins need to be small.

**RENELLE.** Well, yes, but he has that other cabin.

**HARDY.** We'll be casting off in half an hour, Mr. Renelle, good afternoon.

*(CAPTAIN HARDY exits. The lights fade out, briefly, then come up in twilight. The storm has started. RENELLE is on deck. MR. WYATT and MRS. WYATT enter from their cabin.)*

**MRS. WYATT.** Why it's Mr. Renelle, the old college chum of my husband, Mr. Wyatt.

**RENELLE.** Yes, Mrs. Wyatt. How nice to see you again. I trust you got a little rest?

**MRS. WYATT.** Rest. Who needs rest. I need fresh air.

**RENELLE.** Yes, but this storm could put a stop to that. Mr. Wyatt, I wonder if you might do me the courtesy of assuaging my curiosity about something.

**WYATT.** Mrs. Wyatt, you look tired. I think you should go back to the cabin and rest before dinner.

**MRS. WYATT.** Yes, sir.

*(MRS. WYATT exits to her cabin.)*

**RENELLE.** Mr. Wyatt, I wonder what you might tell me about a certain copy of the painting, "The Last Supper."

**WYATT.** "The Last Supper?"

**RENELLE.** Yes. You have been in negotiations with Rubini, haven't you?

**WYATT.** What are you talking about?

**RENELLE.** A certain box with a peculiar shape that you have in your cabin.

*(RENELLE nudges WYATT in the ribs and winks.)*

**WYATT.** Huh?

*(WYATT stares at RENELLE for a few seconds, then breaks into convulsive laughter, finally collapsing onto the deck. CAPTAIN HARDY enters.)*

**HARDY.** What happened?

**RENELLE.** I think he's dead.

**HARDY.** Step back.

*(HARDY, after much effort revives WYATT. WYATT babbles incoherently.)*

**WYATT.** My wife... Last Supper.

**HARDY.** Help me take him to his cabin. We'll bleed him and see that he gets some sleep.

*(HARDY and RENELLE carry WYATT to his cabin. Fade out.)*

*(Fade up. It is night. RENELLE opens his cabin door to look out on the storm. CAPTAIN HARDY enters.)*

**HARDY.** That you, Renelle?

**RENELLE.** Yes. Nasty storm.

**HARDY.** You better stay inside. A wave'll come up and take you overboard.

**RENELLE.** Yes, Captain.

*(CAPTAIN HARDY exits. Just before RENELLE can do the same, RENELLE sees MRS. WYATT leave her cabin and enter the one marked "Servant." Fade out.)*

*(Morning. The storm is now a hurricane. MR. and MRS. WYATT enter from their cabin. CAPTAIN HARDY enters.)*

**HARDY.** Wyatt, come with me. We need every available hand. Mrs. Wyatt you stay in your cabin.

*(RENELLE enters from his cabin.)*

**HARDY.** Renelle, you're coming with us.

*(Two SAILORS enter.)*

**SAILOR #1.** The foretopsail's in shreds, cap'n. The mizzenmast is gonna go any minute, we're gonna have to cut it away.

*(The CARPENTER enters.)*

**HARDY.** Cut it away, now! Renelle! You go with them.

*(SAILOR #1, SAILOR #2 and RENELLE exit.)*

**CARPENTER.** The pumps are chokin', cap'n. We can't bail the water. We got four feet in the hold.

**HARDY.** Do what you can. Wyatt, you go with him.

*(WYATT heads back to his cabin.)*

**HARDY.** Wyatt, you hear me? Go with the carpenter.

*(HARDY, the CARPENTER and WYATT exit. HARDY comes back onstage. RENELLE and SAILOR #1 enter.)*

**SAILOR #1.** We've lost it cap'n. We're gonna swamp.

**HARDY.** Start getting the passengers into the lifeboats.

*(The CREW starts scrambling PASSENGERS into the lifeboats. WYATT goes to his cabin and drags the box toward the lifeboat.)*

**HARDY.** You're not taking that with us.

**WYATT.** You can't refuse me.

**HARDY.** Leave it. The gunwale's almost in the water, now.

**WYATT.** Its weight is nothing...mere nothing.

**HARDY.** You're mad, Wyatt.

*(WYATT ties a rope to the box and jumps into the sea. Fade out.)*

*(Fade up on a clear day, back on the docks with HARDY and RENELLE.)*

**RENELLE.** Captain,...you saw how suddenly they sank. Was that not an exceedingly singular thing? I still had some hope of his survival, when I saw him lash himself to the box, and commit himself to the sea.

**HARDY.** They sank as a matter of course and that like a shot. They will soon rise again, however, but not 'till the salt melts.

**RENELLE.** The salt?

**PAGES HAVE BEEN CUT FROM THIS SCENE.  
THE PLAY CONTINUES ON THE NEXT PAGE.**

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# THE TELL-TALE HEART

## Cast of Characters

BURKE, a small, thin, man in his mid-thirties. He is dressed in a cheap suit and tie.

OLD MAN, he is an old man with a beard. He is dressed in bedclothes.

THREE POLICEMEN, the three are in uniforms of early nineteenth century police. All three are larger than Burke.

## Place

The living room of BURKE's house. Main room has four small wooden chairs; two foot high chest. Bedroom has a bed; large chest. The main character must be able to hide the heart under planks in the floor.

## Time

The 1830s.

## Properties

Lantern

Knife

Heart

Teacups

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*(The living room of BURKE's house. It contains four small wooden chairs and a two-foot high chest. Off to the side of the stage is the old man's bedroom. It has a bed and a large chest.)*

*(It is late afternoon. BURKE is wandering about the room, talking out loud to no one.)*

**BURKE.** True!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had *sharpened* my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story...

*(BURKE moves to Center stage.)*

**BURKE.** It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold, I had no desire... I think it was his eye! Yes... One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever... Now, this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But, you should have seen me...

*(Fade out.)*

*(Fade up. It is nighttime. The OLD MAN is asleep in his bed and BURKE is at the bedroom door.)*

**BURKE.** I was never kinder to the old man than during the week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch on his door and opened it—oh, so gently. ...oh, so slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. Then, when I was inside the doorway, I slowly undid the lantern cover...

*(BURKE does this as he talks. With the opening of the lantern a small spot hits the OLD MAN's face. BURKE lingers, then slowly backs out and closes the door.)*

**BURKE.** Ha! Would a madman be so wise as this? I did this for seven long nights—every night at midnight—but I found the eye was always closed; so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye... Every morning at dawn, I went into his chamber and inquired how he passed the night. He would have been a profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night I looked in on him as he slept... Upon the eighth night...

*(There is dim light in the bedroom. BURKE, chuckling, slowly opens the bedroom door. The OLD MAN rolls over in bed, then suddenly bolts upright.)*

**OLD MAN.** Who's there?

*(For a long time, nobody moves. Then the OLD MAN whimpers softly with fear.)*

**OLD MAN.** It's nothing but the wind in the chimney—only a mouse crossing the floor... It is merely a cricket which has made a chirp.

*(There is the sound of a heartbeat at a low level. BURKE slowly opens the door wider, then slowly opens the lantern onto the OLD MAN's face. The level and rate of the heartbeat increases, but there is no movement from BURKE or the OLD MAN for many seconds. The heartbeat goes faster and louder. BURKE opens the lantern wide. The OLD MAN and BURKE shriek. BURKE jumps on the bed and stabs the OLD MAN to death. BURKE steps back. The heartbeat is still there, but at a low level. BURKE puts his hand on the OLD MAN's heart and the beating stops. BURKE drags the body out through the door. Fade out.)*

*(Fade up. It is dawn. BURKE is sitting on a chair in the living room.)*

**BURKE.** *(To no one:)* Do you still think me mad? You will no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. I worked through the night, hastily, but in silence.

*(BURKE gets up and paces.)*

**BURKE.** First, I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and legs... I then took up three planks from the floor and de-

posited him below. I then replaced the boards so cleverly that no human eye—not even his—could have detected anything wrong... There was nothing to wash out—no blood stain of any kind. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught it all. —Ha! Ha!

*(The morning light fades up in both rooms. There's a knock on the door. BURKE lets in three POLICEMEN.)*

**POLICEMAN #1.** Good morning, sir.

**POLICEMAN #2.** May we come in, sir?

**BURKE.** Why, of course. Come in. Let me get you a seat.

**POLICEMAN #1.** No, thank you.

**BURKE.** What may I do for you?

**POLICEMAN #1.** We are here on business, sir. A neighbor of yours called on us this morning and said he had heard a noise last night. He said it was a shriek.

**BURKE.** A shriek? Oh, no. That was just me. I'm afraid I had a bad dream.

**POLICEMAN #3.** The neighbor said there was a loud racket. He thought there might have been foul play.

**BURKE.** No. I can't say I heard any racket. I was asleep, but I'm a light sleeper. If there had been any loud racket, I would have woken up.

*(POLICEMAN #1 and POLICEMAN #2 begin to roam the apartment looking for clues.)*

**POLICEMAN #3.** Very well. But, I'm afraid we have orders to search the apartment, anyway.

**BURKE.** By all means. Do your duty. Look anywhere you wish. I certainly have nothing to hide.

**POLICEMAN #3.** There is an elderly gentleman who lives in the apartment with you. Is that not so?

**BURKE.** Yes. A kindly old man. Yes. He isn't here, right now. He has gone to visit some relatives of his...in the countryside.

*(BURKE leads POLICEMAN #1 and POLICEMAN #2 into the Old Man's room.)*

**BURKE.** This is his room. I'm sure he wouldn't mind if you searched in here, too... There, you see some of his valuables on his dresser. If a burglar had been here, he surely would have taken them...

*(BURKE brings some chairs DC and arranges them in a semi-circle around the small chest, putting his chair directly US of the chest.)*

**BURKE.** Come, gentlemen, have a seat.

*(BURKE sits in the middle and the THREE POLICEMEN sit on both sides of him. The soft sound of a heartbeat is heard. The THREE POLICEMEN do not hear the sound.)*

**BURKE.** May I get you anything, gentlemen? Some tea, perhaps?

**POLICEMAN #3.** No thank, you.

**BURKE.** You, sir?

**POLICEMAN #1.** Nothing for me.

**BURKE.** *(Pauses.)* You?

**POLICEMAN #2.** No, nothing for me, thanks.

**BURKE.** As I said, the elderly gentleman has gone to the countryside... Visiting relatives, I believe... I don't recall him saying when he might be back.

*(There is a pause as the sound of the heartbeat builds. BURKE gets up from his seat, then paces back and forth UC, then sits back down.)*

**BURKE.** Well, are you gentlemen satisfied that everything is all right? I'm sure you have more important business to attend to...

*(There is another pause as the sound builds.)*

**BURKE.** He's not here. The old man has gone to the country.

*(Pause.)*

**BURKE.** I didn't hear any noises last night!

*(Pause.)*

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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