

THE TELL-TALE HEART

A Play in One Act
A Dramatization of Edgar Allen Poe's Story

by
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CHARACTERS: (As they speak)

William Valdemar, the leading man.

Justin Glanvil, sergeant of police.

James Landor, a policeman.

Bill Josephs, another policeman.

PLACE: Boston, Massachusetts, about 1850.

TIME: Four o'clock in the morning, lights on.

SCENE: A living room in lodgings belonging to Valdemar's uncle, comfortably but not luxuriously furnished. Window up L. with shade entirely lowered. Outside door L. Door into bedroom up R. Large chair at left. Down R. stands a writing desk with small chair in front of it. A man's dressing gown is thrown over this chair. Against the wall at back is a couch bed. At L. C. table and two chairs are crowded together as if they had been hastily pushed back from their usual positions. On the table are a number of books. The floor is covered with a lightweight rug, which has been rolled away from the center.

PROPERTIES: Hammer, a document or "printed form", pencil for Glanvil's pocket, notebook and pencil for Landor's pocket and handcuffs for Glanvil's pocket.

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS:

WILLIAM VALDEMAR: Twenty-two years old, good-looking, of pleasing manners, but suffering from dementia. When first talking with the three policemen, he seems entirely sane. In the second interview, his abnormality begins to show in trivial ways--the tapping of a foot upon the floor, the closing and unclosing of his hand. These betraying signs increase in frequency until the climax.

JUSTIN GLANVIL: Evidently a man of education. Tall and dignified with a stern, severe manner.

JAMES LANDOR: Stouter and more good-natured than Glanvil. Having a son of his own, his attitude toward Valdemar is lenient from the start.

BILL JOSEPHS: May be tall or short, but should give the impression of great physical strength. His brain moves slowly and he hardly becomes well awake before the final scene of the play.

NOTE: Policemen's suits are easily simulated by the use of a Sam Brown belt worn over an ordinary dark suit, blue preferred.

DISCOVERED: (Valdemar, with hammer in his hand, kneels on the floor from where the rug has been pushed away. He is in his shirtsleeves, his manner tense and excited. As the curtain rises, he gives the planks two final blows, then continues to gaze down upon them critically. A clock upstage strikes four, which rouses Valdemar from his scrutiny. He rises, an expression of triumph on his face.)

VALDEMAR: Four o'clock! It was midnight when I began, and now my task is finished. I've only to return this hammer to the drawer--(Opens drawer in desk--places hammer in it) put back the chairs--(Moves chairs to what evidently was their former position) a little to the right I think this one should go--(Moves it--stands off to look at his work, nods in approval). Now, who would suspect what lies concealed beneath those planks? (As if suddenly alarmed, put a finger to his lips) Sh! Was I talking to myself? (Defiantly) No! Only madmen do that and I am not mad. (Paces the floor agitatedly) Nervous, true--very, very dreadfully nervous I have been and am, but why should I fear

that I am mad? (By a strong effort he recovers his composure) To prove how sane I am I'll go over all that has occurred. (Sits in small chair by desk-speaks reflectively) 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. The old man had never wronged me. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye. (Springs to his feet excitedly) Yes, it was. Had that eye been closed last night I would have done nothing. But it was open--open--all a pale blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow of my bones. And as I stood by the bed and looked down upon his eye, (Rehearses the scene in pantomime) there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. The beating of his heart! It grew louder and louder. It increased my fury until at last I--(Makes a gesture as if striking the old man and putting an end to him. After this, stands motionless for a moment, listening) Do I hear his heart beat? (Reassures himself) Impossible! A heart cannot beat after the man is dead. I've silenced it forever. (Gets book from the table--seats himself in large chair and opens book as if to study. The next moment he is staring into space) The murder was not my fault. Had his wicked vulture eye been closed--(More loudly) Had it been closed, I say --(Checks himself) Am I talking to myself again? I will not talk to myself. Again bends over his book. The bell rings down L. Valdemar raises his head) Who's that, at this hour? (He goes to the window and raises the edge of the shade very slightly so that he can peer out without being seen) Three men! The street light shines upon their uniforms....Police! Some one must have heard my uncle scream! (Crosses hastily to R. and puts on his dressing gown) Do I fear investigation? I welcome it. Their futile efforts will amuse me. (As if addressing an unseen audience) Watch! You will see how cleverly I throw them off the track. (The bell rings again. Valdemar opens the outside door and Glanvil, Landor and Josephs immediately enter, Glanvil in the lead. Valdemar feigns surprise) Gentlemen, what is your reason for disturbing me at this hour of the night?

GLANVIL: (Sternly) You were not in bed, your light was burning.

VALDEMAR: I was absorbed in my book. (Indicates book on table) Surely there is no law against that?

GLANVIL: We rang twice. If you were seated here by this table, why did you take so long coming to the door?

VALDEMAR: I stopped to put on my dressing gown. It's not my habit to receive in my shirt-sleeves. My guests might have been three charming young women instead of three long-faced old grave-diggers like you.

GLAN.: (Displeased) This is no occasion for humor.

VAL.: (Respectfully) I regret that my feeble attempt at it has failed to amuse you and shall not offend again. Will you be seated?

GLAN.: For the present we prefer to stand. (Impressively) Perhaps we should introduce ourselves. I am Justin Glanvil, sergeant of police.

LANDOR: My name is James Landor. This house is on my beat.

JOSEPHS: I'm Bill Josephs, the strongest man on the force. (Yawns) Half an hour ago, these fellows woke me up from the first good night's sleep I've had in a week.

VAL.: Naturally, I'm honored to meet you all, but again I must put my question. Why should three such celebrities elect to visit a humble student like myself?

GLAN.: We want an explanation of the scream heard in these lodgings during the night.

VAL.: (As if amazed) A scream you say?