



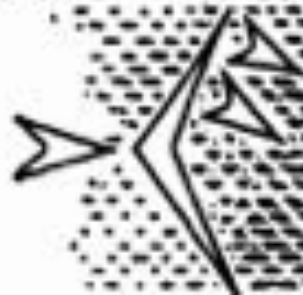
Edgar Allan Poe's

The Tell-Tale Heart

dramatized by

Luella E. McMahon

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



A Play in One Act

The Tell-Tale Heart

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LUELLA E. McMAHON

from the story by

EDGAR ALLAN POE



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THE TELL-TALE HEART

A Play in One Act

For Six Men

(or 3 to 5 men and 1 to 3 women)*

CHARACTERS

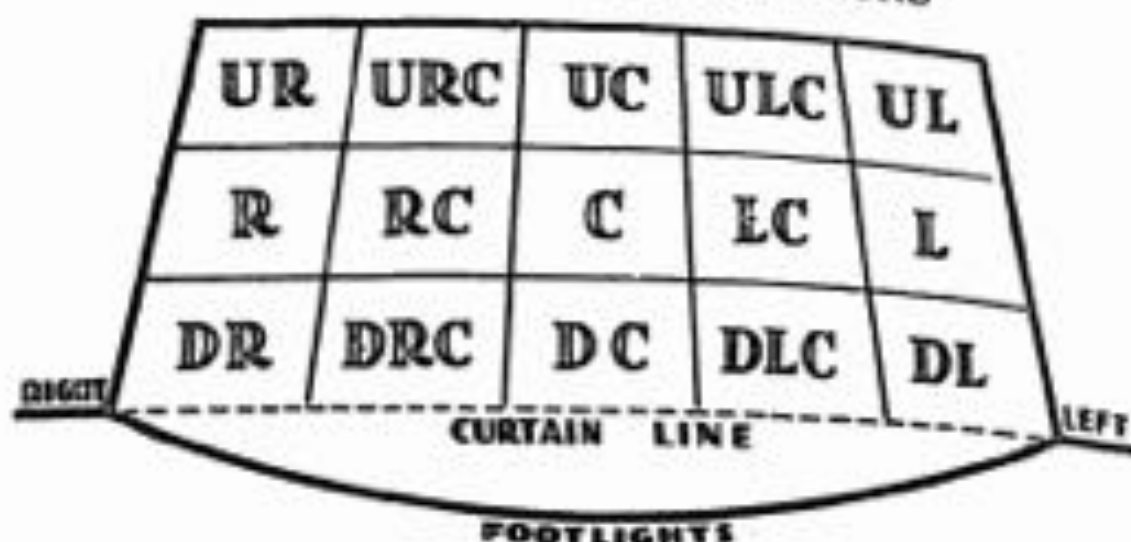
MAN
NEIGHBOR
WIFE
VISITOR
OFFICER ONE
OFFICER TWO
ROOMER

PLACE: The drab, scantily furnished living room of the Man.

TIME: From 10:00 P. M. one evening to 4:00 A. M. the following morning of a foreboding fall night.

* If a mixed cast is desired, the two neighbors visiting the Man at the beginning of the play may be women. The Visitor may be a man or woman. If an all-male cast is preferred, the two neighbors may both be men.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

The Tell-Tale Heart

SCENE: The living room of the Man's home. At L there is an exit into the kitchen and the Man's bedroom beyond the kitchen. At R is an exit leading into the bedroom of the roomer (an old man). The exit to the outdoors is UC. / Since this play requires only a very free form of staging, practical doors are unnecessary. The characters leave and enter through curtain openings. / There are three straight chairs in the drab room. Besides the chairs, there is a table which holds several cups and saucers. UL, there is a stool or level which may be used for the "Visitor." / [Note: If it is impractical to have a level, it may be dispensed with, and the character may come in from the left. If the indicated spots are hard to obtain, the character may hold a large flashlight, hidden under his robe so that only the light shows. This light is trained on his face, its beam covered with a green gelatin. / Also at UL is a small table, with an unlighted lantern and match-on it.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: It is ten o'clock on a gray fall evening. The NEIGHBOR and his WIFE, who have been calling on the MAN, are preparing to leave. They are seated around the table: WIFE, up; NEIGHBOR, right; MAN, left. They have just finished their tea. The MAN speaks. He seems very nervous.)

MAN. It was gracious of you to come.

NEIGHBOR. We've been concerned about you.

WIFE. We hadn't seen you for days.

MAN (getting a little excited). But there's nothing wrong. You didn't think there was anything wrong?

WIFE. Of course not--only a bachelor, living alone, except for that nice old man you befriended . . .

MAN. I'm fond of that old man. I was happy to give him a home.

NEIGHBOR. It's most generous, nonetheless.

WIFE. We know your income is so limited.

NEIGHBOR. And you're not able to work.

MAN. But I've been writing. My last article was sent back, alas--"The Psychology of Murder."

WIFE (shuddering). Murder! You write so much about murder.

MAN. It's an intriguing subject.

NEIGHBOR. You've sold none of these articles?

MAN (vehemently). The publishers! They think I'm not qualified to write about murder.

WIFE. Be thankful you aren't!

MAN. Perhaps, some day they'll change their minds. (The NEIGHBOR and his WIFE exchange a quick, startled look; then the WIFE speaks.)

WIFE. You don't look well. Have you seen a doctor?

NEIGHBOR. We think you should.

MAN (quickly). There is no need.

NEIGHBOR. A doctor might give you something to soothe your nerves.

MAN. Nerves! (Grows more excited.) You talk as though I were sick.

NEIGHBOR. We don't mean that. It's only . . .

MAN (breaking in excitedly). I know what you're hinting! Disease has sharpened my wits, not dulled them.

WIFE. That's true, but if you'd only rest, or go to a hospital . . .

MAN. Hospital! I have no need for a hospital.

(Starts.) Did you hear anything?

NEIGHBOR. No.

MAN. It was like a pounding. My sense of hearing is very strong; so are my other senses. I have no need for hospitals.

NEIGHBOR (soothingly). My wife meant no harm.

MAN (appeased). Of course not.

NEIGHBOR (after a beat). I suppose the old man has retired. He's told me how soundly he sleeps.

MAN (with a quick look toward bedroom). He's gone to the country for a few days. I miss him. I love that old man. (When the MAN mentions that the old man has gone to the country, the WIFE gives a quick start, then controls herself.)

WIFE (rising). It's getting late. We must be going.

MAN (rising). But you come so seldom.

NEIGHBOR (helping his wife into coat or wrap which was on the back of her chair). We'll make it sooner next time. (They start for exit UC.)

MAN. Oh, before you go, I'll get the bowl you brought the soup in. So kind of you.

WIFE (turning back). We were happy to bring it.

MAN. I'll be only a minute. (He goes into the kitchen, L.)

WIFE (looking toward the bedroom). I'm sure I saw that old man come in, and he didn't leave. Why would he say the old man went to the country?

NEIGHBOR. Probably thought we were prying. He's a little suspicious.

WIFE. I tell you he needs care. We should insist that he see a doctor.

NEIGHBOR. We're not going to get involved. You should never have sent that note to the police.

WIFE (shuddering) All those articles on murder!

NEIGHBOR. A pastime. Anyway, we're not getting involved. I hope the police never find out who sent that note.

WIFE. They have no way of finding out. It wasn't signed.

NEIGHBOR (hearing slight noise, offstage L).
Shh--he's coming.

(MAN enters from L with bowl.)

MAN. Your bowl. (He hands it to her.) And thank you again.

NEIGHBOR. Good night.

WIFE (as she goes). Take care of yourself.

MAN (suspiciously). Why do you say that?

NEIGHBOR. Only a good wish. Nothing more.

(They go out UC. The MAN stands at the exit UC for a few seconds, watching them leave; then he mumbles to himself.)

MAN. A madman! That's what they think. I'm only tired--so tired. (He goes to the roomer's door, listens a moment.) He's sound asleep. Why did they ask about him? I love the old man . . . only I'm tired--very tired. (He goes to the table, sits in the right chair, drops his head into his arms upon the table. The lights dim to darkness with just a spot on the MAN.)

(Then, slowly, a spot comes up on the VISTOR as he enters. In the distance, the town clock tolls twelve.)

The MAN wakens, looks up at the
VISITOR, almost as though in a trance.)

MAN. Who are you?

VISITOR. I am the voice of your real self.

MAN. My real self?

VISITOR. The plan you've had in your mind for
this long time. You understand.

MAN. No--no.

VISITOR. Every minute, day and night, since the
old man came to live with you, the plan--your
plan--has haunted you.

MAN. I love the old man.

VISITOR. That has nothing to do with your plan.

MAN. I have no reason to harm him.

VISITOR. You want to know, to know about murder.
And there is his eye.

MAN. Ah, yes, his eye.

VISITOR. That eye!

MAN. The eye of a vulture.

VISITOR. A vulture should be destroyed.

MAN. He has never harmed me.

VISITOR. While he lives you cannot be free of that
eye. For seven nights you have known that.
Seven nights you've opened his door.

MAN. I only meant . . .

VISITOR. Be very cautious this eighth night.

MAN. I have no reason. I have no desire for his
gold.

VISITOR. It's not for gold.

MAN. He trusts me.

VISITOR. Move cautiously. Don't rouse his sus-
picions.

MAN. The minute hand of a watch moves more
noisily than I.

VISITOR. It is midnight. You will open the door
little by little.

MAN (recoiling). No!

VISITOR. He does not suspect your secret thoughts.

MAN. But I have no reason--not really - - -

VISITOR. His eye! Have you forgotten his eye?

MAN. His eye disturbs me only when it is open.

VISITOR. You said, yourself, it is the eye of a vulture. A vulture must be destroyed.

MAN. I've never been so kind to the old man as I have this past week.

VISITOR (insistently). A pale blue eye with a film.

MAN (shuddering). It makes my blood run cold.

VISITOR. A dull blue eye and over it, a hideous veil.

MAN. It chills the very marrow of my bones.

VISITOR. The eye will open soon. The eye will be upon you.

MAN. It cannot be. The old man is fast asleep.

VISITOR. You do not listen when I warn you about the eye. You do not hear.

MAN. I listen. I hear. My hearing is very acute. I hear many things that others do not hear. When I listen at the door, I can even hear the beating of the old man's heart.

VISITOR. Then, listen. (The MAN listens intently. At the discretion of the director, there may be the faintest sound of a heart beat; or this may be indicated to be in the man's imagination.)

MAN. I hear. That steady beating drives me mad. That--and the eye.

VISITOR. Rid yourself of the eye.

MAN (piteously). I can't stand his eye.

VISITOR. Then quietly--softly--the lantern. Silence the heart forever. (The MAN rises, as though in a trance, gets the lantern from UL,

lights it. He sets it on table.)

MAN (to visitor). But I am not mad.

VISITOR (soothingly). No, you are very calm.

MAN (starting for old man's bedroom R, then pulling back). I will not do this deed.

VISITOR. Steadily--little by little. (The MAN starts for the room again; again he stops.)

MAN. He has done me no harm.

VISITOR. He will not see you. The room is black.

MAN. He keeps the shutters closed. (Laughs slightly.) He is afraid of robbers!

VISITOR. Noiselessly. (The MAN listens, then turns to the VISITOR in bewilderment.)

MAN. Don't you hear it?

VISITOR. Hear what?

MAN. His heart. I think it's going to burst.

VISITOR. Silence it. (Points to door.) Soundlessly. (The MAN advances a few steps, turns again.)

MAN. If the eye is not open, I cannot. I have no other reason.

VISITOR (with imperious gesture). Go! (The MAN opens the door slowly, but there is a slight creak of the hinge. The old roomer gives a startled cry.)

ROOMER (off R in bedroom). Who's there? (The MAN draws quickly back into the living room.)

MAN. He heard.

VISITOR. Be quiet. He will think it is nothing but the wind.

ROOMER (offstage). Did I hear something?

MAN (pityingly). He's frightened.

ROOMER (after another short pause). Is someone there?

VISITOR (as MAN starts to answer). Don't answer! He will think it's a cricket.

MAN. I pity him.

VISITOR. The eye! (The MAN starts toward the bedroom again.)

ROOMER (offstage, as MAN opens the door).

Who--who---- (Ends in a moan of fright.)

MAN (turning back). I cannot.

VISITOR. The eye!

MAN. His heart! The beating of his heart becomes stronger.

VISITOR. Move cautiously. (The MAN goes softly off R. The VISITOR disappears. There is a piercing scream from the bedroom.)

(The MAN comes from the bedroom R, looking intently at his extended hands. He moves, mechanically, to the table and sits, slowly staring at his arms stretched out on the table. Then, again slowly, he blows out the lantern and puts his head down on the table. The lights dim, then after a few seconds' pause, a distant clock is heard to strike four times.)

MAN. Four o'clock and still dark as midnight.
(He lights the lantern.) My breakfast tea.
(Goes into kitchen, L.)

(As the MAN leaves, a lantern or other light shines in through the window. If there is no window, the light may play on the curtain upstage. After another short pause, there is a sharp rap on the door. The MAN comes back, stands at the kitchen door, frozen in fright. In a moment, there is another sharp rap, followed by a command.)

OFFICER ONE (outside). Open up! In the name of the law. It's the police. (The MAN hesitates, looks toward bedroom, then speaks with assurance.)

MAN. What have I to fear? (Goes resolutely to door, opens it.)

(Two OFFICERS enter.)

OFFICER ONE. Good morning.

MAN. You're early callers.

OFFICER TWO. We saw your light.

MAN. I had trouble sleeping. I was preparing my breakfast tea. And you?

OFFICER ONE. We're checking the area.

MAN. Checking the area?

OFFICER TWO. During the night a scream was heard.

OFFICER ONE. By one of your neighbors.

OFFICER TWO. As though someone was calling for help.

OFFICER ONE. Somewhere in this vicinity.

OFFICER TWO. We have been ordered to search all premises.

OFFICER ONE. Merely a routine procedure.

MAN. You are free to search. (Speaks with assurance.)

OFFICER ONE. Thank you.

OFFICER TWO. The shriek was reported to be most piercing.

MAN. The shriek was mine--I had a dream.

OFFICER TWO. A nightmare?

MAN (eagerly). Yes--a nightmare.

OFFICER ONE. That sounds logical----

OFFICER TWO. Yes, it does--a nightmare--a sudden scream. (The OFFICERS look around, apparently satisfied.)

MAN (with growing confidence). Would you like to search the kitchen--and the bedroom beyond? (Indicates L.)

OFFICER TWO. Thank you. (They go out L.)

MAN (calling to them). Then come back and rest. You shall see that I can be a good host even at this hour. (The MAN arranges the chairs, cups on table, etc.)

(The OFFICERS return after a few seconds.)

MAN. Are you satisfied?

OFFICER TWO. Yes, everything is in order.

OFFICER ONE. Is there anyone in the house with you?

MAN. There is only a roomer.

OFFICER TWO. A roomer?

MAN. An old man--a charity case--I took in out of kindness. But he has gone to the country.

OFFICER ONE. May we see his room?

MAN (going to bedroom door, R). In here. You'll see his room is undisturbed. (OFFICER TWO goes into the bedroom; OFFICER ONE remains.)

OFFICER ONE. The water for your tea is already boiling on the kitchen stove. You do eat early.

MAN. As I said, I had trouble sleeping.

OFFICER. After the nightmare?

MAN. I'll brew tea for you gentlemen. (Goes L into kitchen. OFFICER ONE goes quickly to bedroom door, speaks softly.)

OFFICER ONE. Did you find anything?

(OFFICER TWO returns from bedroom R.)

OFFICER TWO. Not yet.

OFFICER ONE. Maybe it was only a crank note?
OFFICER TWO. It's the second one we've had.
OFFICER ONE. He didn't deny the scream.
OFFICER TWO. He's hiding something.
OFFICER ONE. If we give him time, he'll break.
OFFICER TWO. He'll be coming back any second.

(OFFICER TWO goes back into the bedroom,
OFFICER ONE picks up a cup, pretends to be
examining it. In a few seconds, the MAN
re-enters with the teapot, which he places on
the table. _

OFFICER ONE. This is a rare piece of china.
MAN. A friend sent it from Japan. (Goes to bed-
room door.) Do you find all things to your
liking?
OFFICER TWO (off R). Your roomer is a neat
housekeeper.
MAN. Come. You shall see how hospitable I
can be.

(OFFICER TWO comes from the bed-
room, R.)

OFFICER TWO. Thank you.
MAN. Won't you sit down? You must be tired.
OFFICER ONE. I am. (Sits.)
MAN. Then have a cup of tea to warm you.
OFFICER TWO (as he sits). Thank you. It's
been a long night. (During the following dia-
logue, the MAN pours the tea and serves each.
MAN. This weather chills one to the bone.
OFFICER TWO. The tea is most welcome. (The
officers watch the MAN intently, but their tones
are commonplace and apparently unsuspecting.
The MAN begins, very gradually, to break.)

MAN (moving to the bedroom). I'll open the old man's door so that his room will be a little warmer, if he should come back.

OFFICER ONE. You are thoughtful.

MAN (pulling his chair closer to the bedroom). I frequently sit here, so that he will not feel alone.

OFFICER TWO. You expect him back soon then?

MAN. One can't tell. The old man is eccentric.

OFFICER ONE. You're fond of him?

MAN. Very fond. Will you have some more tea?

OFFICER ONE. Just a bit, please. It is very good. (The MAN fills OFFICER ONE's cup. The teapot shakes in his hand. As he fills OFFICER TWO's cup, he almost spills the tea.)

OFFICER TWO. You seem a little nervous.

MAN (faltering for a moment). Nervous? (Pause.) Yes, I suppose I am.

OFFICER TWO. Of course. . . the nightmare. . . .

OFFICER ONE. It's enough to give anyone a feeling of unreality.

MAN. I'm nervous, but the neighbors needn't be alarmed.

OFFICER ONE. Your neighbors? Should they be?

MAN. I've told them many times, the disease has sharpened my wits, not dulled them.

OFFICER TWO. Disease?

MAN. A nervous disease, the doctors say--but it hasn't affected my senses.

OFFICER TWO. Of course it hasn't.

MAN (growing more vehement). I admit to being nervous, very nervous----but I'm not disturbed. Not mad.

OFFICER TWO (pursuing the man's apparent weakening). Did you hear anyone scream tonight?

OFFICER ONE. He means, aside from your own

nightmare?

MAN. No--and I would have . . .

OFFICER TWO. Perhaps the scream came while you were still asleep.

MAN. I would have wakened. Above all, my sense of hearing is very keen.

OFFICER ONE. You're proud of your hearing?

MAN. I hear all things in the heaven and in the earth. I hear many things in hell. (Rises and starts to pace.) Do you hear anything?

OFFICER TWO. Nothing.

OFFICER ONE. The tea is very good. (The officers watch him closely, as he moves.)

MAN. You hear nothing?

OFFICER ONE. Only your voice.

MAN (sitting down again). I grew nervous for a moment. I'm better now.

OFFICER TWO. We can see that you're much better.

MAN (calmly). Well, let's get on another subject. Since you're gentlemen of the law and don't seem to be in a hurry to leave, may I ask why we can't have a street light on our corner. It is very dark.

OFFICER TWO (jovially.) Street lights cost money----

OFFICER ONE. --Add to taxes.

MAN (derisively). Taxes! Taxes! The old man needs a light. If he comes home after sun-down, he may stumble in the dark.

OFFICER TWO. We'll take it up with the city fathers.

MAN (nervous again). Gentlemen, do I grow pale?

OFFICER TWO. I hadn't noticed.

OFFICER ONE. Perhaps, it's the heat.

OFFICER TWO (starting to rise.) Shall I open the door?

MAN. No--no--it's not the heat. (OFFICER TWO sits down again. The MAN looks around, then rises.) Did you hear anything--just then?

OFFICER TWO. Nothing.

MAN (controlling himself rigidly, sitting down). What do you think of the taxes?

OFFICER ONE. Infernally high.

OFFICER TWO. Likely to go higher.

OFFICER ONE. It's the poor who pay.

MAN (listening intently). Was that a bell outside?

OFFICER ONE. No, there's no bell.

MAN. You think it's my inagination? Hearing the bell, I mean.

OFFICER ONE. Nothing more.

MAN (rising suddenly). Shall I make another pot of tea? This one is getting a little cold.

OFFICER ONE. No, thank you. This one is fine.

MAN (listening again). Don't you hear that sound?

OFFICER TWO. What sound?

MAN. Something pounding--a low, thudding sound..

OFFICER ONE. I hear nothing.

OFFICER TWO. Nor I.

MAN. I tell you, the sound is distinct.

OFFICER TWO. It's only that you're a little nervous.

MAN (controlling himself). Yes, that's it. But I'm all right now. (He goes to table, pours tea--spills it.)

OFFICER ONE. As we were saying, it's the poor who pay.

MAN (pacing a bit). It says in the Constitution that we shall have fair and equitable taxation.

OFFICER ONE. You are an informed citizen----

OFFICER TWO. An informed citizenry promotes justice. (The MAN gets more nervous as he paces, but does not break.)

MAN. And I know The Declaration of Independence:

"When in the course of human events . . ."

OFFICER ONE. You know it well.

MAN (suddenly). Why do you look at me as though there is something wrong?

OFFICER TWO. We're only admiring your knowledge.

MAN. My mind is as sound as yours.

OFFICER ONE. Of course.

MAN. "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created . . ." (Pauses, listens.) Did you hear that?

(Note: At the discretion of the director, a faint heart beat may start here and go continuously or intermittently through the remainder of the play. It may increase in intensity or be a shadowy underscoring of the man's hysteria. The officers do not hear the beat. The sound may be a recorded heart beat or a muffled sound made by striking a heavily muffled stick against a padded board. Since the heart beat is imaginary, it need not be authentic; but it must be controlled enough not to become annoying or distracting to the audience. Unless it can be made to add to the effect of the play, it is better omitted.)

MAN (more insistently, as officers do not answer.)

I asked--don't you hear that?

OFFICER TWO. I hear nothing.

OFFICER ONE. Nor I.

MAN. You don't hear a dull, thudding sound?

OFFICER ONE. No.

MAN (recovering his composure). You see my nervousness--but to go back to the Constitution--
"All men are created . . ." You must hear that sound!

OFFICER TWO. No.

MAN. That noise is not within my ears.

OFFICER ONE. We hear nothing.

MAN. I'm more nervous than I thought--but I'm not insane.

OFFICER TWO. Of course--not insane.

MAN. "Promote the general welfare . . ." In spite of this, the Government raises taxes.

OFFICER TWO. Without consideration for the poor.

MAN (listening). Don't you hear that muffled sound?

OFFICER ONE. No.

MAN. Such as a watch makes when it's wrapped in cotton?

OFFICER TWO. There is no sound. It's your imagination.

MAN. My imagination. Yes--my imagination!

OFFICER ONE. Sit down and talk with us. (The MAN sits down, but rises again immediately.)

MAN. What are you doing here? You're the police! What are you here for?

OFFICER ONE. We came about the shriek.

MAN. I know the Constitution! I know the Bill of Rights! No one may search my house without a warrant!

OFFICER TWO. You gave us your permission.

OFFICER ONE. You invited us most cordially.

MAN. I can speak my mind! I can talk as I please. "Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech. . . ."

OFFICER TWO. We respect your rights.

MAN. I tell you again, I am not a madman. Nervous--but not mad.

OFFICER ONE. We know you're sane.

MAN. You know I'm sane; yet you pretend you hear nothing!

OFFICER TWO. We hear nothing.

MAN. Of course--of course. There's nothing to hear. I was joking.

OFFICER ONE. We understood that.

MAN (laughing). Now, what were we talking about?

OFFICER TWO. The Constitution.

MAN. Oh, yes, the Constitution. "No one can be tried for murder unless a grand jury indicts him . . ."

OFFICER ONE. Murder? Why do you speak of murder?

MAN. "Then he may have a trial by jury."

OFFICER ONE. You know the law well.

MAN. Then, why don't you go?

OFFICER TWO. We're just finishing our tea.

MAN (almost incoherently). How can you say that you don't hear that noise? It's increasing.

OFFICER ONE. You're joking again!

MAN (trying for control). Of course.

OFFICER TWO. We're almost finished. Excellent tea.

MAN. The tea! What's become of my hospitality? (He picks up the teapot, but the officers continue to watch him closely.) Can the Government possibly say that taxes are not too high?

OFFICER ONE. I don't see how they'd dare.

MAN (excited again). You're the police! How dare you enter my house this hour of the morning?

OFFICER TWO. We saw your light.

MAN (looking toward bedroom R). I'm going to close this door. (Does so.)

OFFICER ONE. I'm sure the room is warm by now.

OFFICER TWO. The old man won't come home now.

MAN (quickly). Why do you say that? What are you hinting at?

OFFICER TWO. I meant because of the hour.

MAN. Of course. (Listens again.) Maybe, I didn't close the door tightly. (Starts toward door again.)

OFFICER ONE (glancing). It seems to be closed all the way.

MAN (listening at door). How can you sit there and smile and pretend not to hear?

OFFICER ONE. Hear what?

MAN. The noise. It gets louder and louder.

OFFICER TWO. It's only that your head aches.

OFFICER ONE. You have a ringing in your ears.

MAN. Yes, that's it--my head aches; so if you'll leave----

OFFICER TWO. In a few minutes.

MAN. I've shown you everything. What more do you want?

OFFICER ONE. We are just enjoying our tea.

MAN. But your duty. You are to go through the neighborhood.

OFFICER TWO. Yours is the last house to be searched.

MAN. You still hear nothing?

OFFICER ONE. Nothing.

MAN (rising). You're baiting me, because you think I'm mad.

OFFICER ONE. I assure you---

MAN. You're making a mockery of my horror!

OFFICER TWO. Believe us, we're most sympathetic. (During the following dialogue, the lights gradually go down on the watching officers and come up on the MAN, who grows less and less controlled as he speaks, sometimes pacing.)

MAN. You pretend to be sympathetic, but you

really think I' mad! You do, don't you?
OFFICER ONE. We've told you we don't.

MAN. Wait till you see how healthily, how calmly I can tell the story----

OFFICER TWO. We're listening.

MAN. I liked the old man----

OFFICER ONE. We know----

MAN. Every night I look in on him. (Slowly advancing.) I move slowly--slowly--because I don't want to disturb him . . . I sit beside his door so that, if he should waken, he'd know someone is near----

OFFICER TWO. Kind----

MAN. When I look in on him, it takes an hour for me to place my whole head within the opening so far that I can see him lying on the bed. . . . Would a madman be as wise as this? . . . (Sharply.) Why do you stare? What are you thinking?

OFFICER ONE. We're just interested. . . .

MAN. I walk quietly, because of the eye. I don't want his eye to open.

OFFICER ONE. Why not?

MAN. It's an ugly eye. It has a horrible cast. . . .

OFFICER TWO. We understand. . . .

MAN. Every morning I go into his room. I speak in a hearty tone. I say "Hello, how are you?"

So you see . . . Stop staring! Stop smiling!

OFFICER ONE. We're not smiling.

MAN. He just couldn't guess that every night at midnight . . . (The MAN rushes toward the officers threateningly.) Stop! Stop your laughing, I tell you. I will stand your torture no longer! You hear and you know! (He pounds the chair on the floor to drown out the heart-beat. Then stops.) Nothing will drown out the horrible noise. . . . Anything is better than

this agony! I can bear anything but your laughter. (The officers start to rise.) It grows louder and louder--and you pretend not to hear it! Pretend no longer! Dissemble no more! I admit the deed! (He rushes to the old man's door.) It was the eye! That horrible eye was open! Its filmy gaze was upon me! (He approaches the officers.) In there! In there! Tear up the planks! Do anything! Only somehow stop it. Stop the beating of his hideous heart!

(The lights go down as the beating [or the music] rises to a crescendo, and the officers approach the MAN. The curtain closes quickly.)

CURTAIN

NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

THE MAN: He wears ordinary street clothes or, if preferred, a lounging robe. He is middle-aged. His make-up is pasty, indicating ill health. He is emotionally disturbed and is obsessed with the idea of murder. He resents anyone's assumption that he needs medical aid.

THE NEIGHBOR and HIS WIFE: They are casually dressed for a quick evening call. Light topcoats may be worn if desired. They are middle-aged or younger, solicitous for the man's health; but the husband, particularly, does not want to get involved.

THE VISITOR: A black choir or graduation robe should be used in order to blend in with the background. The audience should never be quite sure whether the Visitor really appears or is a part of the Man's imagination, and he should only be visible when the spot (or flashlight) is focused on him (or her). He (she) should be on a raised platform or level if possible. Do not make this character "earthy."

OFFICERS: They may wear either uniforms or plain clothes.

NOTE: Avoid clothes which are highly styled unless you decide to place the play in a definite period. The time is universal; clothes should not be emphasized.

It will be well to read the original story carefully before starting the play.

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Table, three straight chairs, lamp, stool or level (optional). Cups and saucers, etc. on table; wife's coat on back of her chair, lantern and matches UL.

MAN: Bowl, teapot containing tea.

LIGHTING: Spots (green or blue) may be used effectively on the MAN and on the VISITOR (Voice of Temptation). If it is difficult to obtain spotlights, large flashlights, their focus diffused by a green covering which will allow the light to be seen, may be used. These flashlights may be held by the character in such a way as not to be detectable as flashlights (handles draped with black). Areas of the stage may be lighted as the MAN or the VISITOR speaks.

SETTING: The room need contain only a table with a tea service and three straight chairs. The VISITOR should be on a level. However, if a level is not practical, the VISITOR may come in from L, wearing a long dark robe or cape.

The Tell-Tale Heart

Drama. Based on the story by Edgar Allan Poe. Dramatized by Luella McMahon.

Cast: 5 or 6m., or 4m., 2w., variable.
A young man plans and commits the "perfect crime." When a detective stops by on a quite different matter, it becomes apparent that the young man has little to fear. The only trouble is—he can't stop the pounding of the dead man's heart. Why can't the detective hear it? As the pounding grows louder and the tension increases, the audience realizes that they are watching the very madness of a murderer. *One int. set.*