

Under The Floorboards
An Adaptation of Edgar Allen Poe's The Tell-Tale Heart
By Dana Hall

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Synopsis: Under the Floorboards is an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's Tell-Tale Heart that depicts the internal struggle to escape patriarchal constraints. The narrator seeks deliverance from the paternal surveillance, that has dominated and abused its privilege for far too long.

Cast:

3 female or non-binary persons

Characters:

Note: The role of the narrator is divided into three parts. The parts should be depicted as parts of the same person. The narrator is female and/or non-binary.

Narrator 1: ID- The id is the primitive and instinctive component of personality.

Presentation: Primitive tatters and/or sexual

Narrator 2: EGO- The ego works by reason it is the mediator between the chaos of ID and the hyper- Morality of SuperEgo.

Presentation: Regular, everyday attire

Narrator 3: SUPEREGO- The superego strives for perfection and it believes it is the ultimate morality, almost narcissistic.

Presentation: Pristine & proper

*The parts are divided to help with staging as they are major shifts in the plot. This show is meant for your own artistic interpretation and welcomes creative and symbolic changes.

At Rise: We see the three parts of self.

Staging Note: They appear together on the stage but do not acknowledge each other unless stated in stage directions. They wear the same color of clothing or have the same accessories but in 3 different styles. (Open interpretation)

PART 1: Introduction. *Narrator 1 we hear the building paranoia. Narrator 2 plays the neutral middle ground/flat affect/matter-of-fact. Narrator 3 acts as a reporter with eerie calmness and at times a twinge of delight.*

NARRATOR 1: They'll tell you I'm crazy-

NARRATOR 2: That I've lost my mind-

NARRATOR 3: That what I have to say is psychotic-

NARRATOR 2: But it's not.

NARRATOR 3: The truth takes many forms.

NARRATOR 1: I'm awake.

SPX: *We hear the heart beating at first faint but it grows with intensity.*

NARRATOR 3: I know what's right and what's wrong. My mind has never been more clear.

NARRATOR 1: It's *their* contagion that has contaminated me. It's *their* sickness that must be stopped/

NARRATOR 3: I've done what was necessary to cleanse myself.

NARRATOR 2: It makes perfect sense-

NARRATOR 1: Wait. (pause) Do you hear that? Listen?...

All three parts look for the sound of the heart before they all settle on the same location in the floor.

PART II: Explanation. *The narrator reveals what vexed them. They're trying desperately to explain why they did what they had to do.*

NARRATOR 1: The urge was building-

NARRATOR 2: *It* would follow me - trace my every move-

NARRATOR 1: My body was not my own and *it* had to end.

NARRATOR 3: You want an account of what happened?

(pause)

NARRATOR 3: (Cont) I can tell you in perfect detail so you'll see I'm not insane/

Cut heartbeat.

NARRATOR 1: It's insidious gaze-

NARRATOR 2: A predatory lens-

NARRATOR 1: It reduced me to nothingness in a single glance-

(Beat)

NARRATOR 1,2,3 in unison: The eye.

NARRATOR 2: What would happen if it was shut- forever?

NARRATOR 3: No more control/

NARRATOR 1: I would have freedom of my mind and body/

NARRATOR 2: I could live/

NARRATOR 1, 2, 3: I had no choice.

NARRATOR 3: If you had the strength you'd done the same.

PART III: Murder.

Narrator 1 steps downstage.

NARRATOR 1: I used what was at my disposal- disarming him with pleasantries, batting my eyes, taking careful account of my hips as I walk- I was a damsel in distress. I knew he would take the bait- what an ironic way to go. He assumed that I was no threat; he let his guard down. We became so close, it wasn't long before he gave me a key to his place.

I know what you think- I must hate this man to plot as I have. But that isn't the case- I didn't hate *him* it was what was attached to him—the eye. I could no longer bear it. It followed me throughout my life, starting as a little girl. It told me lies- that I was inferior- I needed to be submissive and quiet. Then as my body developed the lies were

more insidious- I was told I was responsible for men's reactions and advances. To 'cover-up or the consequences were mine.' It didn't just infect *me*- there's not one single female that doesn't know the poison I speak of- clutch your purse closer, carry your keys as weapons; we are trained to recognize that -gaze. (*maniacal laughing*) Yet- he didn't see me coming.

NARRATOR 1 is joined by 2 & 3 down stage on their lines.

SPX: Heartbeat returns it can be louder and softer at times.

NARRATOR 2: With him out of the way, I could settle the score. Surely, you've heard the saying an eye for an eye?

NARRATOR 1: As he slept I crept in beside his bed. I was so close I could feel him breathe and see his chest rise and fall.

NARRATOR 2: He must have sensed my presence because he jolted awake.

NARRATOR 1: My heart beat wildly as did his.

NARRATOR 2: A single streak of light from the window illuminated the eye/

NARRATOR 1: My body came online. My vision, my sense of hearing were like a lioness on the hunt/

NARRATOR 3: I scarcely even dared to breathe in those moments as I plastered myself to the wall/

NARRATOR 2: I was so close the black of the pupil, like obsidian, taunted me/

NARRATOR 3: I hid in the shadows until the right moment/

NARRATOR 2: A false sense of security washed over him as a neighbor's car door slammed. He must've told himself, *that* was the culprit- the reason he couldn't sleep.

NARRATOR 1: As he laid back down the rage inside me erupted - How dare he underestimate me!

NARRATOR 2: I leap on top of him/

NARRATOR 3: He went to scream/

NARRATOR 1: For a moment I could tell he recognized me.

NARRATOR 3: It was now or never. Me or him.

NARRATOR 2: He was strong but/

NARRATOR 1: the knife plunged into just the right spot

The next lines are overlapping.

NARRATOR 2: Over and/

NARRATOR 1: Over and/

NARRATOR 3: (*laughs*) over.

NARRATOR 1: Full of adrenaline his heart beats wildly/

NARRATOR 3: pushing more blood out from his wounds.

NARRATOR 2: All I could hear was the heart *still* beating...

All 3 NARRATORS cover their ears on NARRATOR 1's line. SPX: Heartbeat should be loud.

NARRATOR 1: It was pounding in my head/

In unison/overlapping holding ears NARRATOR 1,2,3: Get Out/get out

NARRATOR 1: Did it stop?

NARRATOR 2: Is it over?

NARRATOR 3: (*Happily*) He was dead! I was free!

NARRATOR 1: As a lioness divides her kill for her young/

NARRATOR 2: I took apart the man where he laid in bed.

NARRATOR 3: Ever so carefully I placed him part by part underneath the floorboards

NARRATOR 2: The sheets/

NARRATOR 1: knife/

NARRATOR 3: my clothing -

NARRATOR 2: everything stored under the planks with meticulous care.

PART III: The Interrogation

NARRATOR 1 & NARRATOR 2 will portray the police officers while still

remaining as 'parts of self.' No need for costume changes etc.

NARRATOR 3: I was so fatigued from my work I collapsed in a chair and dozed off.

NARRATOR 2: I was startled awake by a loud wrapping. Pounding so loud I grabbed my robe to investigate.

NARRATOR 1: Could I be dreaming?

NARRATOR 1: (fear) How could his heart still be beating?

NARRATOR 3: (amused) But it wasn't the *man* (giggle) it was the door.

SFX: Door knocking aggressively

NARRATOR 1: (fear) Who could be here at this hour? It was still dark.

NARRATOR 2: (rationalizing) I had nothing to fear my deeds were done and packed away. Everything was washed and set so perfect not even his discerning eye would notice a thing out of place.

NARRATOR 1: I peeked out the window and it was the police!

NARRATOR 3: I calmed myself quickly. If they had any suspicion I would simply lie.

NARRATOR 1: I'd tell them I woke from a frightful dream/

NARRATOR 3: and stumbled to the sink to get a glass of water.

NARRATOR 2: What if they ask for him?

NARRATOR 3: I know!

NARRATOR 1: I'm housesitting. Yes, that's it.

NARRATOR 2: Alone, in this big old house surely they would understand how one's mind could play tricks.

NARRATOR 3: I grabbed a robe and hurried down the stairs and let in my guests.

NARRATOR 3: How can I help you, officers?

NARRATOR 1: Sorry to bother you, ma'am.

NARRATOR 2: A neighbor coming home from work said they heard a scream.

NARRATOR 3: Oh dear. How alarming!

NARRATOR 1: Would you happen to know anything about that?

NARRATOR 3: Me? I-I-

NARRATOR 2: Do you live here Miss?

NARRATOR 3: No, I'm housesitting.

NARRATOR 2: For a Mr. Anderson? Timothy Anderson is that correct?

NARRATOR 3: Yes, he's away on business and asked that I take in the mail and keep an *eye* on the place.

NARRATOR 3 breaks the fourth wall and talks to the audience.

NARRATOR 3: (Cont) I know it was funny - eye on the place- I realized the words as they left my mouth. I tried not to giggle.

NARRATOR 2: (To Narrator 3) We must control ourself - and not come undone.

NARRATOR 1: Is it possible for us to come in and do a quick look around? You know, make these neighbors happy and all.

NARRATOR 3: Of course, where are my manners -come on in.

NARRATOR 2: Nice place, isn't it. They don't make them like this anymore, do they?

NARRATOR 1: So empty, but well-kept Mr. Anderson must do well for himself.

NARRATOR 3: I don't remember what I said. I just smiled. I didn't want to commit to anything they could hold me to.

NARRATOR 1: (Mouthing) How long will you be in town?

NARRATOR 2: (Mouthing) Can we get your first and last name?

NARRATOR 3: I saw their mouths move but I couldn't hear what they were saying.

We hear the heartbeat again.

NARRATOR 1:(Mouthing) Ma'am. Ma'am- are you ok?

NARRATOR: 2: (Mouthing) We have some questions for you.

NARRATOR 3 smiles in a way that looks almost painful as she looks around for the sound.

NARRATOR 3: Where is it coming from?

NARRATOR 1: What? Where is what coming from?

NARRATOR 3: Ohh No! No. No. No.

NARRATOR 1: Are you ok? Is there someone here with you?

NARRATOR 3: Ha! You can hear it. I knew you could!

NARRATOR 2: Hear what?

NARRATOR 3: Where is it? WHERE!?

All 3 look around and then their gaze follows NARRATOR 3 up to the ceiling. The bedroom is above them. NARRATOR 1 and 2 then stare at NARRATOR 3 who is talking to the heartbeat above her.

NARRATOR 3: (to the ceiling) I KILLED YOU! YOU ARE NO MORE! (*grabbing ears*) Why does it not stop?

(To NARRATOR 1 &2) You knew- you knew the whole time you were trying to make me go mad- well I'm perfectly sane! Yes, I slit his throat and put him in the floorboards. I timed it all out perfectly. Then I slit his throat. I cut him up where he slept and put him in the floorboards. You wouldn't believe how much blood was inside him. I took care to clean my hands see! I was meticulous! Go- LOOK! Go!

NARRATOR 1 reaches for NARRATOR 3.

NARRATOR 3: Get off me!

NARRATOR 2 reaches for NARRATOR 3.

NARRATOR 3: Let me go!

Being held back by NARRATOR 1 & NARRATOR 2 as if she is being arrested she fights to free herself as she delivers the last line.

NARRATOR 3: (Happy mixed with tears) I am free! I'm free! He's gone.

A beat then NARRATOR 1, 2, 3 return to how they opened the show and a repeat of the beginning happens.

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NARRATOR 2: That I've lost my mind-

NARRATOR 3: That what I have to say is psychotic-

NARRATOR 2: But it's not.

NARRATOR 3: The truth takes many forms.

-End Play-