



Read Rhyme Repeat

The Tell Tale Heart

Theater Adaptation
by Jill Craddock

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Rhyming Reader's Theater Adaptation by Jill Craddock

Characters

OFFICER 1 (Lead officer)
OFFICER 2
OFFICER 3
SUSPECT

Setting is the bedroom of an old man who has vanished mysteriously. SUSPECT is sitting alone.

OFFICER 1

That kid? He could be the last person the old man saw.

OFFICER 2

But he's still innocent, in the eyes of the law.

OFFICER 3

That's right! This is America! He's innocent 'til proven guilty.
Land of the brave, home of the free.

OFFICER 2

It's land of the free, home of the brave.

OFFICER 3

It is not. You said—

OFFICER 1

You two, behave!
Show some class!
A man is dead. Stop being so crass.

OFFICER 2

You don't know he's dead.

SUSPECT

He's not in his bed.

OFFICER 3

He's an invalid. Where else in the world would he be?

OFFICER 2

Miracle cure?

OFFICER 1

You're an imbecile.

OFFICER 3

Exactly. See what I mean?

OFFICER 1

You're an imbecile, too. Both of you.
You, chewed up gum. And you and old shoe.
But put you together, you still don't make a gumshoe.

OFFICER 2

Easy for you to sit back and criticize.
You've got to give us just one clue. Because otherwise,
This case is beyond all reason and rhyme.
And we're frittering away the taxpayer's time.

OFFICER 3

Right. The guy was nearly a hundred years old.
It was most likely just his time to go.
No one noticed whether he lived or died.

SUSPECT

Then what difference does it make when it happened, or where, or why?

OFFICER 1

Hey, Officer Slick and Officer Sentimental.
Investigate this scene. Look for clues, however elemental.
Do all that you can. Don't do your work halfway.

OFFICER 2

We will figure this out, fair or foul play..

OFFICER 3

It's odd. Today is my dear old dad's birthday.
If something like this ever happened to him—
Yes! We will scrutinize the scene, no matter how grim.

OFFICER 2

What about this kid, sir? Should he take the fall?

OFFICER 1

We'll interrogate him and then decide.
That's justice at work. Stop trying to stall.
Remember your oath and show some personal pride.

OFFICER 3

Wait! He's right! Who is this kid? The old man's grandson?
'Cause he sure hasn't said. Could he be a hired gun?

OFFICER 1

From grandson to hired gun, that's quite a leap.
Now you see why the burden of proof is so steep.
Let's question him. I don't plan to be here 'til midnight.

OFFICER 2

Fine. Just be sure we do it right.

OFFICER 1

Kid, tell me about your relationship with the decease—
I mean, with the missing gentleman.

SUSPECT

It's simple. I loved him.

OFFICER 3

Of course you did! Was he your—? Were you his—?

SUSPECT

I made sure he had everything he wanted to eat.

OFFICER 1

But how did you meet?
And did you argue recently?

SUSPECT

No! He has never wronged me.

OFFICER 2

Let me at him!
Kid, you took care of the man? So, I bet you're in for a piece of this empire.

SUSPECT

For his gold and possessions, I have no desire.

OFFICER 1

Help us out here. You don't want to be implicated in this crime.

SUSPECT

However I can help you, I'll certainly try...

OFFICER 3

Hey, kid. You're getting quite pale. Do you think you're in shock?

SUSPECT

I am not. But I know, if I could, I would turn back the clock.

OFFICER 1

Is that right? And what would that serve?

SUSPECT

The chime grates on my nerves.
It's so very loud. It's about to sound any second now.

OFFICER 1

The chime is what's bothering you, presently?

OFFICER 3

Not the loss of the old man you loved so dearly?

SUSPECT

What can I do about him? But the clock...
If I could, all those bells would henceforth cease.

(Clock chimes very softly.)

Aaaargghh! Who can suffer that terrible din?

OFFICER 2

Is it me? Am I losing my hearing?

OFFICER 3

I, too, hear hardly a thing.

OFFICER 2

Maybe off in the distance? The sound of the church bell?

SUSPECT

Are you all three mad? That clatter clangs from the bowels of Hell.
It torments me every fifteen, then thirty, then sixty minutes.
There's no purpose, no point, no benefit to it.

OFFICER 1

If you say so, kid. But what about birds? Out the window, I see a vulture of death.
Birds have a sixth sense. He flew here on behalf of a man's last breath.
The bird suspects that the old man's not missing—the gentleman's dead!

SUSPECT

One vulture? A flock! I can hear their wings flailing; they fill me with dread.
You'll excuse me while slip off this chair and hide under my bed.

OFFICER 1

A flock? It's just one. And it's flown off toward the sun.
Are you all right? Do you need someone to stay with you, son?
Your mother? Father? Someone we can call?

SUSPECT

No. I'm fine. Why would you ask? I need no one at all.

OFFICER 2

It's not every day you see someone cross the floor in a crawl.

SUSPECT

Under my bed is the only place I can get some relief
From the horrible noises that give me no peace.
There is no pill, potion, herb, or elixir
That will still me out of my stir.

OFFICER 1

So we infer. Tell us more, if you would, about this malady
That forces you to crawl on your belly in front of us three.

SUSPECT

It's no one's fault—so my mother said when she died—
That I can hear her angel wings flutter at a distance of ten miles.
The harp of heaven reaches me with jagged electricity.
When St. Peter opens the pearly gates, it creaks so loud I can't help listening.

OFFICER 3

You can hear what is happening in Heaven?
Am I understanding you quite clear?

SUSPECT

Not only in Heaven, but also here.

OFFICER 1

The bells. The birds. St. Peter's gate. Is that the size of it?

SUSPECT

Also Hell, which is an earsplitting cesspit.

OFFICER 2

Is that so? What else is happening in that head of yours?
We'd love for you to tell us more.

SUSPECT

Besides the hearing, most of what I see is an eyesore.
Every small blemish and imperfection offends me to the core.

OFFICER 3

Kid, you're not so perfect—

OFFICER 1

Hold on, I want to hear this.
Tell us what you see. What makes you tick?

SUSPECT

I'm easily stirred. It's how I live.
I'm an artist, and I'm terribly, terribly... sensitive.
Your badges, for instance, blind me.
And you, sir, your right nail is longer than your left:
Look at your pinkies.

OFFICER 3

Well, you're some kind of freak!

OFFICER 1

No, let's listen to what he has to say. Let him speak.

SUSPECT

The curtains never close exactly in the center.
You tracked in bits of twigs and grass when you entered.

OFFICER 1

Sorry about that. Where do you mean?

SUSPECT

Where do I mean? These! There almost small trees. Can't you see?
(Picks up nearly invisible twigs)

OFFICER 3

So, your man, who is missing—or dead—he must have been quite tidy, quite neat.
For you to bear to be near him, he could not miss a beat.

SUSPECT

A beat?

OFFICER 2

You know, he stayed right on the track.

(Rhythmic tapping)

Hup one, hup two, hup three. . . .

SUSPECT *(Panicked)*

What's that?!

OFFICER 3

Easy, kid. Like in the army. You know. A military march.
You must run a tight ship. Ship shape. No sloughing off.

OFFICER 2

Sound off! One, two!

OFFICER 3

Sound off! Three four!

SUSPECT

NO MORE!

I understand. I know why you're here.
I'm not the only one who can hear.

OFFICER 1

We can't hear like you can, kid.
But if we did. . . .

OFFICER 3

I bet it was a job and a half to take care of that old man.
I couldn't do it. Day in and day out. Not too many people can.

SUSPECT

Bringing him food wasn't much of a burden to bear.
He wasn't some stranger.
I did—I do care.

OFFICER 1

I know you do.
You did.
Of course.
And this man, did he have the same sensitivity?

SUSPECT

No. He could barely see.

OFFICER 1

He was blind?

SUSPECT

Not blind. He had one vulture's eye.

OFFICER 1

Vulture's eye? Describe it to me.

SUSPECT

Pale blue, covered with film, so he couldn't see.
It made my blood freeze.
The very air around him was lowered by ten degrees.

OFFICER 2

Why are they talking about the old guy's eye?

OFFICER 3

I don't know. I hardly see why.
Old people never have 20/20 vision.
Where are the witnesses we need to solve this case with precision?

OFFICER 1

We're going to go. We'll talk to the neighbors.
If we need you again, be where we can find you.

SUSPECT

That will be fine.

OFFICER 1

Oh. Just another moment of your time.

OFFICER 2

We're waiting right here.

OFFICER 3

Ready to close this case that's so unclear.

(Begins to tap foot impatiently)

OFFICER 1

Is something wrong, son?

SUSPECT

Why do you ask?

OFFICER 1

Your face.

SUSPECT

I know you can hear it. Let me explain. I heard a scream.
The simple explanation is that I was having a horrible dream.
I have no reason to wish this man dead. I wanted him peacefully in his bed.
I took care of him every night until he retired.

OFFICER 1

I bet you were delighted when he closed that vulture's eye.

SUSPECT

Don't speak about that eye!

OFFICER 2

I didn't expect that reply.

OFFICER 3

Would you say this old man had an evil eye?
Did he have eyes in the back of his head?

SUSPECT

He's dead!

OFFICER 2

Was he always watching you? With his naked eye?

SUSPECT *(tormented)*

Why? Why?

OFFICER 1

Tell me more about his eye.

OFFICER 3

I'll tell you something, buddy. I've had it up to here.
(Gestures to eyeballs)

No vulture eyes, blue, cloudy, or clear.

OFFICER 1

(Taps his pen repeatedly)

Just let me take down your information.
We keep it on file at the station.

SUSPECT

The pounding. Your foot, the pen, the clock.
No matter what you do, the pounding won't stop.

OFFICER 3

The guy can hear any type of sound.
He's got the hearing of a bloodhound.

OFFICER 2

That's smell.

OFFICER 3

Dogs also have an excellent sense of—whatever.

OFFICER 1

Both of you, stop! No more being clever.

SUSPECT

(Lowers his ear to the floor)

I hear it louder ... louder! LOUDER!

OFFICER 2

He's got the ear of a Mozart.

OFFICER 3

Mozart was deaf.

OFFICER 2

That was Beethoven.

SUSPECT

(Tearing up the floor)

Stop... that... noise... Stop... that... pulsing... Stop... that... pounding... Stop... that... beating... heart.

OFFICER 1

It seems we've been standing atop the dear departed from the start.

(OFFICER 3 handcuffs SUSPECT.)