2004

Mystery at the Old Fort

Hilary Barnett

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Reviewer: Hilary Barnett
Reading Level: Young Adult
Rating: Dependable
Genre: Play; Detective and mystery plays; Historical plays; Humorous plays;
Subject: Ghosts--Juvenile drama; Indians--Juvenile drama; Drama--Reviews;
Theme: Things aren’t always what they seem, in fact they rarely are.
Production Requirements: Stage is set in the interior of an old stone fort. Living room (as part of/inside the stone fort), and a passage-way that can be done in front of the proscenium curtain or in front of screens set up inside the fort setting. (See suggested floor plan for living room). Many props needed (included in script).
Acts: 3
Run Time: 2 hours
Characters: 11 (4M-young-adult, 1M-Old Indian, 1M-age 13) (1F-middle-aged, 1F-young-adult, 1F-age 11, 1F-age 8) 1 live dog.
Cast: The dog will be the only concern. Cast for young adults by adults and children.
Time Period: Northern New York, 1943

A family and their maid visit their aunt, find her house empty, and decide to stay in the house. They are spooked by old Native American ghost stories that an officer guarding the house tells them. The maid, Lizzie, begs to leave but stays because the family does not want to go. Dick, the young boy in the family, seeks adventure by disobeying the rules and going down into the basement. The old Indian chief, Charley, scares everyone but is only trying to unfold the mystery at the old fort. Through a series of disobedient acts Dick and Charley discover the culprit to be Dr. Hammond who is working on a government experiment that must not be disturbed or known by any outsiders, and that is why the house is guarded.

The play has a nice tempo and creates the needed suspense to engage an audience. There are specific block notes, prop notes, and acting notes within the script which are important to the plot progression. However, the ending is thrown together and is awkward. Since Dick continually talks about spies and government officials the mystery is obvious. The dialogue makes the characters engaging and is the driving force behind the plot. Yet, the characters are uneven. The maid, Lizzie, is cartoon-like while the other characters are portrayed as normal people with typical superstitions. Lizzie may bring comedic relief, but she is too over-the-top for a suspenseful mystery and takes away from the plot development. As well, there are some interesting and possibly harming stereotypes and allusions to historical events that an older crowd will be mature enough to handle and understand.