

# **The Gruesome, Gory, Grotesque Stories of Edgar Allan Poe**

*by  
Sam Kuglen*

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## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Edgar Allan Poe, his wife Virginia, and his editor Griswold are frozen in time, endlessly repeating the moment of Virginia's death. Annie and Owen, two contemporary teenagers, enter the condemned building haunted by the trio and get locked in the room where they are unable to see the specters. Annie, with the help of Edgar and Virginia, starts looking for a lost letter Griswold hid from Poe, which keeps Edgar and Virginia apart. Frightened at first, Owen soon joins the search, motivated by the money the letter might bring. Meanwhile, Griswold watches the proceedings, comfortable in the knowledge that the letter he has hidden will never be found. As the day breaks and the wreckers come to destroy the building, Annie and Owen are released from the room. As they leave, Annie takes an oval portrait of Virginia, from which falls the lost letter, uniting the spirits of Poe and Virginia and condemning Griswold to a fiery eternity. The play skillfully interweaves three of Poe's best known stories, "The Black Cat," "The Tell-tale Heart" and "The Purloined Letter," with comedy, fantasy and mystery. The play received its world premiere production at The Serendipity Theatre Company in Los Angeles.

## **PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE**

The telling of parts of the Poe stories may be offstage or done in a highly stylized manner to make the horror and violence easier to accept for a younger audience. If acted out onstage, place the actors behind material that is lighted from the rear, so that all we see is shadows projected on the screen in front of the audience. These sequences should be a seamless telling of the story between the two student characters and the three ghost characters.

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(3 m, 2 w)*

**EDGAR ALLAN POE:** 35, pale and ghostly-looking. A sharp wit and satiric sense of humor. The writer of the dramatized stories. Longs to be reunited with his wife. A sad, lonely figure. He also plays the Husband in "The Black Cat," the Policeman in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and Dupin in "The Purloined Letter." He can see Annie and Owen, but not Virginia or Griswold.

**VIRGINIA CLEMM POE:** 20, Poe's frail young wife who died before her time. She, too, longs to be reunited with her beloved. She plays the Wife in "The Black Cat" and the Old Man in "The Tell-Tale Heart." She can see Annie and Owen, but not Poe or Griswold.

**GRISWOLD:** 35, Poe's editor and tormentor in the afterlife. He is able to see all the participants in the play and loves to manipulate the situation when he can. He plays the Policeman in "The Black Cat," the Madman in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and the Inspector in "The Purloined Letter."

**ANNIE:** 15, offbeat; "the weirdest girl in school." She is trying to solve the mystery of Poe's letter.

**OWEN FERGUSON:** 16, high school jock and practical joker. Doesn't know too much about Poe but develops an interest in him as the play progresses.

**TIME:** The present.

**PLACE:** A condemned apartment building in Fordham, NY.

**APPROXIMATE RUNNING TIME:** 70 - 75 minutes.

## ACT I

*(As the play begins, we see what looks to be the rundown room of an old apartment building. The windows are partially boarded up and it appears that no one has been in the room for years. There are two or three doors at various points on the stage leading to other rooms, but perhaps they, too, give the suggestion of being boarded up. There is a bookcase on one wall. Sheets are draped over the few pieces of furniture. The only piece uncovered is an old table, with a pitcher, bowl and vase. The vase has a dried red rose in it. The feel is of mustiness. There are two or three pictures on the wall: one, the portrait of a young woman in an oval frame. After a moment, we hear a man's pitiful moan. EDGAR materializes on to the set. He is obviously other-worldly, with an ashen complexion and clothes of the 1840s. Is he real or is he a ghost? He walks over to one of the windows and throws it open, in spite of it being boarded up. We see it is twilight. He looks at the faded, water-spotted portrait of the woman in the oval frame, then walks over to the table, takes a handkerchief from his pocket, pours water over it, then walks over to a sofa. The sheet mysteriously comes off of the sofa to reveal VIRGINIA, the woman in the oval-framed portrait. She, too, is other-worldly looking, dressed in clothes of the 1840s. She doesn't move or acknowledge Edgar as he approaches.)*

EDGAR: Rest easy, Virginia. I've brought you some water to cool your brow. *(He dabs the handkerchief on her forehead.)* Please, my love, wake just once more, look at me, smile for me ... please. Forgive me for bringing you here, causing you this pain. Had I known you would come to this, I would have never come to this horrible place. *(Calling off.)* Annie! Annie!! Some smelling salts to rouse the missus! At once!! Foolish girl, where is she? *(Looks at Virginia.)* "The angels, not half so happy in heaven, Went envying her and me: - Yes! that was the reason *(As all men know in this kingdom by the sea.)* That the wind came out of a cloud, chilling and killing my ..."

EDGAR: *(Cont'd.)* Virginia!! *(Crosses to her; beat.)* Annie, where are you, girl? *(He takes a small mirror out of his pocket and holds it over her mouth.)* No breath. *(HE feels her hand.)* She is cold. So cold. *(Woefully.)* It's all my fault. *(Quietly.)* You needn't come now, Annie, the missus is ... She is gone. For eternity. And I will never know if she forgave my selfishness, my hard heart. I stole her youth and beauty, I wanted it all for myself and I let it slip through my fingers. I am doomed! *(He exits.)*

*(There is a moment of silence as we look on Virginia.)*

VIRGINIA: *(As if awakening.)* Edgar? Mr. Poe? I feel much better. I'm well at last. I know I am. You don't have to take care of me anymore. Mr. Poe?? Edgar?

EDGAR: *(Offstage.)* Annie, we must prepare the missus' body for burial. *(Edgar reenters. He returns to the place where Virginia's body had been, but she is at another place on stage, watching him.)* Beloved, we must bury you as quickly as possible. Your body will not keep. *(He begins to "wrap" her body.)*

VIRGINIA: Mr. Poe, I'm here. Right here. We can be together at last.

EDGAR: Annie, go find Mr. Griswold and tell him what's happened, then ask Mr. Goodbody to come at once and take her away. I cannot bear to have her here for one moment more!

VIRGINIA: *(Questioning.)* I'm dead? *(Understanding.)* I'm dead. And Mr. Poe is ...

EDGAR: Goodbye, my sweet.

VIRGINIA: But, I'm here. I'm here with you, Mr. Poe. We're here together, we've been reunited. Where's Griswold? He's your friend. He'll tell you. He has the letter I wrote to you as I became ill.

EDGAR: We'll meet on the other side.

VIRGINIA: This is the other side.

EDGAR: Please forgive me, Virginia. I will never love another the way I love you. *(To some imagined attendant.)* You may take her now.

*(HE watches as he "sees" her body being taken out. We see a DOOR open, hear FOOTSTEPS, then see the door close.)*

EDGAR: *(Cont'd.)* She is gone forever. I am doomed! *(He disappears into the wall.)*

VIRGINIA: No. No. We're to be together forever, just as you said. Why can't you hear me?

*(SHE lies down on the couch and resumes her opening position. The WINDOW blows open, FOG rolls in and GRISWOLD enters. He walks over to the table and pours himself a drink. From offstage, we hear a moan and EDGAR reenters, repeating exactly his movement from the beginning of the play.)*

GRISWOLD: Ah! Edgar, how delightful to see you again. And Mrs. Poe, you're looking as beautiful as ever. Pity you're both dead! But then, I am, too. *(Laughs at his joke.)* Since I caused your endless pain, I must watch the result of my little prank over and over. You see, Mr. Poe, I couldn't resist causing you eternal anguish. It was all part of my plan to spur you on to write stories even more gruesome and grotesque than the ones you wrote before your beloved Virginia died. For my own benefit, of course. So, I stole the last words of affection from your beloved Sissy and denied you, Mr. Poe, a final word of love from your cherished. I found it rather bizarre at first, that Edgar Allan Poe, the master of the strange and odd coincidence, wouldn't even consider so obvious a ploy on my part, but I soon came to revel in my genius, my ability to outwit the master. And now, Mr. and Mrs. Poe, we, all three of us, must relive my little faux pas unendingly, each in our own little universe, caught in that moment in time, unable to communicate with one another. Rest assured, the letter still exists! Right in this very room!! In the most obvious of places. Oh, to be sure, if the letter is ever found, both your spirits would finally rest easy and I would go to ... well, let's just say I would no longer have the pleasure of watching the two of you dream endlessly of eternal union.

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