

# The Lamentable Facts of the Horrible Case of the Man Who Read Too Much Poe.

By Scott McAteer

Characters:

Arthur: A lodger who has lately read too much of the work of Edgar Allan Poe.

Val: His Landlady, a smoker.

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*NOTE: SHOULD BE PLAYED FOR LAUGHS AND FOR SCARES. NOT FOR DRAMA. THE MAN IS HAMMY AND MELODRAMATIC, VAL IS BROAD AND BOGAN. MOST OF WHAT THE MAN SAYS IS TO THE AUDIENCE*

*THE MAN, ON STAGE, WITH A BOOK, ON A TABLE. IT'D BE NEAT IF THERE WAS A DOOR OR SOMETHING TO SCRATCH ON.*

THE MAN

It should have been a black cat! That would have made sense. As dark as plutonian night with a manner to match; that would be a cat worthy of such a tortured story.

But I'm getting ahead of myself...

I am going to tell you a tale of terrible crimes and terrible revenge, you might think me mad, yet mad I am not.

About myself; I am a man of simple tastes: a room, a little food, peace, quiet, and books; these were my only worldly needs. Sadly, I was to be denied even these simple pleasures.

*Beyond all things, the study of gothic horrors gave me great delight; not from any ill-advised admiration of their eloquent madness, but from the ease with which my habits of rigid thought*

*enabled me to detect their foolishness.* I could not be swayed into a crazed mindset. Not I.

MAN

My landlady was an odious woman, (*Val enters*) she bore about her the marks of a hoary old age, her knees hobbled with infirmity; her shoulders were bent double with decrepitude, her shriveled skin rattled in the wind, her voice... harsh, broken, and hollow.

A woman of foul habits and worse manners; privacy and peace were but faded memories of a better time. She-

*VAL STARTS BANGING ON THE DOOR.*

VAL

Arthur!

MAN

She would bang on my door when I was trying, as I am now, to compose my thoughts.

VAL

Who are you talking to in there? You know you're not allowed visitors.

MAN

My thoughts turned to-

VAL

Arthur! Have you got a visitor in there?

THE MAN

No, I-

VAL  
You're not allowed visitors

MAN  
I don't have-

VAL  
Visitors aren't allowed.

MAN  
I don't have visitors!

VAL  
Well who are you talking to?

MAN  
I'm soliloquising.

VAL  
You'll go blind.

MAN  
I'm talking to myself.

VAL  
Oh. First sign of madness that.

MAN  
No. That would be talking to you.

VAL  
Next you'll be talking to the cat.

*(TO AUDIENCE)*

MAN

The cat! In truth it was not my landlady's habits or her manner that drove me to the fateful deed, it was her cat.

*REVEAL CAT; IT WOULD BE GREAT IF THIS WAS A PLUSH TOY CAT THAT THE MAN PULLS OUT OF SOMEWHERE AND PUTS ON THE TABLE.*

It should have been a black cat. Sleek and evil like the night. But it wasn't. It was orange. And fluffy. And fat. It was called "Muffin".

And it liked to go outside.

*VAL DOES THE SCRATCHING NOISE OF A CAT AT A DOOR; THE MAN TAKES THE CAT AND PUTS IT "OUTSIDE".*

MAN

And it liked to come in.

*VAL DOES THE SCRATCHING NOISE OF A CAT AT A DOOR; THE MAN TAKES THE CAT AND PUTS IT "INSIDE".*

MAN

And it like to come back in...

*VAL DOES THE SCRATCHING NOISE OF A CAT AT A DOOR; THE MAN TAKES THE CAT AND PUTS IT "OUTSIDE".*

MAN

And it like to come back in again.

*VAL DOES THE SCRATCHING NOISE OF A CAT AT A DOOR; THE MAN TAKES THE CAT AND PUTS IT "OUTSIDE".*

MAN

And it liked to do these things at all hours of the day or night.

And whenever it decided to do either it would herald its choice with a scratch, scratch scratching at the door. (*Val scratches as he says this*)

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

VAL

(*Off*) Let Muffin in will you in Arthur, I'm having a cup of tea.

MAN

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

VAL

(*Off*) Let Muffin in Arthur, I'm watching Bert.

MAN

Scratch, scratch, scratch.

VAL

(*Off*) Let Muffin in Arthur, I've got a male friend over.

MAN

Always; scratch, scratch, scratching.

MAN

For what happened next I neither expect, not solicit belief. You may think me mad, yet mad I am not.

I thought it my lot to be the gatekeeper to that infernal beast.

Until one night, while I sat dozing...  
The beast himself came to me proposing

Proposing a solution to that wretched chore  
Quoth the Muffin: "Get a cat door."

MAN

He wanted a cat-door. An admirable solution that would solve all our problems; but the proposition of a cat-door was not well met by my landlady.

VAL

There'll be a draft!

MAN

Nor was the compromise of a litter-box,

VAL

They smell of poop!

MAN (TO AUDIENCE)

It was then that we determined that she must be killed.

I challenge you to have a conversation with a cat and not be swayed. Their eyes have an eager and uneasy meaning.

As will all just endeavors, opportunity soon presented itself. I'd become a student of mesmerism, through a book I'd bought on the internet, and she happened to remark on that fateful day:

VAL

I've been thinking of quitting smoking.

MAN (TO AUDIENCE)

Val was a smoker, a noxious habit I'd managed to rid myself of years before, often times she'd say to me:

VAL

Why don't you join me for a fag, luv?

MAN (TO AUDIENCE)

I only smoked when I was tense and I quit years ago.

VAL

Go on... You'll look cool, like me.

MAN (TO VAL)

Take up smoking again? That's the last thing I'd do?

VAL

Well, if you can quit, I can too.

MAN

You should let me help you, I've been studying hypnotism.

VAL

Ooh.

MAN

The conquest of the body's craving through the power of the mind's power.

VAL

Sounds a bit fruity, but I'll give it a go. Can't do any harm.

*MAN LOOKS AT THE AUDIENCE.*

MAN (SLIGHTLY TO AUDIENCE)

*(Softly)* Of course not.

VAL

Why'd you say it like that?

MAN

What?

VAL

All ominous-like. As though it was going to do me harm.

MAN

Just get in the chair.

MAN (TO AUDIENCE)

I commenced the technique that I was sure would prove most effectual in subduing her; I took from my pocket an unbroken silver cord; hanging from it was a golden ball.

Swinging the pendulum gently while directing my gaze entirely into her right eye.

MAN (TO VAL)

Watch the pendulum. Watch its motion. Soothing motion

VAL

Oooh...

MAN (TO VAL)

Relax. Relax...

MAN (TO AUDIENCE)

After several moments I perceived unequivocal signs of the mesmeric influence.

VAL

*(Sitting up)*. Are you sure? I don't feel any different.

MAN (TO AUDIENCE)

I was not satisfied with this and continued the administrations.

*HE FIXES VAL WITH A PENETRATING STARE.*

MAN

You are getting sleepy.

VAL

I am getting sleepy.

MAN

Very sleepy...

VAL

Very sleepy...

MAN

*(To audience)* At last she was within my grasp.

VAL

I was within your grasp.

MAN

That's a very old joke.

VAL

It's a very old joke...

MAN

*(To Val)* I'm soliloquizing.

VAL

You're pretentious.

MAN

And then as she lay in a trance, a stupor, I put the next step of my plan into effect. A simple, undetectable method of suffocation; peaceful and

undetected... *(During this bit, he holds a pillow over her face, and then he drops the pillow).*

VAL

[Snore!]

MAN

But that didn't work, so I hit her with a brick

*(BRICK FROM BEHIND THE CHAIR (OR SOMEWHERE) HIT WITH SOUND EFFECT- BY HITTING A HIGH BACKED CHAIR). HE DRAGS VAL OFF AS HE SAYS:*

MAN

In the back yard, I dug a hole. Six foot wide by three feet deep. It probably should have been the other way around... I threw her in and filled the hole with all its dirt, save for enough to fill the cat's new litter box.

Later, when my bleak work was done. We sat by the fire; he purred, I read; there we sat, till my eyelids grew heavy and the letters on the page began to dance. I dozed, dozed even with the burden of murder on my soul.

I sat and I dozed and I dreamt. I dreamt of a fly trapped in a bottle. Why should I dream of a fly trapped in a bottle? Then another noise drew me out of my dream, a noise all too familiar, a noise I thought never to hear again.

*SCRATCHING*

I was awakened from my slumber by a scratch, scratch, scratching.

I was furious that Muffin had recanted on our deal; I sprang from my chair, upending my book, spilling my drink and knocking the cat from my lap... Knocking the cat from my lap...

*HE LOOKS TO THE DOOR, LOOKS TO THE CAT, LOOKS BACK TO THE DOOR*

THE MAN

I resolved that I had been dreaming; that the scratching was merely a part of my dream.

I determined to return to my book; but then I heard it again- scratch, scratch, scratching at the door. It was a loud scratching. Louder than a cat.

*THE RETURN*

MAN

I looked to the cat for answers. His mouth was silent, but its eyes told another story; a story called "Never Trust a Cat"

MAN

With quivering hand I turned the handle and opened the door... Oh, what horrors greeted me;

Her face wore a leaden hue, her eyes were utterly lustreless and the lips pulled back from her teeth in a rictus grin.

I opened the door and was greeted with a spectral vision of what was once my poor, foolish, landlady, skin pale, a smell as rank and odourous as the grave- so there were some things still the same- Her eyes were sunk deep in their sockets;

those eyes told a story; a story of murderous  
range, and my impending doom.

Her hideous face; caked with mud and dripping  
with blood. She opened her mouth and said:

VAL

*(Quite merrily)* Well, that didn't work. I still feel like  
a smoke. I'd go so far to say,

*CHILL, PAUSE, HER ASPECT CHANGES, BECOMES MENACING*

VAL

I could murder a cigarette. Care to join me?

MAN

From my own dry lips I heard a choked reply: (To  
Val) Take up smoking again? That's the last thing  
I'd... [do] (He trails off).

*HE LOOKS AT VAL; VAL LOOKS AT HIM, ANGRY AND MURDEROUS (BUT  
RESTRAINED).*

MAN (TO VAL)

I think I'll join you.

*HE GETS A CIGARETTE FROM HER PACKET, [TOSSES THE PACKET TO  
HER?] GOES TO LIGHT IT, PULLS THE CIGARETTE FROM HIS MOUTH  
AND SAYS:*

MAN

The end

*HE SLAMS THE BOOK. SNAP BLACKOUT  
END.*