

CLASSIC
a story with
timeless appeal

Drama

Edgar Allan Poe's

THE TELL-TALE

A story of
murder and
madness

BY MACK LEWIS

ALLAN DAVEY

Characters

Circle the character you will play.

*Starred characters are major roles.

***Stage Directors 1 & 2** (SD1, SD2)

Ravens 1, 2, 3, & 4

***All Ravens:** to be read by a group

***Villain:** the teller of the tale

***Old Man:** the villain's housemate

Heart

Officer

Sergeant

Constable

As You Read

Think about what makes this story suspenseful.

PROLOGUE

SD1: A small light appears on a dark stage, casting long shadows.

SD2: All is still until—

All Ravens (flying in): Caw, caw, caw!

Raven 1: Long ago, the master of bloodcurdling tales was a man named Edgar Allan Poe.

Raven 2: Poe wrote about murder and morgues . . .

Raven 3: Gargoyles and graveyards . . .

Raven 4: And this tale, about a man fallen into madness.

SD1: A thin, pale man steps from the shadows.

Villain: Madness? I am not mad.

All Ravens: Caw! Caw! Caw!

Villain: You do not believe me, I can tell. But it's no matter. I shall prove it to you.

SD2: Ravens fly around the stage—more and more of them—until the stage is filled with flapping wings.

SD1: When the stage clears, the man is gone.

SCENE 1

SD2: An old man sits in a big wooden bed.

SD1: A large raven is perched on the headboard. Three others sit on the footboard.

SD2: The old man is not, however, aware of the birds. It is as though they are invisible.

Old Man (weakly): Would you kindly bring me some tea?

Villain (cheerfully, offstage): Of course. I'll be right there, with the morning paper too.

Old Man (kindly): Thank you very much.

SD1: The villain walks in, carrying a tray.

Old Man: You do not look well today. Didn't you get any sleep last night?

Villain: I am fine, old man. If anything, my senses are especially keen.

Old Man: Is it a headache? Let me fix you something.

Villain: No, no. You just enjoy your tea.

All Ravens: Such a kindhearted old man.

Villain (to the audience): 'Tis too true. The old man had never done me harm. But he had this one sickly eye—pale blue with a hideous film over it. It was like the eye of a vulture. When it looked at me, my blood ran cold.

SD2: The villain turns his head back toward the old man.

Villain: So I made up my mind to kill him.

All Ravens: He made up his mind!

Villain: I was not crazy. It was his evil eye. It mocked me. It haunted me. I had to rid myself of THAT EVIL EYE!

SD1: He runs from the room. The ravens follow.

SCENE 2

SD2: The stage is dark and silent, save for gentle snoring.

Old Man (snoring): Sssssnnnuuhhh . . .

SD1: Slowly—ever so slowly—the door opens. The villain skulks into the room holding a lantern.

Villain (to the audience): Night after night, I crept into the old man's room.

All Ravens: Night after night, he shone a sliver of light upon the eye.

Villain: But every night, the eye was closed. So I waited. After all, it was not the old man who vexed me. It was his eye.

All Ravens: His evil eye!

Villain: On the eighth night—

SD2: The villain accidentally bumps into the dresser.

Old Man (sitting up): Who's there?

SD1: The villain freezes.

Villain: For an hour I stood still, hardly breathing. I sensed, all the while, the old man listening. And then . . .

Old Man (groaning): Ohhhhhhh . . .

Villain: It was the groan of mortal terror, a low stifled sound from the bottom of his soul.

All Ravens (groaning): Ohhhhhhh . . .

Villain: I shone my light upon the eye. And—

All Ravens: It was open!



Villain: Wide, wide open! It chilled the very marrow in my bones! And then I heard it.
Heart: Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump.
All Ravens: The beating of the old man's heart!
SD2: Eyes wide, mouth **agape**, the villain remains still.
Villain: The heart beat faster and faster.
All Ravens: Louder and louder.
Heart: Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump.
Villain: My rage boiled! I could stand it no longer!

I leapt.
All Ravens: Ahhhhhh!
Villain: Ahhhhhh!
Old Man: Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!
SD1: The stage goes dark. A few seconds pass.
SD2: Then a small light comes up on the villain.
Villain: I smiled when the deed was done. Yet for many minutes, the old man's heart beat on.
Heart: Thump-thump, thump-thump . . .
Villain: When finally it ceased, I examined the corpse. The old man was dead—stone dead.
Raven 1: It was over.
Raven 2: The heart was still.
Raven 3: The eye was closed forever.
Villain: The eye would trouble me no more.

SCENE 3

SD1: The lights come up to reveal a cozy parlor.
SD2: There is a loud knock on the door.
SD1: The villain hums lightly as he crosses the stage to the front door. Opening it, he finds three police officers.
Villain: Good morning, gentlemen.
Officer: There has been a complaint.
Sergeant: Your neighbors.
Constable: They complained.
Villain: Did they, now?
Officer: A scream was heard.
Sergeant: Like this: "Ahhhhhh!"
Constable: Yes: "Ahhhhhh!"
Villain: I see.
SD2: The villain smiles.
Villain: I must confess: The shriek was my own, uttered during a most distressing dream.
Officer: May we come in?
Sergeant: Look around?



WHY DO WE LOVE SCARY STUFF?

When we watch or read something scary, we feel a rush of energy. Our hearts beat faster, our breathing quickens, our palms sweat. We become focused on the moment, escaping the routine of our everyday lives and forgetting our worries for a time. We know deep down that we are not in any *actual* danger, so we experience the fear in a fun, safe way. A frightening story can also boost our confidence: We feel strong and proud for making it through to the end.

Constable: Investigate?
Villain: Yes, of course.
SD1: The villain opens the door. The men walk in.
Villain (to the audience): I was not worried, for I had concealed the body beneath the floorboards. No eye—not even his—could have detected anything. There was no stain, no blood. I had been too clever for that.
Officer: Who else lives here with you?
Sergeant: Yes, with whom do you live?
Constable: And why isn't he here?
Villain: Ah, the old man. He is off to the country for a bit of rest. Would you care for a look around his room?
Officer: We would.
Sergeant: Quite so.
Constable: Yes, please.
Villain: After you, then, gentlemen.

SCENE 4

SD2: The villain watches as the policemen examine the old man's bedroom.
SD1: Nothing seems out of place—except the four ravens

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perched on the old man's bed. But these no one sees.
Officer: Well, everything looks fine to me.
Sergeant: Nothing out of the ordinary.
Constable: Everything quite *within* the ordinary, I'd say.
Villain: Care to join me for a spot of tea before you go?
Officer: A spot of tea?
Sergeant: That would be lovely.
Constable: Yes, lovely.
SD2: The villain leaves the room.
Officer: Nice fellow.
Sergeant: Yes, quite.
Constable: Indeed.
Villain (returning with a tray): Here we are, gentlemen! *(to the audience)* Yes, I served them tea. For what had I to fear? I served them tea above the very spot where I had hidden the corpse!
Officer (sipping): Ah, this is fine tea.
Sergeant: They say tea is good for you.
Constable: English Breakfast is my favorite.
Villain (to the audience): I had fooled the officers well. Tell me, could a madman have done that?
All Ravens: But soon our villain wished them gone.
Raven 4: See how pale he has grown.
Raven 1: See how he fidgets.
Raven 2: See how he sweats.
Villain (to the audience): Why wouldn't they leave?
Officer: Lots of strange things happening these days.
Sergeant: People acting oddly.
Constable: Something's in the air.
Villain: Then there came a ringing in my ears.
All Ravens: A muffled buzzing sound.
Heart: Buzz . . . buzz . . . buzz . . .
Officer: The countryside must be nice this time of year.
Sergeant: Yes—peaceful, I'd say.
Constable: What with the fall foliage and all.

SD1: The villain looks around, searching for the noise.
Raven 3: It wasn't a buzzing at all. It was a ticking.
Heart: Tick, tick, tick . . .
Raven 4: Like that of a watch,
Raven 1: Or a clock,
Raven 2: Or a bomb.
SD2: The villain begins to pace.
Villain: They **blathered** on as if nothing was wrong!
Officer: A walk in the woods, why, it clears the mind.
Sergeant: Much like this tea.
Constable: Yes, it's good for the soul.
Heart: Thump-thump, thump-thump—
Villain: Couldn't they hear it?
SD1: The villain clutches his head and covers his ears.
Officer: Why do they call it "English Breakfast"?
Sergeant: Something to do with the English, I imagine.
Constable: Is there such a thing as English Lunch tea?
Heart: Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump.
Villain: Then it came to me. They knew! They were



Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) helped invent the horror genre. His stories are still popular today.

mocking me with their innocent smiles and sips of tea!
All Ravens: Oh, the agony!
Heart: Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump.
Officer: Well, we should be getting back to the station.
Sergeant: Yes. It's time to go.
Constable: Thank you for the tea, young man.
Villain: I can bear it no longer!
All Ravens: He could bear it no longer!
Heart: Thump-thump, thump-thump, thump-thump.
Villain: Cruel monsters, **dissemble** no more! I did it! I confess! Tear up the floor! Here! Here! It is the beating! It is the beating of the old man's hideous heart!
SD2: The ravens fly around the stage in a frenzy as the officers leap to their feet and rush toward the villain.
All Ravens: Caw, caw, caw!
SD1: The lights fade to black and all falls still. ●

WRITING CONTEST

In a well-organized paragraph, explain how the author creates a suspenseful mood in *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Support your ideas with text evidence. Send your paragraph to **POE CONTEST**. Five winners will get *Doll Bones* by Holly Black. See page 2 for details.

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