

*Loren Horrors*



# EDGAR ALLAN POE FINDS HIS KILLER

By

*Evan Baughfman*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes...*

*From everything that I've heard about genius ideas, they sound a lot like love. They both like to appear when you aren't looking for them and always in the least expected places. I guess a good gyro place would fit in that category too... I digress.*

*In Edgar Allan Poe Finds His Killer, Evan Baughfman quickly charms us with a story of Edgar Allan Poe stricken with a literary problem. Well, not only a literary problem; a really "shitty day". But just like the peculiar tendencies life possesses, this "shitty day" will turn out to be exactly what Mr. Poe needs. There truly is flecks of gold occasionally in the heaps of shit (Truly figurative. Please don't go shit-panning for gold).*

## **EDGAR ALLAN POE FINDS HIS KILLER**

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### **Synopsis:**

Suffering from writer's block, Edgar Allan Poe struggles to enjoy a day at the circus with his wife, Virginia, until he discovers the perfect way to end his new detective story, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

### **Character list:**

EDGAR ALLAN POE – *the famous author*  
VIRGINIA CLEMM POE – *his young bride*

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**“EDGAR ALLAN POE FINDS HIS KILLER”**

*(1841. At a circus, outside the Big Tent, calliope music plays. A sullen EDGAR ALLAN POE walks arm-in-arm with his beaming young wife, VIRGINIA.)*

VIRGINIA

*(pointing)* Look at it, Eddie! Amazing! How long do you suppose it took to piece together a tent of that size?

EDGAR

I'm not a seamstress, so I wouldn't know. I'm a master of the quill, not the sewing needle.

*(Edgar breaks away from Virginia to cover his ears.)*

This dreadful music...! The day calls for a funeral dirge, not this mind-numbing cheer.

VIRGINIA

Marching to the grave already? This early in the afternoon? And you're trying to bury me alongside you? Sorry, but I don't choose to be your long-suffering, morose companion.

EDGAR

Apologies, my dear, but I really should be at home being productive.

VIRGINIA

You haven't been productive in quite some time.

EDGAR

But today could be when words finally leap onto the page.

VIRGINIA

Let them jump over candlelight this evening, then, like nimble Jack. In the sunshine you are mine, Edgar Allan Poe.

EDGAR

Now I wish for a storm. A little lightning.

*(Virginia playfully punches his arm.)*

VIRGINIA

Is it really so terrible, spending time with your bride?

EDGAR

Only when she's so easily impressed by childish amusements.

*(Another playful punch from Virginia.)*

VIRGINIA

Imply I'm a child again, and you can put your pillow on your writing desk and sleep there, continuing to dream of fame and fortune.

EDGAR

I don't mean to be rude, but... Harlequins and trained animals, Virginia? They're frivolous distractions.

VIRGINIA

You need distractions, Eddie.

EDGAR

I need focus.

VIRGINIA

You need inspiration.

EDGAR

Yes, I do. But it's not here.

VIRGINIA

It could be.

EDGAR

It won't be.

VIRGINIA

I think you've fallen out of love.

EDGAR

Because I commented on clowns, you think my feelings for you are somehow diminished? You're what keeps me from drowning in the undercurrents of this precarious kingdom by the sea.

VIRGINIA

Silly boy, I speak of the love for your *craft*. You've told me before that storytelling comes from your heart. And you're no longer hearing that heartbeat.

EDGAR

One can't hear a heartbeat.

VIRGINIA

Come now. I've spent enough time with you for colorful language to also infect my tongue.

EDGAR

A disease most cruel.

VIRGINIA

The performers here... these artists... Their passion for their work is palpable. Open yourself up to their creativity... to their love... and steal some. Allow it to transform your heart's murmur into a roar.

EDGAR

You think bearing witness to pratfalls and juggling will somehow influence my fiction?

VIRGINIA

It's better than hoping a helpful voice will suddenly call out to you from behind the walls.

EDGAR

A clown, then, as my newest protagonist! Or better yet... as the villain!

VIRGINIA

No one would fear a clown, Eddie. Not even a child.

EDGAR

Don't you feel it, dear? Huzzah! Ideas and imagination permeating from the tent's very fabric! I can't wait to absorb the various wonders playing within!

*(The couple approaches an empty bench.)*

VIRGINIA

Let's sit.

EDGAR

But the answers to my problems can't wait a moment longer!

VIRGINIA

*(sitting)* Your sarcasm makes me weary. Sit, Eddie.

EDGAR

But the show—

VIRGINIA

We have time. Sit.

EDGAR

*(sitting also)* Now, what?

VIRGINIA

Tell me a story.

EDGAR

I've told you, there's nothing worth sharing. There hasn't been for months.

VIRGINIA

You notice these animals caged before us?

EDGAR

I'm not blind to the menagerie, Virginia. Nor am I impervious to the smell.

VIRGINIA

These beautiful, exotic beasts were placed here so that they could be seen. To catch a glimpse of these creatures from another world is a genuine treat, don't you think?

EDGAR

"Another world"? That yawning lion's from Earth. And so is the slumbering zebra.

VIRGINIA

You know what I mean.

*(She puts her head on Edgar's shoulder.)*

Your mind is a beautiful, exotic beast, Eddie. And even though you have it shackled inside some sort of cage of self-doubt, you can still catch glimpses of its brilliance, in the spaces between the steel bars. Share those with me, will you? The parts that can already be seen?

EDGAR

Believe me, your metaphors are more impressive than any bits of story I can share with you.

VIRGINIA

So, that brain of yours isn't a blank slate, then.

EDGAR

This brain of mine contains scribbles leading to nowhere. Beginnings without endings. Imagery missing narrative ties. Gibberish. Confusion.

VIRGINIA

But something's there. Share it with me. Please?

*(Edgar hesitates but eventually relents and speaks.)*

EDGAR

A title. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

VIRGINIA

"Morgue". Excellent. And what of these murders?

EDGAR

A woman, strangled, her corpse stuffed up a chimney. Her mother, also dead, crumpled in the yard behind their house. The older woman's throat has been slashed so severely, her head falls off when the body is moved.

VIRGINIA

Gruesome. I love it. Tell me more.

EDGAR

The murders occurred in a room on the fourth floor of the home. But the room is locked from the inside. Including the windows. A bloody straight razor and the women's gold are present at the crime scene. The police are baffled. Who is the killer? How did he enter the room? How did he exit? And what is the motive if not robbery?

VIRGINIA

A mystery.

EDGAR

A mystery, yes. Even to me.

VIRGINIA

You don't have the answers.

EDGAR

Therein lies the dilemma. The source of all my woes.

VIRGINIA

Did the mother and daughter have enemies?

EDGAR

Perhaps. But I find it more frightening if it were a random attack.

VIRGINIA

Yes. Absolutely. Who's this random attacker, then?

EDGAR

Someone who can enter and exit a locked room from an impossible height.

VIRGINIA

Hmmm.

EDGAR

Not only is the height impossible. So is pinpointing a worthy perpetrator.

VIRGINIA

I've got it!

EDGAR

You do?

VIRGINIA

A ghost! A phantom can easily enter and exit a locked room.

EDGAR

That feels like a cheat, though, to have the solution be, "It was a ghost all along!" Who would feel satisfied by such a conclusion? No, the supernatural must be out of the equation. It's far too easy. Too lazy. I seek a more logical explanation.

VIRGINIA

That's quite the task. I can see why you've been so distressed.

EDGAR

Because it's complete folly! I have been stuck on this quandary—and will continue to be—forever.

*(SPLAT! Something strikes Edgar in the chest, painting his coat brown.)*

What in the world...? Something has stained my...!

*(With his fingers, he inspects what's hit him.)*

VIRGINIA

Eddie, what is it? Mud?

EDGAR

*(sniffing)* Vile! Putrid! Not mud, Virginia! Not mud!

VIRGINIA

What, then?

*(Disgusted, Edgar removes a handkerchief from a pocket. He attempts to wipe himself clean.)*

EDGAR

Excrement!

VIRGINIA

Excrement?



EDGAR

Yes! Fecal matter!

VIRGINIA

*Actual* fecal matter?

EDGAR

This is no metaphorical waste! Care to inspect it yourself?

*(Virginia leaps out of her seat and steps away from her husband.)*

VIRGINIA

No, the displeasure is all yours. How did it come to be on your coat?

EDGAR

It was thrown as a projectile from inside a beast's cage!

VIRGINIA

Which creature would possibly participate in such unpleasantness?

*(Edgar studies the animal cages with inquisitive eyes.)*

EDGAR

Yes, which one, indeed... We shall approach this mystery logically.

VIRGINIA

Okay... We can immediately rule out the zebra as a suspect.

EDGAR

Because it's asleep? That afternoon nap could be nothing more than a ruse.

VIRGINIA

How would it even clutch the excrement in its hooves to throw it in this direction? Zebra hooves are not conducive for picking up objects off the floor.

EDGAR

Yes. Consider the zebra innocent of this crime.

VIRGINIA

And the lion certainly didn't do it.

EDGAR

No, he did not. Because we have a cat at home, we can correlate his behavior with that of a larger feline.

VIRGINIA

Precisely. Our darling Pluto defecates discreetly. Not once has he played with his waste after the deed is done.

Disgusting. Not our Pluto.

EDGAR

And not this lion.

VIRGINIA

On to the elephant.

EDGAR

That trunk functions similarly to an arm.

VIRGINIA

A powerful, prehensile limb.

EDGAR

Have we shined a light upon the guilty party?

VIRGINIA

We have not.

EDGAR

No?

VIRGINIA

The amount of fecal matter flung is disproportionate to the size of the beast.

EDGAR

You're saying...

VIRGINIA

If I were struck by the mammoth's feces, it would have felt like a brick to my sternum. So, due to the minimal sample size, we can determine that the pachyderm is above suspicion.

EDGAR

Process of elimination leads us to Suspect #4.

VIRGINIA

The orangutan.

EDGAR

Look! It waves to us, Eddie. Hello, there! How sweet.

VIRGINIA

*(Virginia waves back to the ape.)*

EDGAR

Curious. It waves with its right hand.

VIRGINIA

Why is that curious?

EDGAR

Orangutans are often left-handed. I read that somewhere.

VIRGINIA

This creature must be the exception.

EDGAR

No, the niceties are a clever distraction! It holds something in its dominant hand! Duck, Virginia! Quickly, now! Shield yourself!

*(The two of them crouch behind the bench, using it for cover as the orangutan throws more poop their way. The orangutan's waste hits neither of its intended targets.)*

VIRGINIA

Tossing fistfuls of dung! What a repugnant and ill-mannered swine!

EDGAR

A fascinating and intelligent creature...

VIRGINIA

Perfectly diabolical!

EDGAR

Diabolical, yes...

VIRGINIA

*(to the orangutan)* Have you finally emptied yourself of excrement, you wretch?!

*(She gives the animal the middle finger. She gasps when the ape returns in kind.)*

Eddie, it's doing it back to me! Do you suppose it knows what it's saying?

EDGAR

It's merely mimicking you.

VIRGINIA

Well, mimic this!

*(She displays middle fingers with both hands now.)*

EDGAR

My God, I've got it! Virginia, the answer to the riddle! I know who the killer will be!

VIRGINIA

You've seriously found inspiration inside this odd exchange?

EDGAR

Yes! I've been inspired! The murderer is a nefarious, wall-climbing fiend! An escaped orangutan!

VIRGINIA

No...

EDGAR

Yes! There are other details to work out to be sure, but the killer's identity has been found!

VIRGINIA

I find it a little... ridiculous, Eddie. Absurd.

EDGAR

And it will also be unforgettable. Readers will be stunned!

VIRGINIA

If you love it, I love it.

EDGAR

I love it! And I love you! Thank you for bringing me here today!

*(He attempts to hug Virginia, but she pushes him away because of what's smeared on his coat. Edgar turns to the orangutan.)*

And thank you, you disgusting reprobate! Come, dear. I'm now ready to be amused!

*(They exit, happily, toward the Big Tent. As they leave, Virginia turns to flip the ape a final bird.)*

**End of play.**

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *I'm not sure how many people know this, but Edgar Allan Poe was the inventor of detective fiction. His "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was the first example of this literary genre ever written. I thought it would be fun to craft a mini-mystery—and a piece of historical fiction—where Poe and his wife put their own detective skills to the test. (I'm a big fan of Poe's tales of gothic horror, so there are little nods to those stories in this play, as well!)*

*As an author/playwright, I sometimes get "writer's block." And so I wondered, "What did those famous authors do when they struggled with a story? Shakespeare... Dickens... Poe..." I explored that idea with this play. Where do artists get inspiration for their art? Yes, often times, it's inspired by other pieces of art. But, also, game-changing ideas can develop in unexpected places, from the silliest and strangest of experiences...*

*Lastly, I hoped to show how great—how powerful—it is for an author to have the support of a loved one. In reality, I'm unsure how supportive Virginia was of her husband's writing, but it's always nice to imagine a world where family nurtures and assists their resident artist(s).*

*In November 2021, this play received a staged reading in Los Angeles with PlayGround-L.A. In April 2023, it was produced as part of Pan Theater's short play festival in Oakland, CA.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** A resident of Southern California, Evan Baughfman is a playwriting member of PlayGround-L.A., and is a company member with Force of Nature Productions. A number of Evan's plays are published through Heuer Publishing, YouthPLAYS, Next Stage Press, and Drama Notebook. Additionally, Evan has found success writing horror fiction. Evan's short story collection, *The Emaciated Man and Other Terrifying Tales from Poe Middle School*, is published through Thurston Howl Publications, and his novella, *Vanishing of the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade*, is available through D&T Publishing. D&T published his novel, *Bad for Your Teeth*, as well. More info available at [amazon.com/author/evanbaughfman](https://amazon.com/author/evanbaughfman)