

## SCENE 1

*A dark classroom.*

*A teacher sits at a desk, sleeping. A man stands at a window, holding a newspaper.*

*After a while:*

POE. "Edgar Allan Poe is dead. He died in Baltimore the day before yesterday. This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. The poet was well known, personally or by reputation, in all this country; he had readers in England, and in several of the states of Continental Europe; but he had few or no friends; and the regrets for his death will be suggested principally by the consideration that in him literary art has lost one of its most brilliant but erratic stars."<sup>1</sup>

*Pause.*

POE. "...but few will be grieved by it." (*Pause.*) For all the grief I had, maybe there was none left...?

ANNABEL. (*Waking up*) ....what the--

POE. Hello.

ANNABEL. Who--? (*Laughs nervously*) Did Gordie put you up to this? Gosh you're good. You look just like him. Wow. (*No response- getting nervous*) Who are you anyways? I didn't think Gordie knew any actors. Where did he find you? (*No response- getting even more nervous*) Um I'm sorry but, this is hardly appropriate- it's after hours and the school is closed- I am came here to...I am just here to...well I am...I mean I was just...I was--

*ANNABEL stops and thinks. She can't remember where she was before this moment.*

ANNABEL. (*Stares at POE, trying to work it out.*) This is where I teach. Yes. I think. No, yes it is. This IS where I teach. English. I teach English. Here. To students.

*She cannot see the audience. Awkward Pause*

ANNABEL. Okay can you please say something because I am feeling a little out of order at the moment? Anything. Seriously anything.

POE. Why are you here?

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<sup>1</sup> "Death of Edgar Allan Poe" in the *New York Daily Tribune* (1849) Rufus Wilmot Griswald

ANNABEL. Why am *I* here? Really? You're the strange one dressed up in *my* classroom.  
I was just—(*Pause.*) I was...

POE. You can't remember where you came from?

ANNABEL. (*Thinks.*) No.

POE. Is this yours? (*Indicates the newspaper*)

ANNABEL. No. Never seen it before. What is it? (*Reads it.*)

*Pause.*

POE. Its all there is to read here. I would even settle for some Hawthorne right now, just anything besides that godforsaken newspaper. Did you not say you were an English teacher? I'd have expected more books, then.

ANNABEL. How long have you been here?

POE. I have no idea, but it feels like a long time.

*Pause*

ANNABEL. Do you know who you are?

POE. Excuse me?

ANNABEL. I know someone probably paid you to do this, but you could have at least read up on the guy. Do you have the slightest idea of who that man actually was? A literary genius. Academics debate over the meanings behind his work. There are societies, museums- MOVIES! There are MOVIES! Your works were turned into movies for Christ's sake! You are a huge inspiration and an icon for horror! Writers long to write like you—oh my god and now I am talking like you are actually Poe. Jesus--

POE. (*Interrupting*) Be like me? You have no idea what you are saying. No one should ever wish that upon his or herself--

ANNABEL. Wish literary fame? Are you kidding me? I would do anything—

POE. What exactly do you know about me?

ANNABEL. Just about everything there is to know. You were born to David and Elizabeth Poe, then after their deaths were adopted by the Allan family. You moved around a lot—yada, yada, yada— did some time with military, went to West Point, got kicked out of West Point, worked as a writer and journalist, and had quite a number of love interests—most ending tragically, as everything did, including you...*him*. Including *him*.

POE. And you are aware of my...reputation?

ANNABEL. What? Yes.

POE. "...but few will be grieved by it."

ANNABEL. That's not true. Tons of people that grieve for you now!

POE. Grief and pity are two entirely different concepts.

ANNABEL. Pity? Who said pity? All I meant was that--

*Arguing increasingly, overlapping.*

POE. That means noth--

ANNABEL. Your—AH I mean his works are so beau—

POE. You do not know what I went th—

ANNABEL. I did my graduate thesis about your—ah fuck- HIS stories

POE. Do you not understand—

ANNABEL. Writers would kill to get a glimpse—

POE. —INTO INSANITY? (*Pause.*) Is that what you want?!?!? (*Pause.*) There is no romantic story hiding in an insane mind. How can you even *think* that my life and mind are something to be desired?!? Have you ever been insane?

ANNABEL. Hey—

POE. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ACCUSED OF BEING MAD?

ANNABEL. Well—

POE. Of being sick?

ANNABEL. Not rea—

POE. (*Accusingly*) Why are you here? Where were you before? And why can't you remember?

ANNABEL. I don't—

POE. (*Interrupting*) You want to know what insanity feels like—here! Why are you here? Where were you before? *And why can't you remember?*

*Pause. The room settles.*

ANNABEL. While I was working on my dissertation I spent hours trying to get inside your head. Countless hours reading everything I possibly could. I barely slept—barely did anything really. Your birth parents were actors, you had some strange undiagnosed health issue, you were almost always poor, and your life was the polar opposite of normal. How can anyone say you were crazy? You had shitty luck and shitty health—you weren't crazy—you were unfortunate and sick.

POE. (*Picking up the newspaper*) and hated by all.

ANNABEL. Okay- give me that (*rips up the newspaper*). Now- tell me who you really are and we can end this awkward nightmare and I can go back to—oooooohh dear.

POE. What?

ANNABEL. “This awkward nightmare”. (*awkward laugh*) I believe, Mr. Poe, that I am dreaming.

POE. (*Smiles. ANNABEL listens in a daze as the poet recites his poem.*)

“Oh! That my young life were a lasting dream!  
 My spirit not awakening, till the beam  
 Of an Eternity should bring the morrow.  
 Yes! Though that long dream were of hopeless sorrow,  
 'Twere better than the cold reality  
 Of waking life, to him whose heart must be,  
 And hath been still, upon the lovely earth,  
 A chaos of deep passion, from his birth.  
 But should it be--that dream eternally  
 Continuing--as dreams have been to me  
 In my young boyhood--should it thus be given,  
 'Twere folly still to hope for higher Heaven.  
 For I have revelled when the sun was bright  
 I' the summer sky, in dreams of living light  
 And loveliness,--have left my very heart  
 Inclines of my imaginary apart  
 From mine own home, with beings that have been

Of mine own thought--what more could I have seen?  
 'Twas once--and only once--and the wild hour  
 From my remembrance shall not pass--some power  
 Or spell had bound me--'twas the chilly wind  
 Came o'er me in the night, and left behind  
 Its image on my spirit--or the moon  
 Shone on my slumbers in her lofty noon  
 Too coldly--or the stars--howe'er it was  
 That dream was that that night-wind--let it pass.  
 I have been happy, though in a dream.  
 I have been happy--and I love the theme:  
 Dreams! in their vivid coloring of life  
 As in that fleeting, shadowy, misty strife  
 Of semblance with reality which brings  
 To the delirious eye, more lovely things  
 Of Paradise and Love--and all my own!--  
 Than young Hope in his sunniest hour hath known."

ANNABEL. (*Dazed*) Oh my god. You're Edgar Allan Poe.

POE. Um, yes—

*Beat*

ANNABEL. You *are* dead, right? You must be. How did you die?

POE. (*Half laughs*) Can't you tell me that?

ANNABEL. No one actually knows.

*Pause.*

POE. I was cold. That's all I remember. Cold. I am not sure where I was. I am not sure who I was. Throughout the years all the stories and worlds inside my head slowly merged with reality. At some point the boundaries were expunged. Then I was cold. (*pause*) and now I am here. The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins? For all I know this is another one of my stories-- my ego fighting against the tortured artist.

ANNABEL. Jesus Christ—you even speak exquisitely. One day I want my work to be half as beautiful as yours.

POE. But can you bear the cost?

ANNABEL. What?

POE. Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality. The worlds that you create do not come out of nowhere. They come from experiences—both real and unreal. You have to feel more that your reader ever could. That way there is enough of it all to last through editing, rejection, printing, critiques, reprinting and everything else.

ANNABEL. But isn't it worth it?

*Enters YOUNG BOY.*

ANNABEL. What the--?

*The YOUNG BOY says nothing. He timidly hands POE an envelope, leaven a lantern on the ground, and then leaves.*

ANNABEL. Where did HE come from?!?!

POE. *(Distracted by the invitation he is reading)* I remember this...

ANNABEL. What? What is it?

POE. An invitation to a garden party. I'd just moved to London with the Allan family. I was about 7 or so.

ANNABEL. Oh I would kill to see you as a child! I bet you were fascinating!

POE. *(Sternly)* I was no different than any other person. I tell you, my life was nothing to be desired.

*ANNABEL is still gleeful.*

ANNABEL. Can we go? Can we go?

POE. Are you no longer concerned with how you arrived here, or better yet, why you are here?

ANNABEL. Look, this is strange enough already—it can't possibly get much worse. I am dreaming, so all the world's a stage or whatever- so let's get outta here!

POE. Are you sure you want to know what it was like? My life? All of it?

ANNABEL. More than anything.

POE. I can't promise you anything will come of this, but—

ANNABEL. I trust you. (*Beat. Holds out her hand to POE who eventually shakes it.*)  
Let's go to a garden party.

*POE glances as the audience and nods. POE grabs the lantern then he, ANNABEL, the audience exit the classroom.*

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