

EARLY POE

by

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dialogue sample

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CHARACTERS IN SAMPLE

EDGAR ALLAN POE, Male, teens. The ward of JOCK and FANNY ALLAN.

JOHN (JOCK) ALLAN, Male, early 40s. Edgar's foster-father. Scottish tobacco merchant. Limp in his left leg.

JANE STANARD, female, late 20s. JOCK's mistress.

CHARACTERS NOT IN SAMPLE

SARAH ELMIRA (MYRA) ROYSTER, female, teens. Played by the same actress that plays JANE.

FRANCES (FANNY) ALLAN, female, early 30s. JOCK's wife, EDGAR's foster-mother.

CHARLES ELLIS, male, early 40s. Scottish. JOCK's business partner.

SETTING & TIME OF SAMPLE

Richmond, 1823. John Allan's study.

This is not a biography. This is a story based on some facts from Poe's life.

Act I**Scene 1**

(The library of Jock Allan.

Dark. Cramped. Rain at the narrow window. A cabinet underneath. A shabby desk loaded with papers. Seated with a document, JOCK.

Offstage [downstairs] a woman screams.

This gets JOCK's attention. He limps to the door, stops, stuck: wanting to go out, but unwilling to go out.

Offstage again: a woman's laughter. JOCK, relieved, chuckles. Again, he has the impulse to go out, but stops.

Footsteps hurry up the stairs. JOCK returns to his chair.

EDGAR runs in.

The two size each other up.)

EDGAR

Pa, I've murdered Mrs. Stanard.

JOCK (doesn't believe him.)

Then you'll hang, hang by your wee willy winkie.

EDGAR

I *did* do it.

JOCK

You did not.

EDGAR

I did. With a pistol. Yes pa, *your* pistol.

JOCK

I didn't hear a shot.

EDGAR

The heavy drapes Ma bought in London absorbed the report.

JOCK

What a bargain.

Tell me what really happened.

EDGAR

Come see for yourself.

JOCK

I'll have it from you.

EDGAR

You must have heard Mrs. Stanard cry out.

JOCK

And I also heard your Ma laugh.

EDGAR

Yes, but then she prayed to God for forgiveness.

JOCK

Edgar Poe, you're not a very good storyteller. If Mrs. Stanard were dead in the parlor, your Ma would be in here, demanding that I have the bloody furniture reupholstered. If you used my pistol, you're a master thief that filched it from a locked cabinet. If you fired a killing shot, you'd be blubbering snot out your nose.

(Beat.)

EDGAR

With a chair, then.

JOCK

Ah, a chair.

EDGAR

An astonishingly effective weapon. I offered it so that Mrs. Stanard might be comfortable for our first lesson. Then -- as she sat down -- I yanked it away. She rolled to her side suddenly -- she was very surprised -- and cracked her head against the floor. She's dead, Pa. I murdered her.

JOCK

Better story. One problem: you wouldn't have the ballsack.

EDGAR

Perhaps there's some demon living inside me.

JOCK

Och, a demon, is it? What's this demon look like? Red hair? Big eyes?

EDGAR

I don't know.

JOCK

Take a look at it. Take a look inside yourself.

EDGAR

It's too dark to see.

JOCK

Swallow a candle.

EDGAR

Do you know everything that's inside you?

JOCK

Of course. Know your dick from a dock. I'm made of eggs, salt, slaves, beef, tobacco -- lots of that -- coffees, schooners, nappy ale, cobblestones, and Portuguese ceramics.

EDGAR

Is that all?

JOCK

And when *I* used to shirk my lessons, my Uncle Galt would take me behind the privy for a whipping.

EDGAR

Uncle Galt would believe me. *He* has imagination.

(Beat.)

JOCK

Whose uncle?

EDGAR

Uncle Galt.

JOCK

Whose uncle?

EDGAR

Your Uncle Galt.

JOCK

Don't ever mistake me for stupid. Here's your inventory:

(MORE)

JOCK (cont'd)

a degenerate's spilt wine. An actress's tattered costume. Consumption. Musty cots. Orphanages. You're made of Poe. The name under the bell says Allan. You're none of my flesh and blood, not mine nor your ma's. Yet I continue to spend over three dollars a week on you. Now, what happened?

(Beat.)

EDGAR

Pa...please, send Mrs. Stanard away.

JOCK

If you wish to excel at University, you need a tutor.

EDGAR

Not her. I'm afraid.

JOCK

What, the demon again?

EDGAR

She came into the parlor. She didn't speak to me, she spoke to Ma. But while she did, she called to me, from some hidden place inside herself, and I heard her, inside me. She's a siren. She's luring me to a vortex. I can feel the pull, a magnetic force drawing me with hideous velocity.

(Beat.)

JOCK

Well...believe whatever foolishness...

EDGAR

You've seen it.

JOCK

Enough.

(MRS. [JANE] STANARD enters, with a wet rag to her forehead.)

JANE

Edgar. Did my lesson trouble you?

(Beat.)

JOCK

What's going on?

JANE

Did my lesson trouble you, is that why you did it?

JOCK

Sakes what -- what the hell happened? Are you all right?

JANE

I'm fine.

JOCK (to EDGAR:)

Quit hiding behind me. What the hell did you do?

EDGAR

I pulled her chair away. Weren't you listening?

JOCK

You little rat -

JANE

My boy Robbie played the same joke once. Now answer my question, Edgar. Do I trouble you?

(Silence from EDGAR.)

JOCK

Well, answer her damned question!

(Beat.)

EDGAR

It's the book...

JOCK

What?! Quit mumbling.

EDGAR (to JANE:)

It's the book, the book you gave me. I don't approve of it. Yes, because my Pa wouldn't approve of it. It's filth. Lord Byron writes filth. My Pa and I don't approve of his wanton degeneracy.

JOCK

I never said -- that's a lie.

JANE

Yes, I'm afraid that won't do at all.

JOCK

Do you know what else he told me? He said he shot you with my pistol.

JANE

Oh, now *that's* a good story.

EDGAR (to JOCK:)

You see? She has a taste for sinful violence.

JOCK

Shut your mouth, how dare you speak about the lady like -

JANE

It's all right.

EDGAR (over:)

You're right, Pa. I'm a filthy liar. Clearly I don't deserve a tutor of Mrs. Stanard's caliber.

JOCK

You'll read what she gives you, you'll be a man and answer her question right now!

EDGAR

No please don't make me! Please don't make me -

JOCK (over, to JANE:)

He said you were a siren. You were drawing him. He said he was frightened of you, that's why he did it.

EDGAR

Pa! You don't have to tell her...

(Beat.

JOCK calls downstairs:)

JOCK

Fanny! I'm sending the lad down. Tell old Caleb that Edgar is the servants' servant tonight.

EDGAR

He'll send me out in the rain.

JOCK

Think about that next time your demon gives you ideas.

EDGAR

Sir, I promise you that this course of action will bring destruction upon us. Someone will die!

JOCK

Then *you'll* die.

(*EDGAR exits.*)

JANE
He knows.

JOCK
We've been careful.

JANE
I don't mean that.

JOCK
"Someone will die?" His clever nonsense. Poison for me.

JANE
Poor Jock.

(*Beat.*)

JOCK
Come here, lass.

JANE
Your wife is downstairs.

JOCK
She'll be busy saving the lad from Caleb -

JANE
You can't possibly want this around your son.

JOCK
He's only my ward.

JANE
Stop that.

JOCK
I don't mean -- of course he'll go far. We'll get him to University -

JANE
Please, this is only excusing *us* through *him*.

JOCK
I can't think of anyone else who knows more books than you -

JANE
We have to stop.

I can't do this anymore. I'm sick.

JOCK

Och, you've had three physicians examine you. You're well.

JANE

I'm not well. I'm well thought-of. That's why I adore you, you get on so poorly with people.

JOCK

That's fine, laugh at me, like all the rest.

JANE

Oh, poor Jock..."Unchecked by dull and selfish chastity, That virtue of the cheaply virtuous."

JOCK

Is that more of Lord Biden?

JANE

Shelley.

JOCK

Shelley. Teach me some Shelley, lass.

JANE

No stop it -

JOCK

I'll Shel-lel-lel-ley you too.

JANE

Jock please -

(He puts his head up her dress.)

JOCK

I know what you like, Shel-lel-lel-lel...

JANE

Oh...I can't...I can't...I'm not here...I'm not here, I'm... oh...I'm Helen...I'm Helen in Troy...oh I'm long dead...I'm dirt, I'm stone, I'm the stone unknown, the unknown shown on the stone shown groan alone stop, Jock STOP -

(JOCK pulls out. She recovers.)

JANE (cont'd)

Downstairs, just now, when I was lying on the floor, there was another lady there. Besides Fanny. She was hovering above me. Red gown. Blood spilled from her mouth, on to my face. As the droplets rolled off, they turned into apples. I saw her. Do you understand what that means?

JOCK

You hit your head, it was nothing.

JANE

No. No. It was not nothing.

(Beat.)

JOCK

You need a party. A party will do wonders. There's a dance at Moldavia next week. Why don't you -

JANE

The Judge won't let me go.

JOCK

He must see you do better at parties.

JANE

I wear my ribbons at parties, to remind me I'm a charming wife, I'm Robby's wonderful mother...

I'm drowning.

JOCK

You're tired.

JANE

I'll drown you too. You. Edgar.

JOCK

I won't let that -

JANE

Maybe I'd like to drown him.

JOCK

I won't let you.

JANE

Let me go, please -

JOCK

No don't you know what they'll do to me? People want to kick horseshit on the swell-footed Scots bastard. They laugh at me, and they pretend they don't. They've got their knives out for me. Because I lost their money in London. They're waiting to stick their knives in my back. But they can't with you near me lass, they don't dare, with a fine lady like you as my friend. Don't let them get me.

(Beat.)

JANE

I won't. I'm sorry.

JOCK

Tomorrow, after church, we'll meet.

JANE

Yes, keep telling me that.

JOCK

The woods out past Belvedere Estate, our spot -

JANE

Yes, Poor Jock, yes.

Where's my ribbon? My ribbon, did I leave it down -- a-ha.

(She finds the length of blue ribbon crumpled in the wet rag.)

JANE (cont'd)

Would you please?

(JOCK ties it around her wrist.)

JOCK

It's wet.

JANE

Tie it tighter. Tighter. 'Til it hurts. There.

(She seems more in control of herself.)

Lights change.

JOCK unclothes JANE, into her dressing gown. She spreads her arms out.

Elsewhere, EDGAR enters. He pulls a tiny bright light -- like a star -- from his eye.

Night falls. JOCK exits.

EDGAR hangs the star in the night sky. The lights go out, except for the stars.

When the lights rise again, we are in:)