

18 BEST STORIES BY

EDGAR ALLAN POE



EDITED BY VINCENT PRICE
AND CHANDLER BROSSARD
INTRODUCTION BY VINCENT PRICE

**18 BEST STORIES
BY EDGAR ALLAN POE**

**EDITED BY VINCENT PRICE
AND CHANDLER BROSSARD**
Introduction by **VINCENT PRICE**

Published by
Dell Publishing
a division of
Random House, Inc.
1540 Broadway
New York, New York 10036

If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

Copyright © 1965 by Vincent Price and Chandler Brossard

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the Publisher, except where permitted by law.

The trademark Dell® is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

ISBN: 0-440-32227-8

Printed in the United States of America

Published simultaneously in Canada

May 1965

OPM 50

EDGAR ALLAN POE (1809-1849), poet, critic and short-story writer, is widely acknowledged to be one of the most important American authors of the nineteenth century. Although he cared less for his short stories than his poems, and indeed considered himself primarily a poet, it is for his tales that he eventually became best known. Dealing chiefly with mystery, horror and crime, they are regarded as important forerunners of the modern detective story. His weirdness and dramatic power as a storyteller, combined with his poetic gifts, have gained for him a prominent place among universally known literary figures.

VINCENT PRICE, the actor is also a noted art expert and lecturer.

CHANDLER BROSSARD is a well-known writer and author of three major novels.

C O N T E N T S

THE BLACK CAT	11
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER	21
THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH	41
THE FACTS IN THE CASE OF M. VALDEMAR	48
THE PREMATURE BURIAL	58
MS FOUND IN A BOTTLE	73
A TALE OF THE RAGGED MOUNTAINS	85
THE SPHINX	96
THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE	101
THE TELL-TALE HEART	138
THE GOLD-BUG	144
THE SYSTEM OF DR. TARR AND PROF. FETHER	182
THE MAN THAT WAS USED UP	201
THE BALLOON-HOAX	212

A DESCENT INTO THE MAELSTRÖM	226
THE PURLOINED LETTER	244
THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM	264
THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO	280

INTRODUCTION

The eerie, haunted, and wildly tormented world of Edgar Allan Poe has enchanted me ever since I can remember. In all my reading, I've never encountered any writer who was so brilliantly able to transform his inner visions or hallucinations into universally loved fiction and poetry. Poe's achievements are particularly awesome when you consider what a miserable life he led, both personally and publicly. He was orphaned as a child, adopted by a remarkably cold and pretentious man who, as one reads the records, clearly hated him and abandoned him financially when he was in college. It is no wonder that he was profoundly neurotic and tried to get comfort, or release, in extensive gambling and drinking. How he managed to write at all is a mystery.

During his lifetime Poe was never acclaimed. It was through such French artists as Baudelaire, who translated his work, that his greatness was broadcast and finally reached the poor man's own country. After his death, of course. My appreciation of him—or, one might say, my deeper understanding and empathy—has been heightened enormously by the fact that I have played in several movies based on his marvelous work. I have *become* his characters, and the depth and complexity of their minds seems almost endless. I can only hope that the reader will find in him the same joy—different, to be sure—the same richness and reward that I have. He truly can become a part of one's own imagination and inner life.

Making a movie from a Poe short story is not an easy job, for the stories themselves are long on thrills and short on plot. They often contain more elements of horror than one would need to make several pictures, so it comes down to a

matter of selection and parceling out the different elements to different departments. The set designer, for instance, must handle the visual suggestion of loneliness, desolation, and the essential gloominess of the house or village. (These stories seldom take place in a housing settlement or tract house.) Then it is up to the "special effects" man to create the ever-present cobwebs, fog, dust, and dilapidation. A "green man" may be required to find trees that suggest bony figures and the "standby" painter must see to it that everything from the wallpaper to the upholstery looks properly faded and forlorn.

The director must keep the pace slow and moody but build steadily to the eventual thrill peak, and then pay off the story with either a happy ending or one that sends the audience away with the chilly feeling that there but for the grace of God go they.

The cameraman, of course, must catch all moods and see to it that the actors are not lost in the gloom (or else keep them lost in it until a sudden revelation frightens the audience half to death). Blood and bruises and gleaming knives are his department because no matter how talented the makeup artist or the prop man, their effects are rendered useless by cameramen who don't know their horrors.

Costumes must carry audience and actor back into those periods when such frightening things happened. They just don't come off in slacks and sweaters. The actor's problem is demanding, for he must be terribly serious in even the most ludicrous situations if he wants the audience to be taken in to the mood.

I try to analyze the elements of shock and horror in each story and try to make them a little larger than life, in fact almost operatic. A man screaming is seldom subtle, a man or woman in terror is never completely contained. Terror shows—or at least it must on the screen. In one picture alone the character I portrayed suffered from, or was assailed by, these terrors: claustrophobia, acrophobia, fear of the unknown, ghosts, rats, falling, madness, and death. Yet I felt that something still more was needed, so we rigged up a spider web, complete with spider, and as I walked through a dark

tunnel I ran full face into it. The reaction from the men working on the set was terrific—and I knew that we were right in adding that final touch of horror.

But enough of my experiences with the wonderful stories of Edgar Allan Poe. Read them for yourself. I hope you get from them the same pleasurable excitement and spine-tingling thrill that I always do. I think you will.

VINCENT PRICE

Hollywood

THE BLACK CAT

For the most wild yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in a case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad am I not—and very surely do I not dream. But tomorrow I die, and today I would unburden my soul. My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified—have tortured—have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me, they have presented little but horror—to many they will seem less terrible than *baroques*. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the commonplace—some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. My tenderness of heart was even so conspicuous as to make me the jest of my companions. I was especially fond of animals, and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. To those who have cherished an affection for a faithful and sagacious dog, I need hardly be at the trouble of explaining the nature or the intensity of the gratification thus derivable. There is something in the unselfish and self-sacrificing love of a brute, which goes directly to the

heart of him who has had frequent occasion to test the paltry friendship and gossamer fidelity of mere *Man*.

I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition not uncongenial with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold-fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a *cat*.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusion to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever *serious* upon this point—and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered.

Pluto—this was the cat's name—was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character—through the instrumentality of the Fiend Intemperance—had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them. For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when, by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me—for what disease is like Alcohol!—and at length even Pluto, who was now becoming old, and consequently somewhat peevish—even Pluto began to experience the effects of my ill temper.

One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he

inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a penknife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.

When reason returned with the morning—when I had slept off the fumes of the night's debauch—I experienced a sentiment half of horror, half of remorse, for the crime of which I had been guilty; but it was, at best, a feeble and equivocal feeling, and the soul remained untouched. I again plunged into excess, and soon drowned in wine all memory of the deed.

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of Man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only—that urged me to continue and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the

unoffending brute. One morning, in cold blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree;—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart;—hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt it had given me no reason of offence;—hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

On the night of the day on which this most cruel deed was done, I was aroused from sleep by the cry of fire. The curtains of my bed were in flames. The whole house was blazing. It was with great difficulty that my wife, a servant, and myself, made our escape from the conflagration. The destruction was complete. My entire worldly wealth was swallowed up, and I resigned myself thenceforward to despair.

I am above the weakness of seeking to establish a sequence of cause and effect, between the disaster and the atrocity. But I am detailing a chain of facts—and wish not to leave even a possible link imperfect. On the day succeeding the fire, I visited the ruins. The walls, with one exception, had fallen in. This exception was found in a compartment wall, not very thick, which stood about the middle of the house, and against which had rested the head of my bed. The plastering had here, in great measure, resisted the action of the fire—a fact which I attributed to its having been recently spread. About this wall a dense crowd were collected, and many persons seemed to be examining a particular portion of it with very minute and eager attention. The words “strange!” “singular!” and other similar expressions, excited my curiosity. I approached and saw, as if graven in *bas-relief* upon the white surface, the figure of a gigantic cat. The impression was given with an accuracy truly marvelous. There was a rope about the animal’s neck.

When I first beheld this apparition—for I could scarcely regard it as less—my wonder and my terror were extreme. But at length reflection came to my aid. The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house.

Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd—by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window, into my chamber. This had probably been done with the view of arousing me from sleep. The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plaster; the lime of which, with the flames, and the *ammonia* from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.

Although I thus readily accounted to my reason, if not altogether to my conscience, for the startling fact just detailed, it did not the less fail to make a deep impression upon my fancy. For months I could not rid myself of the phantasm of the cat; and, during this period, there came back into my spirit a half-sentiment that seemed, but was not, remorse. I went so far as to regret the loss of the animal, and to look about me, among the vile haunts which I now habitually frequented, for another pet of the same species, and of somewhat similar appearance, with which to supply its place.

One night as I sat, half stupefied, in a den of more than infamy, my attention was suddenly drawn to some black object, reposing upon the head of one of the immense hogsheads of gin, or of rum, which constituted the chief furniture of the apartment. I had been looking steadily at the top of this hogshead for some minutes, and what now caused me surprise was the fact that I had not sooner perceived the object thereupon. I approached it, and touched it with my hand. It was a black cat—a very large one—fully as large as Pluto, and closely resembling him in every respect but one. Pluto had not a white hair upon any portion of his body; but this cat had a large, although indefinite splotch of white, covering nearly the whole region of the breast.

Upon my touching him, he immediately arose, purred loudly, rubbed against my hand, and appeared delighted with my notice. This, then, was the very creature of which I was in search. I at once offered to purchase it of the landlord; but this person made no claim to it—knew nothing of it—had never seen it before.

I continued my caresses, and when I prepared to go home,

the animal evinced a disposition to accompany me. I permitted it to do so; occasionally stooping and patting it as I proceeded. When it reached the house it domesticated itself at once, and became immediately a great favorite with my wife.

For my own part, I soon found a dislike to it arising within me. This was just the reverse of what I had anticipated; but—I knew not how or why it was—its evident fondness for myself rather disgusted and annoyed me. By slow degrees these feelings of disgust and annoyance rose into the bitterness of hatred. I avoided the creature; a certain sense of shame, and the remembrance of my former deed of cruelty, preventing me from physically abusing it. I did not, for some weeks, strike, or otherwise violently ill use it; but gradually—very gradually—I came to look upon it with unutterable loathing, and to flee silently from its odious presence, as from the breath of a pestilence.

What added, no doubt, to my hatred of the beast, was the discovery, on the morning after I brought it home, that, like Pluto, it also had been deprived of one of its eyes. This circumstance, however, only endeared it to my wife, who, as I have already said, possessed, in a high degree, that humanity of feeling which had once been my distinguishing trait, and the source of many of my simplest and purest pleasures.

With my aversion to this cat, however, its partiality for myself seemed to increase. It followed my footsteps with a pertinacity which it would be difficult to make the reader comprehend. Whenever I sat, it would crouch beneath my chair, or spring upon my knees, covering me with its loathsome caresses. If I arose to walk it would get between my feet and thus nearly throw me down, or, fastening its long and sharp claws in my dress, clamber, in this manner, to my breast. At such times, although I longed to destroy it with a blow, I was yet withheld from so doing, partly by a memory of my former crime, but chiefly—let me confess it at once—by absolute *dread* of the beast.

This dread was not exactly a dread of physical evil—and yet I should be at a loss how otherwise to define it. I am almost ashamed to own—yes, even in this felon's cell, I am