

Edgar Allen Poe, a charter member in the fraternity of writers who write through their nightmares. A bookish man whose passion was writing, but who was conspired against by an unrelenting internal voice spelling out his inadequacies, a world full of commentators, and the unrelenting march of fate. Now, imagine all these things wrapped up in a book.

Other Poems



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Do you know how some books you can't put down? Well this book, I suggest you never pick up.

Maurice Chandler sat in the third row at Sotheby's. He'd been waiting for this particular auction to come up for a long time. Item number 175 was from the estate of a Mr. Gordon P. Feldman. He had been a very wealthy architect who had recently fallen from the 122nd floor of one of his buildings while supervising its construction.

Maurice had bibliophobia, a man who had the fear of running out of reading material. But this was only one of his many character flaws. He'd been a successful Manhattan attorney for almost 20 years. Competent beyond all measure and certainly determined, as his track record would attest, yet he had fewer social skills than your average gnat. He wasn't particularly likable, perhaps because he relished in destroying people on the stand and crushing his legal opponents in open court. As a result, he found his solace in books. His townhouse was a four-floor walkup in the village. Only the kitchen on the first floor and the bedroom and bathroom on the fourth wasn't packed from floor to ceiling with bookshelves.

Maurice sat back in his chair. Although the room as packed to the point of standing, the three chairs to Maurice's left and to his right were empty. He looked down at the auction catalog. The asking price for item number 175 was a mere \$300,000. Far below the price the book should have been worth. It was a copy of Edgar Allan Poe's *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, published in 1827. Poe was a renowned American author of stories with macabre and supernatural themes. But even Poe detested this collection as having some of his weaker stories. Only 50 copies were printed, and they are now one of the rarest books in print ... and worth twice the \$300,000 stated.

Unlike their other books, Sotheby's rolled this one out on a cart. It was resting comfortably on a walnut lectern. The staff person rolling the book out never touched the tome, but they were wearing blue latex gloves in any case. The bidding was surprisingly slow. Maurice purchased the volume for only \$450,000.

Later, in the privacy of his reading room, Maurice opened the hand-carved box Sotheby's had given him. Inside, on a soft velvet pillow was Edgar Allen Poe's first printed work. The room was instantly filled with the scent of old leather, printer's ink, and linseed oil. His usual habit was to devour the work, reading thru it in a single sitting. Maurice was a busy man. Across from him was an empty chair. Maurice only had the two. The second one, the empty one, he kept for the occasional visits of his accountant. Yet upon picking the work up he was disturbed by a grunt from this same chair. Sitting across from him was now an oddly dressed, bearded man. Well, not oddly dressed, it was more along the lines of the absurd. Over a red shirt with gold buttons, he wore a gold embroidered jacket, although it was more like a robe. On his head, he wore the most ridiculous white turban, decorated in both jewels and feathers.

Maurice would have laughed, but he'd left his sense of humor in childhood. "If you are going to break and enter, I suggest a less outlandish outfit. The police will pick you up too quickly."

"I think not," he replied.

"You seem rather overconfident."

"The police tend to be rather ineffective when faced with objects they cannot see."

Maurice seemed disappointed. He was of those who only put his faith in what he could prove, not anything he might believe in. He put the book back in its box and placed it on a nearby table. Standing

up, he seemed about to leave ... until he reached out to touch the man's shoulder. Well, he would have put his hand on his shoulder, but his hand passed right through the apparition.

"As you can see, I would be rather difficult to apprehend," the man explained.

Maurice might have responded, but his shock stood in the way. He watched as the apparition slowly faded and left only the empty chair in its place. His hands still shaking, he placed the wooden book-box in a carefully hidden safe behind one of the bookcases and spun the combination wheel. Deciding to deal with his thoughts in the morning, he proceeded to the fourth floor and his bed. Later he would recall his ill-conceived decision and eat his words.

His sleep was disturbed throughout the night by various characters who appeared in his bedroom. They were all wearing the most archaic outfits, long out of style. The creatures scuttled about like cornered rats. These shadows were impossible to catch. He could see them but could grasp none of the apparitions. By dawn he was still awake, with no more sleep than he would have gotten had he decided to remain awake all night.

Where once the room had been a veritable menagerie of old-fashioned visions, the room had quieted down to a single individual.

A thin-bearded man with the gaunt face stood next to his bed. In one hand he held a white-handled cane, in the other a revolver. He was seriously overdressed. Oversized bow-tie, black dinner jacket with a fire-engine red vest. And white spats of all things. Maurice pulled the covers up to his neck. None of his other visitors the previous night had been armed.

"It appears you have an infestation," the man said in a slurred French accent. "This calls for an investigation, no? Allow me to introduce myself. I am Professor Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, I find I have an interest in your ratiocination." He offered his hand to shake Maurice's hand but realized it contained the gun. He quickly tucked it under his other armpit and again offered his hand again.

Maurice simply sank deeper into his covers. This was the first spirit who had spoken to him since the Turk and he wasn't at all happy about it.

"Yes well, we can dispense with ze pleasantries for now. Let us proceed with ze ratiocination, shall we?"

As if drawn by some unascertainable force, Maurice rose from his bed and, still dressed in his nightclothes, followed the strange man with the French accent. They walked down the stairs towards the lower floors. "When did this start? Yesterday, huh?"

"Yes, last night," Maurice muttered.

"I suspect a clever stratagem. Most spirits inhabit ze stone, ze structure of a building and therefore stay in one place. This one has placed himself in ze binding of ze book, no? So, he might travel from place to place unhindered by geographical locale. Mon Dieu, he is clever this one, no?"

A spirit, hardly more than a floating washed-out skull trailing rags floated out of a wall by the stairs. It screamed an unearthly howl and then passed right through Maurice. The effect, as far as Maurice was concerned, was similar to placing your finger in an electrical socket while standing in a puddle. Dupin pretended not to notice.

Dupin lit slip a wry smile. “I think you have ze curse, as ze Belgians would say, oui? Of course, you could rid yourself of ze infestation by removing ze book. Oui? But my study of the number of books in your dwelling tells me you are not ze type, eh?”

Now a series of disembodied screams filled the room. All without the attended visual effects Maurice had been presented with earlier. The volume of the screams was such they should have woken up the neighbors for a radius of six blocks. However, Maurice was already convinced only he could hear the voices in the same way only he could see the less than pleasant visions.

“I’m afraid you’d have to sell ze book and not merely throw it away to have any useful effect,” Dupin added. “But, again, you do not seem ze type, no?”

Several more apparitions floated into the room, each more grotesque and horrid than the last. They seemed to have arrived fully intending to set up shop, as it were, in Maurice’s house. He might have objected, but his mind had long since let the physical form others would later identify as Maurice Chandler, once a famed Manhattan attorney.