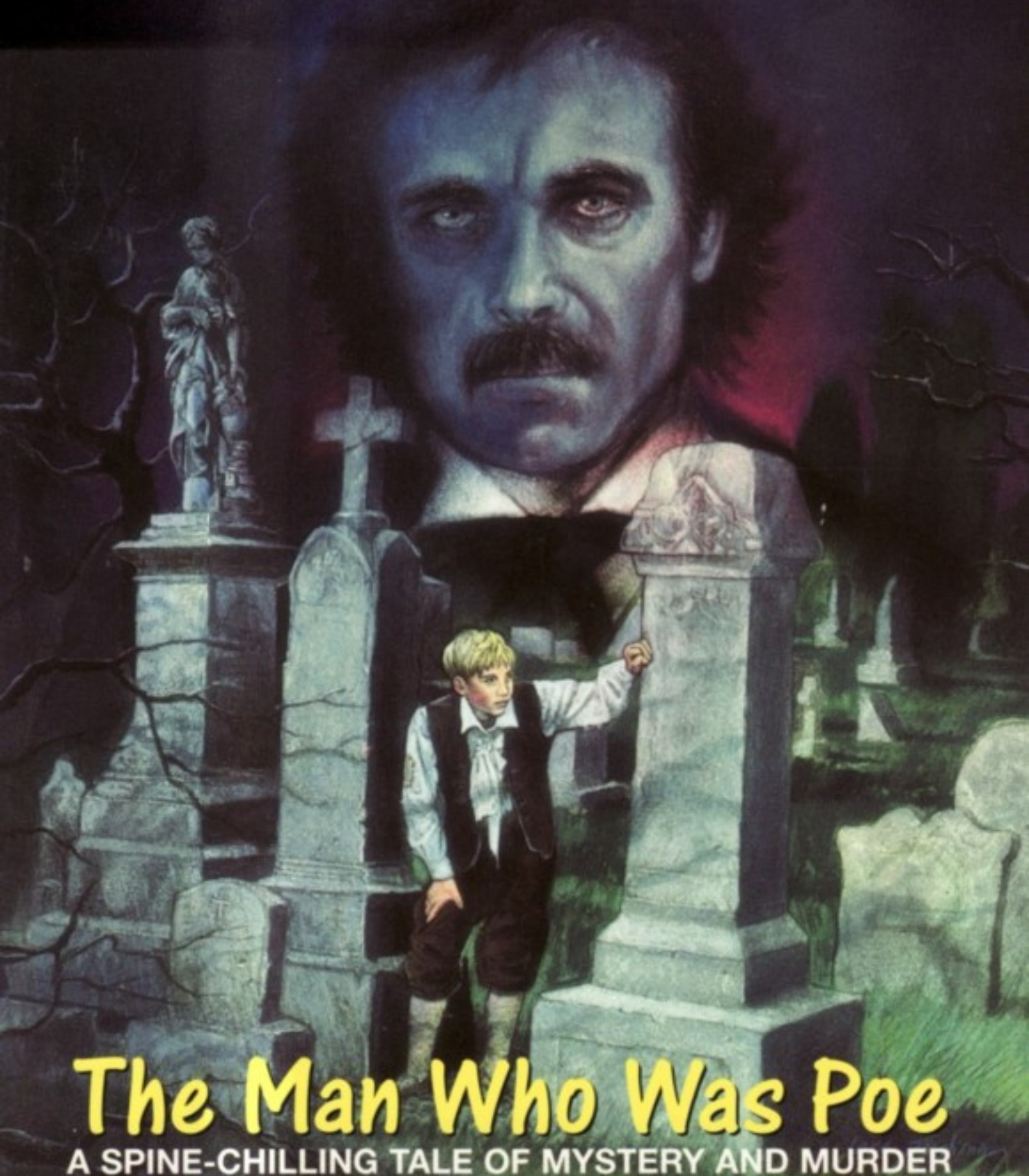


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The Man Who Was Poe

A SPINE-CHILLING TALE OF MYSTERY AND MURDER

Might I Know Your Name?

THE old city lay dark and cold. A raw wind whipped the Street lamps and made the gas flames hiss and flicker like snake tongues. Fingers of shadow leaped over sidewalks, clawing silently upon closely set wooden houses. Stray leaves, brittle and brown, rattled like dry bones along cold stone gutters.

A man, carpetbag in hand, made his way up College Hill, up from the sluggish river basin, battling the steep incline, the wind, and his own desire. He was not big, this man, but the old army coat he wore—black and misshapen, reaching below his knees—gave him an odd bulk. His face was pale, his mustache dark, his mouth set in a scowl of contempt. Beneath a broad forehead crowned by a shock of jet black hair, his eyes were deep, dark, and intense.

Sometimes he walked quickly, sometimes slowly. More than once he looked back down the hill, trying to decide if he should return to the warm station and the

train he had just left. There were moments he could think of nothing better. But he had traveled all day and was exhausted. What he wanted, what he needed, was a place where he could drink and sleep.

And write. For the man was a writer very much in need of cash. A story would bring money. But of late he had been unable to write. Idea, theme, characters: he lacked them all.

Short of breath, he reached Benefit Street. There, he stopped beneath a lamp post and looked south. The porch lamp of the Unitarian Church was glowing, indicating that its doors were open to the homeless. If he had no choice he knew he could sleep there. But his gaze turned north. That was where he wanted to go.

Opening his carpetbag he rummaged through clothing, bottles, a notebook, until he found a letter. He read it. Though he himself had written the letter many times, he still found it unsatisfactory. Still, he felt he'd best deliver it before he changed his mind.

More slowly than before, the man walked north along Benefit Street until at last, seeing the house where he intended to leave the letter, Number Eighty-eight, he paused. The door to the dark red building—ordinary a moment before—now appeared to him like a gaping, hungry mouth. He felt suddenly that he was looking *through* the mouth to a graveyard situated just behind.

Despite the bitter cold, he began to sweat. Pain gripped his heart. He felt as if a million needles were pricking him. Against his agony he shut his eyes until, unable to bear it, he turned and fled. Even as he did someone flung himself from the

darkness, crashing into him, and all but knocked him to the ground.

Gasping for breath the man attempted to see who had attacked him. Seeing no one, he was seized with terror. A demon had struck. Then he saw: sitting on the pavement, equally stunned, was not a demon, but a boy.

The man drew himself up. "That," he managed to say, "was a vicious blow."

"I didn't see you, sir," Edmund whimpered. "I'm very sorry."

"I should think you would be," the man said as he brushed off his greatcoat. "You could have sent me to the grave." With a quick step he started off, only to stop. Something about the boy's wretchedness had touched him. And when the boy shivered—he was wearing little more than a shirt and trousers and even these were ragged—the man came back.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

Edmund was too frightened to say.

"I asked you a question," the man said, his voice turning harsh.

Edmund attempted to reply but gave up. Instead he buried his face in his arms and began to sob.

The man knelt. "What are you doing here at such an ungodly hour?" he demanded. "Why have you nothing warmer to wear? What *is* the matter?" He drew up Edmund's face. When he saw how dirty, red-eyed and streaked with tears it was, he softened. "Why are you so troubled?" he asked.

"She's gone," Edmund blurted out, trying to knuckle the tears from his eyes.

"Who's gone?"

ALONE AND SCARED

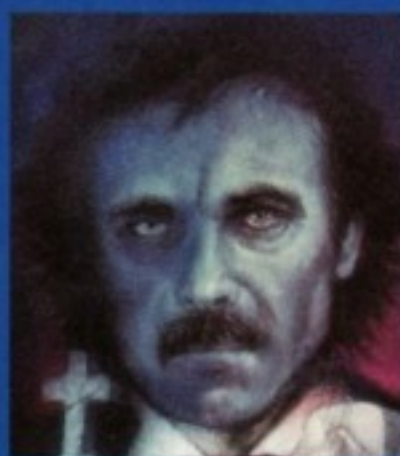
It is night and Edmund is all alone. His mother is gone. His sister has disappeared. Edmund has no one, except for a dark and mysterious stranger who follows him through the cold and shadowy city with offers of help. But who is this stranger who gives Edmund refuge? He has a mission of his own and he needs Edmund, but he tells him nothing of his purpose. Yet the stranger is Edmund's only hope of discovering the dark secrets that surround the disappearance of his family...

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a suspenseful, thought-provoking novel that
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