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# **Macabre: Tales From Edgar Allan Poe**

By  
JULES TASCA

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Dedicated to  
Michael Tasca Kell

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# William Wilson

## CHARACTERS

WILLIAM WILSON #1: A willful man.

WILLIAM WILSON #2: A moral man.

FIVE MALE EXTRAS

ONE FEMALE EXTRA: Plays all other parts.

TIME: The 1800s.

PLACE: England and various other countries.

SETTING: The settings are flexible and simple for this presentational theatre piece. A few props and furnishings can suggest a place. Some scenes are pantomimed.

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*(A light comes up on WILLIAM WILSON #1. He is an old, hunched man in a cape. He walks with a cane as he moves closer to the audience to address them.)*

WILSON #1. What a deed is death that drops us from the tree of life like an auburn leaf ... a spent thing ... a remnant for the wind to whisk away ... Yes, look upon me and see a destiny that's done.

*(He continues as he removes his grey wig and cape and puts aside his cane. He becomes young.)*

WILSON #1 (*cont'd*). But once I was young and unbridled. I come from a family of quick minds and strong self-will.

In boyhood my parents couldn't stop my caprices that bordered on the shores of sin ... I poured oil on swarms of ants. (*Laughs.*) I dismembered frogs. I roasted jars of live grasshoppers until they turned—*black*.

*(Lights change. WILSON #1's FATHER enters.)*

FATHER. Son, you've gone too far now!

WILSON #1. Father, I was just having fun.

FATHER. Fun?! Drowning kittens? It is improper! It is cruel! It is intolerable! Do you understand me?

WILSON #1. No one wanted the kittens so I ...

FATHER. William, it's not your place to decide their end. Good God, you understand nothing of what is right! You're ... you're uncontrollable! My only hope is that when you go off to school, they'll shear these habits from you! Get out of my sight! Go!

*(Lights change. WILSON #1 crosses down to the audience as his FATHER exits. Behind WILSON #1, four BOYS enter and make gothic arches with their arms over their heads)*

WILSON #1 (*to audience*). Gothic arches ... they ... they always remind me of the rigid boarding school my father selected for me. But, no ... Their rules didn't stunt the mastery I held over my own will to do as I pleased ...

*(Two of the BOYS come out of their gothic stance and pass between the arch of the other two BOYS and cross to WILSON #1. Then the last two BOYS come out of their arch stances and join the others. They all run across the stage in a race, which WILSON #1 wins. WILSON #1 crosses to the other side of the stage and stretches.)*



BOY #1. Wilson always wins at everything.

BOY #2. He's just too fast.

BOY #1. He's too athletic.

BOY #3. We might as well not compete with him anymore.

BOY #4. Shhh ... don't make him angry. He helps us with our homework.

*(Lights change. The BOYS gather around WILSON #1 as he explains a math problem on a blackboard. The others copy answers.)*

WILSON #1. When two parallel lines are cut by a transversal, the opposite angles are equal. This is a given in the problem, but you could see the principle by merely looking ...

BOY #1. Yes, I see it.

BOY #2. It does make sense.

WILSON #1. The angles on the same side of the transversal are always equal to 180 degrees.

BOY #3. Always, Wilson?

WILSON #1. Of course, always. Whatever the degree of the angles, they always add up to 180 degrees. Don't you see? You chaps are so slow to understand simple geometry.

BOY #4. No, we understand. You explain it all better than the math teacher, Wilson.

BOY #1. He does ...

BOY #2. Thanks for the help.

BOY #3. You always pull us through.

*(The BOYS freeze as the lights change and WILSON #1 addresses the audience.)*

WILSON #1. You see how I am naturally superior to all of them? I was king of the mountain, and I ended each day pleased with myself. Until one day, another boy enrolled in the school ... Our headmaster, Dr. Bransby called the roll.

*(Lights change. The BOYS line up. WILSON #2 joins the line at one end, while WILSON #1 joins at the other end. The headmaster enters with a roll book. He wears an academic robe.)*

BRANSBY. Bicksbury.

BOY #1. Here, sir.

BRANSBY. Conwell.

BOY #2. Here, sir.

BRANSBY. Hodges.

BOY #3. Here, sir.

BRANSBY. Palmer.

BOY #4. Here, sir.

BRANSBY. Wilson.

*(Both WILSON #1 and WILSON #2 answer at the same time. WILSON #2 always speaks in a stage whisper.)*

WILSON #1 & WILSON #2. Here, sir.

WILSON #1. Sir, I'm William Wilson.

BRANSBY. I'm sorry, boys. I failed to inform you. We now have another William Wilson.

WILSON #2. Yes, my name is also William Wilson.

BRANSBY. That's correct, class. We now have two William Wilsons. Be sure to make the new William Wilson feel at home.

BOY #1. Yes, Dr. Bransby.

BOY #2. We will, sir.

BOY #3. Happy to meet you, William Wilson number two.

*(The others laugh.)*

BOY #4. Yes, Wilson one and Wilson two. That's what we'll call you fellows.

*(Lights change. BRANSBY exits. All the others freeze as WILSON #1 addresses the audience.)*

WILSON #1. It's a common name—Wilson. William, too, is a popular English-given name. Still ... it annoyed me that this boy ... this other ... had the same name as I. I thought I should be the *only* William Wilson. Then other coincidences angered me. Old Bransby later told me that this whispering Wilson was born on the 19th of January, 1813—*my* birthday. Oh, yes, I know he couldn't have selected his nativity ... Still ... I saw it as *audacity* ...

*(Lights change. WILSON #1 and WILSON #2 mime playing a tennis match. The other BOYS watch the imaginary ball go back and forth. Two of the BOYS make the sounds of the racquets hitting the ball. After several exchanges, WILSON #1 can't reach a cross-court shot.)*

BOY #1. Wilson two wins set and match!

*(The BOYS applaud as WILSON #2 jumps an imaginary net and shakes hands with WILSON #1. Lights change as they all freeze. WILSON #1 addresses the audience.)*

WILSON #1. I never had competition in sports like this before. Even though I did at times beat this upstart Wilson, I no longer dominated every other boy. It was the same in our studies.

*(Lights change. The others unfreeze. WILSON #1 joins them as BRANSBY enters and reads test results.)*

BRANSBY. Class, I give you now the results of your science examination. Wilson #1—ninety-four.

BOY #2. Wow. A ninety-four!

BRANSBY. No comments, please. Bicksbury, seventy-five. Conwell, seventy-two. Hodges, eighty-two. Palmer, seventy-six. Hedly, eighty. Wilson two—a perfect paper. One hundred.

BOY #3. The Wilsons rule the school.

BOY #4. I'll say.

BRANSBY. Class dismissed ...

*(BRANSBY exits. The BOYS freeze again. The lights change. WILSON #1 addresses the audience.)*

WILSON #1. Yes. The others saw us both as better than anyone else and admired us equally, but I saw it as a loss of my superiority. Most irritating of all, this other William Wilson refused to go along with my schemes ...

*(Lights change. The BOYS unfreeze. WILSON #1 crosses to them carrying a small sack.)*

WILSON #1 (*cont'd*). Look here, chaps. I've filched over a dozen eggs from the kitchen. Let's sneak over and egg the Bransby greenhouse.

*(Except for WILSON #2, the others all become excited by the mischievous idea and ad-lib agreement with WILSON #1.)*

BOY #3. Let's go.

WILSON #1. We'll go around through the thicket and come up behind the greenhouse.

BOY #2. Let me have a couple of those eggs.

*(WILSON #1 hands the eggs out.)*

BOY #1. Me, too.

BOY #4. I can just see old Bransby's face when he sees egg oozing down the glass.

*(He makes a dour face. The others laugh.)*

BOY #3. If he doesn't see it right away, the sun dries it hard as paint. He'll have to chip it off.

*(The others laugh again and begin to exit with WILSON #1.)*

WILSON #2. Hold on!

BOY #2. What is it, Wilson two?

WILSON #2. Why do we want to egg the greenhouse? It's more Mrs. Bransby's hobby than Doctor Bransby's.

BOY #1. That's so ...

WILSON #1. Who cares whose hobby it is?

BOY #3. I'd like to egg it.

BOY #4. I, too ...

WILSON #1. Then let's go ...

WILSON #2. Listen. Mrs. Bransby makes a huge cake for all the boys every Friday night.

BOY #3. She does ...

WILSON #2. Then wouldn't it be better if we went out in the field and collected a bouquet of flowers for her?

BOY #3. Mrs. Bransby is really kind to all of us.

BOY #4. She made me cough syrup for my cold.

BOY #1. And last term she brought us hot chocolate while we ice skated.

WILSON #2. So ... wouldn't she love the gesture of our flowers? And wouldn't it do our hearts better?

WILSON #1. Picking flowers doesn't sound like fun to me. I say let's take a vote. All in favor of egging the greenhouse show your hand.

*(WILSON #1 raises his hand. The others look at each other; but they don't raise their hands. Slowly, they return the eggs to WILSON #1's sack.)*

WILSON #2. It's settled then. To the fields. We can race there for fun.

*(They all race off except for WILSON #1, who turns to the audience.)*

WILSON #1 *(to audience)*. At every turn he threw cold water on my whims.

*(WILSON #1 crosses the stage as the lights change. WILSON #2 enters. WILSON #1 turns his back on WILSON #2.)*

WILSON #2. Wilson ... Wilson? I say, are you cross with me? William, I asked you a question ...

WILSON #1. You ask that? You, who contradict my every idea to the others ...

WILSON #2. I'm only looking out for you. Don't you see? I'm trying to keep you out of trouble. To keep you from a caning.

WILSON #1. Oh? Who looked out for me before you came to this school?

WILSON #2. I suppose no one.

WILSON #1. No one. Correct. You are nothing to me. No relation at all. Before you came, I took my chances and my punishments.

WILSON #2. But ... now ... now we're older, and your pranks are not fun. They're just ... just mean.

WILSON #1. Name one.

WILSON #2. William, be reasonable.

WILSON #1. Name one. *Whisper* me one.

WILSON #2. One? Every week you concoct some mischief.

WILSON #1. Perhaps what you call mischief, I call a good laugh.

WILSON #2. Last week you made sure I was asleep. Then you roused some of the other boys to do your bidding. You know that Royal Palmer is a heavy sleeper. You cajoled the others into carrying his bunk with Palmer sleeping in it far out into the grazing field.

WILSON #1. It was an amusement.

*(WILSON #1 chuckles through WILSON #2's next speech.)*

WILSON #2. There were cows out there.

WILSON #1. Moooooo ...

WILSON #2. And rutted uneven ground.

WILSON #1. Watch your step, Palmer.

WILSON #2. Palmer woke up in the dark of night. He panicked and ran into a ditch and broke his ankle.

*(WILSON #1 hobbles around.)*

WILSON #1. What we'd have given, Whispering Will, to have seen his face when he woke up in a cattle field. Moooooo ...

WILSON #2. It was wrong, dangerous, uncalled for. You ... You need to be constantly watched, Wilson. You're cruel!

WILSON #1. I'm fun loving! ...

WILSON #2. No. Mean and contemptible!

WILSON #1. To only you! I told the boys that a starched collar's going to pop up right through your coat! I told them you're going to turn into a parson right before our eyes! The boys howled with laughter. You should've heard them.

*(We hear laughter off.)*

WILSON #1 (*cont'd*). I can still hear them.

*(WILSON #2 gives a gesture of disdain to WILSON #1 and exits. Lights change.)*

WILSON #1 (*cont'd, to audience*). As we advanced to the next form in school, I came to see Wilson not as just one in competition with me. No. I came to see this ... this righteous Whispering Willy as one ... well ... as one illuminated by moral sunbeams that were shaded to me ...

*(Lights change. WILSON #2 enters.)*

WILSON #2. Wilson ...

WILSON #1. Yes ...

WILSON #2. I've lost my copy of *Richard the Third*.

WILSON #1. Oh? Too bad.

WILSON #2. Have you finished with yours? I need to go over it again for tomorrow's class.

WILSON #1. I'm still studying. But I think I'm prepared. Was there ever such a fascinating character as Richard the Third?

*(WILSON #1 makes himself into the hunchbacked Richard.)*

WILSON #2. He was such a villain.



WILSON #1. "I that am rudely stamped  
and want love's majesty  
to strut before a wonton  
ambling nymph;  
I that am curtailed of this  
fair proportion,  
cheated of features by  
dissembling nature,  
Deformed, unfinished,  
sent before my time  
Into this breathing world,  
scarce half made up  
and that so lamely and  
unfashioned  
that dogs bark at me as I  
halt by them ..."

*(WILSON #1 barks as he comes out of the character of Richard.)*

WILSON #1 (*cont'd*). Yes, William, I am determined to be a villain.

WILSON #2. That's quite good ... Quite ...

WILSON #1. Yes, I think I gave a good account of the speech ...

WILSON #2. But then ... Shakespeare is easily memorized ... a string of his words is a necklace of musical notes that easily clings to memory ...

*(WILSON #1 tosses him the copy of the play.)*