

The First Two Pages of “Bruised and Battered Nevermore” by Amy Grech

From [*Even in the Grave*](#), edited by James Chambers and Carol Gyzander
(Neoparadoxa)

An Essay by Amy Grech

“In death — no! Even in the grave, all is not lost.” That quote from Edgar Allan Poe typifies the theme of *Even in the Grave*, an anthology of ghost stories published by NeoParadoxa that examines what endures after death and what the dead yearn for despite having crossed the veil. Co-editors James Chambers and Carol Gyzander had one request: Every story needed to include a ghost as the focal point. With that condition met, there were no restrictions. In my story, “Bruised and Battered Nevermore,” I wanted to play devil’s advocate. Rage and redemption coalesce during a séance, revealing a murder most foul.

I’ve lived in New York City for over 25 years. There’s a New York City law on the books that states if a prospective tenant wishes to rent an apartment, the owner must disclose any deaths that occurred in the unit, prior to the lease signing, whether the untimely mishaps were accidental, such as the tenant falling off a ladder while changing a light bulb and breaking his/her neck, passing away in his/her sleep due to old age, or intentional, (e.g., a drug overdose, or suicide).

I wondered what would happen if a new tenant, a young woman, didn’t know about this so-called dead man’s clause and, after a year strange paranormal

phenomena occurred that couldn't easily be explained, decided to take matters into her own hands.

Something strange about the decrepit apartment in Brooklyn where Jackie Crawford lived for the past year unnerved her. The lack of heat and hot water didn't set her on edge. No, it was something more ominous...

Her boyfriend, Jeff Dutton, had a hunch one night while they snuggled on the couch and watched *The Exorcist*. She leaned on his chest, and he wrapped his strong arms around her to keep her warm, both inside and out.

When the movie ended, they heard a loud click that caused Jackie to flinch and set Jeff on edge.

"What was that noise?" Cringing, Jackie clung to Jeff.

"Beats me." He shrugged. "Maybe your creepy neighbor Al snuck in while we were watching the movie to poke around your lingerie drawer." Jeff snickered. "He looks like a pervert to me."

Jackie punched his arm, a playful love-tap. "That's not funny."

He stopped laughing. "Lighten up."

She sat bolt upright on the couch. "Something's wrong. Better go see what it is."

"Sure thing." Jeff got up to look around, straining to see in the dark. He flicked the light switch and searched for intruders. There was no one in the living room besides Jackie.

Cautiously, he made his way into the bedroom with Jackie skulking nearby and turned on the light. They found the room unoccupied, but the window was open halfway despite the chill.

"Why did you open the window?" he asked, teeth chattering as he shut it.

She frowned. "I didn't. I thought *you* did."

"Nope, I didn't touch it." Jeff shook his head.

"I probably opened it last night for some fresh air..." Jackie bit her lip, unable to remember touching the window.

"Why would you do that? It's a bit nippy out this time of year." He folded his arms and rubbed them to keep warm.

"Sheesh. I forgot to shut it. Cut me some slack." She frowned. "Why don't you keep me company in the kitchen while I whip up some hot chocolate."

“Roger that.” Jeff followed her into the kitchen and sat down at the table while Jackie puttered around near the stove.

Five minutes later, they brought their steaming mugs of hot chocolate with marshmallows back into the living room and set them down on the cluttered coffee table crammed full of books about ghosts and other atrocities.

Jeff picked up a dog-eared paperback, *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* and thumbed through it.

A daunting challenge . . . to immerse readers in a modern-day setting in New York City, an atmosphere rife with impending dread. I was tasked with holding my audience’s interest as the tension gradually mounts to a frenzied fever-pitch. Jackie’s mounting paranoia is the opposite of her boyfriend Jeff’s devil-may-care demeanor. I also managed to interweave several subtle nods to master of the macabre, Edgar Allan Poe.

I think I managed to rise to the challenge of ramping up the tension with several Edgar Allan Poe-themed easter eggs meant to pique my readers’ interest and amplify mounting dread until the brutal end.

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Amy Grech has sold over 100 stories to various anthologies and magazines including: *A New York State of Fright*, *Apex Magazine*, *Even in the Grave*, *Gorefest*, *Hell’s Heart*, *Hell’s Highway*, *Hell’s Mall*, *Microverses*, *Needle Magazine*, *Punk Noir Magazine*, *Tales from the Canyons of the Damned*, *The One That Got Away*, *Under Her Skin*, *Yellow Mama*, and many others.

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