**Planning Your Gothic Mystery**

**Before you begin:** If the following words don’t come to mind, then the story you are developing is probably NOT a gothic mystery.

*Haunting, chilling, terror, darkness, evil forces, sinister, violence, shadows, mystery, suspense, romance, horror, adventure, love*

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|  | **Cask of Amontillado** | **Title:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
| The Building  *The building in most gothics is so important that it almost becomes a character in the story. The term “gothic” comes from a style of architecture used in the Middle Ages. Words associated with the building might be:*  Gargoyles, arches, turrets, towering arches, stained-glass windows, lancet windows, tomb, haunted, creaking, gloomy, nunnery, monastery, castle, Southern plantation |  |  |
| The Heroine  *The heroine can be either meek and helpless or independent and courageous. She can be in any kind of work, a teacher or any other kind of professional, a social worker, a stay-at-home mom, or anything else. She can be any of the following:*  Caught in a web of terror, poor, alone in the world, helpless, pretty (or not so pretty), saved from the terror of the plot by a strong, noble man or by her own intelligence and courage.  **or**  The Hero  *Before the 1800s, gothics had a hero and a villain. After that, the qualities of good and evil became blended into one character, the hero-villain, who usually turns out to be good in the end. The hero can be:*  Handsome, dark, sinister, mysterious, contradictory, dashing, tall, slender, suave |  |  |
| Dark Forces  *The supernatural plays a part in many gothics. Nature behaves unnaturally. Paintings, statues, or suits of armor come to life. All seemingly supernatural elements are explained at the end of the story. Some vocabulary associated with dark forces:*  Graveyards, dark forests, red clouds, purple skies, evil powers, magic rings or other magic items*,* earthquakes, charms, spells and curses, nightmares, mysterious sounds, greed, mysterious deaths |  |  |
| The Secret  *Gothic plots usually hinge on an unrevealed secret, perhaps with an old family mystery or a mysterious building. It is the heroine who unravels the secret before she becomes a victim.*  Mysterious objects, strange behavior, strange disappearances, unusual noises, strange or threatening animals, strange comings and goings, eerie, sinister laughter |  |  |
| Symbolism  *Gothic plots usually incorporate an object or person that symbolizes something greater than its physical self.*  A scarred face reflecting a scarred soul, a decaying house representing a decaying personality; an animal representing a human quality, a madman or madwoman |  |  |
| The Ending  *There is no single ending for a gothic. However, here are some traditional outcomes:*  Heroine learns the secret of why she was where she was, good triumphs over evil, wrongs are righted, bad people are punished, mysteries are understood and explained, the hero and heroine get together, sickness is healed, spells and curses are removed or broken, terrible but necessary things happen in order to restore peace |  |  |

**Checkpoints**

Checkpoint One

Does the story have a **theme**? Unless the story says something, it has little reason for being. The theme may never be quoted verbatim in the story, but it is always the hub around which the story revolves. You should be able to state in a single clear, concise sentence what the story says.

Checkpoint Two

Does the story have a **good opening**? Does the story begin as close to the climax as possible? By the end of the first 1/5 of the story, did you have an emotion toward the **protagonist** and interest in the **situation**? Did the opening indicate the age, sex, and appearance of the protagonist? Did it set the stage with the **mood** of the story? Did it give a hint of the **conflict?**

Checkpoint Three

Does the story contain an element of strong **conflict**? Man against man, man against God, man against nature, man against society, man against himself—the protagonist should be pitted against a big problem. Sometimes the story contains a double-barreled problem interwove skillfully in a **sub-plot**.

Checkpoint Four

Is the story free from **predictability**? Sometimes the reader may be able to guess the eventual outcome without losing interest, if the means by which the end is achieved keeps him guessing.

Checkpoint Five

Does the story have a **dark moment**? Every story usually should have a low point at which all seems lost for the heroine.

Checkpoint Six

Is **coincidence** used as an easy solution? Here is rule that many writers use: “A writer is free to use coincidence to get his characters into trouble, but they must climb out under their own power.”

Checkpoint Seven

Has something changed in the story? If, at the end of the story, the characters are in exactly the same situation that they were at the beginning, or if they have not changed to adapt to their problems, it isn’t really a story. No matter how beautifully written, how penetrating the insight—it is only a sketch.

Checkpoint Eight

The author must make his readers care about the lead characters—even if one of them is a scoundrel. The reader should cheer for things to turn out right.

**Climax**

**When does the main character face their problem? This is the turning part of the story… things will never be the same for the character.**

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**Rising Action**

**What events happen after the exposition and before the climax?**

**Conflict**

**What is the major problem in the story?**

**Falling Action:**

**What happens immediately after the climax?**



Plot Diagram

**Resolution**

**What happens at the VERY end of the story?**

**Exposition**

**Who are the main characters in the beginning of the story?**

**What is the setting in the beginning of the story?**