

A Reader's Theater adaptation of Patrick Carman's *Atherton: The House of Power*

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Approximately 6 minutes

Readers:

Edgar	Narrator 1
Mr. Ratikan	Narrator 2
Isabel	Narrator 3
	Narrator 4
	Narrator 5

Narrator 1: In Mr. Ratikan's grove there lived a boy. He was not well-to-do, but his needs were met and he was happy most of the time. His name was Edgar.

Narrator 2: Some would say that Edgar was skinny like all the other boys who worked in the grove, but they would only be half right, for everyone knows there are two kinds of skinny children.

Narrator 3: Some are fragile as paper while others are nimble as wire. Edgar was the wiry kind, strong and quick as a jackrabbit.

Narrator 4: Deep in the heart of the grove, a thick canopy of leaves hung low overhead, and in the heat of the day it was a cool, quiet place to lie in the grass and take a nap.

Narrator 5: But Edgar was not the kind who enjoyed sneaking off to nap under the trees like some of the others. He was far more likely to be found doing something mischievous, which is precisely where we find him as our story begins.

Narrator 2: Somewhere in a silent part of the grove, Edgar had been swinging violently back and forth on one of the tree branches, trying to gain enough speed to fling himself across the grassy path to a branch five feet or more away on the other side.

Narrator 4: Twice Edgar had let go too late and flown through the air feet first, landing on his back in the middle of the path with a terrible thud.

Narrator 1: Undeterred, Edgar made a third attempt, which sent him careening through the air so fast he smashed into the tree's trunk and was rewarded with a bloody nose.

Narrator 3: The ruckus caught the attention of the owner of the grove, Mr. Ratikan, a tall, hunchbacked man who was always determined to put an end to Edgar's fun.

Narrator 5: Edgar was in the middle of his biggest swing yet, brushing the leaves in the tree with his arms as he came forward. When he swung back, Mr. Ratikan struck Edgar on his bare feet with his walking stick.

Mr. Ratikan: Come away from there this instant.

Narrator 4: Mr. Ratikan had chalky white skin, and his mouth was perpetually turned in a scowl, making his thin lips and long mustache seem like nothing more than red and brown ribbons around an unhappy mouth.

Narrator 2: The walking stick had failed to knock Edgar free. Swinging his feet high up in the air, Edgar let go, arms and legs flailing. This time he caught hold of the branch on the other side. But the moment he did, the branch snapped off and he crashed to the ground.

Narrator 5: This was exceptionally bad luck for Edgar, since nothing made Mr. Ratikan quite as irritated as someone damaging one of the precious trees in his grove.

Mr. Ratikan: Now you've done it (poking Edgar in the ribs with his walking stick).

Edgar: I was only having a moment's fun before coming to find you.

Mr. Ratikan: Get to work on the saplings—and don't you stop until you've finished twenty. If I ever catch you playing in the trees again, there'll be no dinner for a week.

Narrator 1: Edgar sized up the space across which he'd flown. Though he would have to work an extra hour for his misbehavior, it had been worth it.

Mr. Ratikan: Go!

Narrator 3: Edgar slowed to a walk as he reached the oldest stretch of trees, where the limbs grew wide and long. Little bits of light were shooting between the leaves, and he tried to catch them in his hand as he went.

Narrator 2: Edgar was easily amused, but he stayed by himself a great deal.

Narrator 5: He was a boy with a secret, and he kept it well.

Narrators All: Suddenly there came a sound of a twig snapping from somewhere nearby in the grove. Edgar froze, wondering what he might do if Mr. Ratikan came out from the shadows again, swinging his walking stick.

Isabel: You've got twigs and leaves caught in your hair.

Edgar: Come out from there, Isabel.

Narrator 4: A head of tangled, dirty hair emerged from behind the trunk of the tree, then a brown forehead, and finally a dark eye with a thick black brow hanging over it peered out.

Isabel: Did Mr. Ratikan knock you down again? Did he hit you with that awful stick of his?

Edgar: Why must you always follow me, Isabel.

Isabel: I can get those out for you.

Narrator 3: Edgar brushed the leaves and twigs from his mop of brown hair and then he turned to go.

Isabel: Oh, but you can't just go. You need to tell me what happened. Did Mr. Ratikan throw you to the ground? Is that why you've got leaves in your hair?

Narrator 2: Edgar was about to scold the girl as an older brother might do when he felt a slight rumbling beneath his feet.

Narrator 5: Isabel felt it too.

Narrators All: They both stood quietly, trying to understand what it was.

Narrator 1: It had happened before – this faint trembling of the ground in the grove- and so the two were not so surprised by it. Still, it was a little stronger this time, as though someone were banging a drum in the ground beneath them, trying to get their attention.

Isabel: My father says it's nothing, but it does feel strange, doesn't it.

Narrators All: The feeling stopped and Edgar began to walk away without answering. It was getting late and he still had twenty trees to trim.

Narrator 1: Edgar gazed out past the edge of the grove. He often daydreamed about what his world might look like from far away, and he had devised a rather accurate image in his mind.

Narrator 2: Atherton was situated on three circular levels, each one wider than the one above it.

Narrator 3: The broad Flatlands were at the distant bottom. Edgar thought that if a person fell off the edge of the Flatlands, they would fall forever.

Narrator 4: Tabletop, where Edgar lived, was a large plateau at the top of a steep rock face rising from the middle of the Flatlands.

Narrator 5: And then there were the Highlands, the most mysterious place of all.

Narrators 2 & 3: It sat at the top of the imposing cliffs in the center of Tabletop.

Narrators All: Edgar, too, had always been curious about the Highlands though he'd never been there.

Narrator 1: Travel between the three levels was strictly forbidden.

Narrator 4: No one from Tabletop knew what was at the top of the cliffs, because no one was ever invited. What others didn't know is that Edgar was a climber and he planned to climb those cliffs.

Narrator 3: If you want to know more about Edgar's adventures:

Narrator 2: Pick up a copy of *Atherton: The House of Power* by Patrick Carman.