



E N T E R T A I N M E N T



THE RAVEN

FADE IN:

SUPERIMPOSE: On October 7, 1849, Edgar Allan Poe was found, near death, on a park bench in Baltimore, Maryland. He was forty years old. The last five days of his life remain a mystery.

EXT. PARK - DUSK

A light rain falls over Baltimore, 1849. MOVE across a street toward a lone figure seated on a bench. A beat and then the MAN leans his head back, takes off his hat and looks toward the sky.

FADE TO:

EXT. TENEMENT - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: BALTIMORE. FIVE DAYS EARLIER.

A woman SCREAMS. It is the sound of death, and all who hear it shudder. In the distance, HORSE'S HOOVES pound against cobblestones. A MAN bursts through the front door of the tenement house. He is winded by fear.

MAN AT TENEMENT
It's the fourth floor.

The man points as CAPTAIN ELDERIDGE, 50s, leaps from a carriage. Elderidge is followed by several OFFICERS on horseback.

ELDERIDGE
Upstairs.

INT. TENEMENT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

DARKNESS, broken only by a faint hue of light, far off. The light intensifies as Elderidge leads the Officers around the corner of a narrow, wooden stairwell, waistcoats and lanterns flying through the cold Chesapeake night. They reach the final landing just in time to hear the sound of a SKELETON KEY. The door they now face has been locked from the INSIDE.

Tenement residents cluster in shadow shrouded door-frames.

ELDERIDGE
Give us room!

Elderidge heaves himself against the tiny door and CRASHES it down in a flurry of splinters.

The air of the room assaults the Captain with the moist iron *
scent of fresh blood.

He grabs a lantern from an officer thrusting it before him.

ELDERIDGE (CONT'D)

Dear God..

An older woman lays in a pool of blood, her neck slit by a
razor so deeply that it lies at an unnatural angle to the
shoulder.

He aims his gun into the darkness beyond his lantern and
signals to his men.

They move cautiously into the small apartment. Elderidge
finds the gas lamp and lights it.

OFFICER

It's empty, sir.

ELDERIDGE

Impossible. We heard the door lock.

He signals to the final remaining closet. The other officers *
back him up. He flings open the door. FIRES on instinct.
Fires on nothing.

ELDERIDGE (CONT'D)

Dammit. The window. *

CANTRELL, a young and clearly frightened police officer,
struggles at the sill...

CANTRELL

Nailed shut.

ELDERIDGE

How...?

Each cop ponders the impossible. Until...

A delicate tintinnabulation of falling gravel.

Elderidge's gaze turns to the FIREPLACE. *

We PUSH IN slowly on the fireplace as they all train their
guns and Elderidge approaches nervously.

Another tinkle of crumbling mortar and then a slim young arm,
alabaster white against the sooted wall, a single vein of
blood curling like a ribbon before dripping upon the brick
hearth.

ELDERIDGE (CONT'D)
Get the Inspector.

EXT. BUTCHER ROW - NIGHT

A murder of crows eviscerate the remains of a decaying carcass.

A figure in a tattered cape and hat emerges from the fog, scattering the birds.

EDGAR ALLEN POE, a bottle dangling from his fingers sways slightly above the carrion. He stoops and examines what had once been a cat.

POE
Phylum Chordata, subphylum
Vertebrata...

He pulls out a broken quill of pen and uses it to peel back a piece of matted fur around the stomach, revealing the tiny remains of unborn kittens.

POE (CONT'D)
With kittens...

Nature reminds him of how unbearably cruel she can be.

POE (CONT'D)
"The ways of God in Nature, as in
Providence are not *our* ways..."

He sucks at the last sip of his bottle. Finding it lacking, he tosses it away, goes in search of more.

EXT. TAVERN NIGHT

*

A low place. Poe stands before it, bracing himself. Stands before it as if already able to foresee the calamitous adventure about to unfold. A deep breath, then...

*

*

*

CUT TO:

INT. TAVERN - NIGHT

SAILORS pound liquor in a rowdy ale house. The door to the tavern suddenly explodes open and Poe, dressed in a cape, enters.

*

POE
Lovely to see you all. Again.

Poe crosses the room while tucking a pair of gloves in his pocket. He saddles onto a bar stool and taps the zinc. He is drunk and over articulates.

POE (CONT'D)

Hello Reagan. Did you miss me? I am naturally delighted to be back in Baltimore though in all honesty feeling a bit under the weather. However it has long been said, what brandy cannot cure, has no cure, so what say you to a snifter for an old, ailing friend?

*

REAGAN, the barman, is the largest, most solid object in the room. Per routine, he stares down Poe.

*

POE (CONT'D)

(cupping an ear)

I'm sorry, say what?

*

*

REAGAN

Say nothin'.

*

POE

Am I to assume you're out of brandy, then?

REAGAN

Got many bottles back there.

POE

So it's a question of finances.

*

REAGAN

Don't mean to shock you, Poe. But I haven't seen you in a while and the last time you left me in kind of a small economic depression.

*

*

*

POE

Let me ask you, Reagan... When you're tossing about at night struggling to embrace sweet oblivion, do you tend to count sheep or shekels?

*

*

*

*

*

*

Reagan stares at him.

*

POE (CONT'D)

Fine. If it's money you want...

*

Poe empties a change purse onto the zinc.

POE (CONT'D)
...try not to shit yourself.

Poe reaches into his stocking and pulls out a dollar bill.
Adds it to the pile.

POE (CONT'D)
And spot these fine oceaneers a
round too. On me.

*

REAGAN
Where the hell'd you get that?

Reagan takes a coin and bites it to see if the money is, in
fact, real.

POE
Donation box at Holy Cross. They
were out of candles anyway.

Reagan sweeps the change into the till but doesn't pour any
drinks.

POE (CONT'D)
Christ. Now what?

REAGAN
That'll just about cover the last
tab.

Poe stares at the barman with sad eyes.

POE
Are you really going to be this
cruel? Besides, the Patriot is
publishing one of my reviews
tomorrow. I'll be flush as a lord.

*

*

Indifference. Poe sits, defeated. Then...

POE (CONT'D)
(holding up his hand)
A single glass. I swear I'm good
for it, Reagan. On my honor.

*

REAGAN
Tell you what. If the paper
publishes anything you write, come
back tomorrow and I'll buy you the
pint.

POE
Tomorrow? Tomorrow I might be dead.
Or you might be.

REAGAN
I'll risk it.

POE
How's this.

*

Poe grabs a nearby half-drunk pint and finishes it off. He holds the glass upside down to confirm he hasn't missed a drop.

POE (CONT'D)
I get a pint for everyone here who recognizes me or one of my poems.

The SAILOR belonging to the pint, much larger than Poe, sides with the barman.

SAILOR
You better get to the door before I split your head open.

Poe fixes him with a stare in which demons reside.

*

POE
My head is already split open, you overgrown mouthbreather, and if you don't show me some respect, I'll give you a personal tour...

*

*

*

*

Poe then turns to the crowded bar and recites in a booming voice:

*

POE (CONT'D)
Excuse me, gentlemen! A drink to the man who can finish this line or name the author: "Quoth the raven...?"

BARFLY
"Piss off!"

BARFLY #2
Poncey bastard.

*

The whole bar guffaws.

POE
I repeat, "Quoth the raven...?"

*

Finally, a sailor dressed as a FRENCH OFFICER stands proudly and bellows--

FRENCH OFFICER
(in a thick accent)
Nevermore!

Silence. The man looks like a fool.

FRENCH OFFICER (CONT'D)
It is a very favorite poem.

POE
(pointing)
France! God love the Frenchies.

*

The barman nods to the Sailor (#2), who grabs Poe's arm and escorts him toward the door. Poe rips his arm free and turns back to the crowd.

*

POE (CONT'D)
You people wouldn't recognize your
own homegrown voices if they hissed
in your ears.

*

*

*

SAILOR (#3)
But we know other things. Like how
much it hurts to pick your teeth up
off the floor with broken fingers.

*

*

*

POE
Broken fingers... Is that the limit
of your imagination, you mental
oyster?

*

*

*

*

Sailor #3 leaps up and grabs Poe by the throat, half-carrying him and summarily heaves him out the door.

*

Outside, Poe lands on his bony petard, just as he foresaw.

*

POE (CONT'D)
(to Reagan)
...so lovely to see you all again.

*

CUT TO:

INT. TENEMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

The CORPSE of a young girl is being wrestled from the chimney. Her body is besmeared with SOOT. The body drops, revealing a once beautiful face now mangled and frozen in death. A young officer crosses himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENEMENT - NIGHT

A carriage stops in front of a townhouse now surrounded by police. INSPECTOR EMMETT FIELDS, 30, checks his pocket watch against the bells which toll the THREE AM hour. His handsomeness is belied by a intensely analytical exterior.

INT. TENEMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

Fields kneels beside the DEAD WOMAN and her DAUGHTER.

ELDERIDGE

Katherine LaForte. Thirty-six. Her daughter Anna, just twelve.

Fields retrieves a POCKET KNIFE from his vest and uses it to pull back the locks of blood soaked hair which conceal BRUISES around the dead girl's neck.

FIELDS

She was strangled.

CANTRELL

So young. It gets to you, don't it, Inspector?

*

Fields ignores the young police officer's nervous chatter as he places his own hands over the bruises left on the victim's throat, measuring the killer's grip.

FIELDS

He's a large man. Here. By the extent of his grip. Well over a foot from thumb to pinky.

Wiping the soot marks off his hands with a handkerchief, Fields records his notes on a pad and crosses to the window.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Captain, your men agree that someone locked the door from inside?

*

ELDERIDGE

Absolutely. We heard the bolt thrown just as we arrived.

FIELDS

But by the time you broke down the door the murderer was gone?

ELDERIDGE

Not a trace.

Fields studies the perimeter of the window frame.

FIELDS
And both windows were closed when
you came into the room?

ELDERIDGE
Not just closed, nailed shut. Both
of 'em.

Fields scrapes the head of a nail with his pocket knife.

FIELDS
Tell me, how does such a large man
escape so quickly from a room in
which the windows are nailed shut
and the door has been locked from
the inside?

*

ELDERIDGE
I'm afraid only God and the killer
know that.

FIELDS
Is that a fact...

*

A beat.

CANTRELL
(smirking)
Unless... unless it were a haunt,
Inspector.

*

Fields turns back to the room then returns, examining an
almost imperceptible indentation in the dust around the
window casing.

FIELDS
I'm afraid this killer is very much
alive and I believe he was familiar
to this poor woman and her child.
A workman. Have your men question
the neighbors. I want a list of
all the men who visited these
premises.

*

*

ELDERIDGE
Yes sir.

Fields draws his pocket knife and plunges it into the
indentation releasing...

FIELDS
...a lock. Triggered by a spring.

A gust of cold air sweeps into the room as the window flies open. The officers race over, shocked at the finding, and yet still disbelieving.

CANTRELL
But the nail.

FIELDS
Cut. Mid shaft.

Fields lowers the window revealing how the two halves line up to give the appearance of a single, solid nail.

ELDERIDGE
I checked that window ten times and never found the spring.

FIELDS
I wouldn't have found it either except...

Fields' words trail off as he again takes in the scene.

ELDERIDGE
What is it?

FIELDS
(with a vague distaste)
This crime is familiar to me.

*

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET, CARRIAGE - MORNING

In the distance, CHURCH BELLS toll the hour as a carriage rattles over the cobblestones. The driver sees a shadowed figure in the fog standing in the middle of the street.

It is Poe and he casually holds up his hand, forcing the coach to stop.

POE
Good morning, Percy.

The carriage driver, PERCY, a towering stone-faced servant, tugs on the reins forcing the carriage to a halt. Poe pats the lead horse and sneaks a SUGAR CUBE into its mouth.

PERCY
(stern)
Not again, Mr. Poe. The Captain ain't got time for this.

Poe opens the door to the carriage and steps in anyway, tipping his mud soaked hat to CAPT. CHARLES HAMILTON, a retired US Naval Captain who's still used to giving the orders. Seated beside him is his beautiful daughter, EMILY, an outspoken, radiant young woman. *

POE
Contrary to precedent, Captain
Hamilton, I've no intention of
asking for money. *

HAMILTON
Then what can you possibly want,
Poe? *

Poe climbs into the seat beside Emily and pats her leg.

POE
I've come back to town for your
daughter, Charles.

HAMILTON
You're insane. *

POE
There are those who say madness is
the most sublime form of
intelligence; nonetheless... *

EMILY
Oh, please. I told you I find you
as revolting as some of your
stories. *

POE
Some? Aha, but not all... You're
looking lovely today by the way. *

HAMILTON
Poe get out before I shoot you
where you sit.

POE
And risk blood and brains
splattering onto your daughters
fine silk outfit? *

EMILY
Is this your way of being charming?

POE
Is it working?

Hamilton presses the barrel of a small revolver to Poe's temple.

HAMILTON

Out.

POE

I suppose an invitation to your ball on Friday would be out of the question then?

Hamilton cocks the revolver.

EMILY

Father, don't!

Edgar quickly kisses Emily's cheek, surreptitiously hiding a piece of paper in her muff as he lunges out the far door.

Percy snaps the reins and the horses pull away. Poe runs along the side of the carriage until Emily looks out the window.

POE

(to Emily)

That dress does look ravishing...

The wheel hits a puddle and violently splashes Poe. As the carriage bears her away, she obviously enjoys the sight of him covered in mud.

POE (CONT'D)

(trying to wipe the mud
from his trousers,
muttering to himself)

Man's real life is happy, chiefly
because he is ever expecting that
it will soon be so.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

INT. PATRIOT PRINTING ROOM - MORNING

CLOSE ON: The massive fingers of a PRINTING PRESS grinding out the evening newspaper. PULL BACK TO REVEAL: IVAN REYNOLDS, a 35 year-old typesetter. Behind him several other typesetters labor away at the next day's print.

POE

Good morning, Baltimore Patriot.

Poe, still covered in mud, bows deeply. Most everyone ignores him, except Ivan whose smile is a checker-board of missing teeth.

IVAN
Mr. Poe... your clothes.

Poe crosses to Ivan's work bench and sits.

POE
Just beating the mudslingers to it.
Fortitude, Ivan?

*
*

Ivan sheepishly reaches for a hidden bottle that he hands to Poe.

IVAN
I'm afraid you might need more than
this, Mr. Poe.

POE
And why is that?

Poe sucks down a hearty swig.

IVAN
It's a crime, Mr. Poe. A terrible
crime.

POE
What is, Ivan? Out with it...

*

Ivan nervously hands him the freshly printed edition. The headline screams "GRISLY DOUBLE MURDER!"

Poe flips past, looking for his review.

POE (CONT'D)
Did that marsupial of an editor
fiddle with my review again...

*

IVAN
I told him not to touch it, I told
him, Mr. Poe.

POE
My review... where's my review?

*

A beat. There is no review. Ivan doesn't know where to look.

POE (CONT'D)
What the hell has he done?

IVAN
He said there was no more room in
the layout.

POE
 No more room? Right. No more room.
 (still flipping)
 Pray tell, what fine twat was
 deemed more worthy than--

Poe's eyes expand in horror.

POE (CONT'D)
 LONGFELLOW?

INT. PATRIOT EDITOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

Sitting at a large cluttered desk is HENRY MADDUX, a portly
 flush-faced giant in a loud, possibly checkered suit.

*
 *

POE
 (screaming)
 Where is it?

Poe barges into the room. His mere presence sends the editor
 into instantaneous hypertension.

HENRY
 Where is what?

POE
 The trash bin. Because--

Poe rips the copy of the paper he is carrying in half and
 then in half again.

POE (CONT'D)
 -that is where every last bit of
 this soul-sucking brain-warping
 fish wrap... should be... PUT!

*
 *

HENRY
 That's lovely, Eddy. A real show of
 adjectival fireworks from the great
 Poe himself.

*
 *

POE
 Not only do you refuse to print my
 review of Longfellow, you actually
 run his third rate poem instead?

*

HENRY
 People LIKE Longfellow.

POE
 That's because editors like you
 tell them to. Doesn't the artistic
 (MORE)

POE (CONT'D)
enrichment of your readers mean
anything?

HENRY
Artistic enrichment?! You've got
some gall barging into my office
and lecturing me. All you do is
tear down other people's work.

*

POE
Not true. Not true at all.

Henry snatches a text off his desk.

HENRY
You called Emerson, and I quote, "A
sad, festering, literary whore."

POE
He is. What's wrong with being
honest? Or do you prefer that hack
Griswold, quacking like a duck over
some pap not clever enough for an
outhouse wall?

*
*
*
*

HENRY
Doesn't think much of your stuff,
does he.

*
*
*

POE
The man is an absolute buffoon.
Which is probably why he finds so
much of a home here.

*
*
*
*

HENRY
You're out of line with me.

*
*

POE
I'm broke.

Henry becomes aware that the entire staff of the Baltimore
Patriot has been watching. He shuts the door.

HENRY
Then write another "*Tell-Tale
Heart*." People love blood. They
love death.

*

POE
If I could write another "*Tell-Tale
Heart*" and you had a feather up
your ass we'd both be tickled. You
have to publish my review, Henry.
I'm desperate.

*
*
*

HENRY

You think you're the only one? Have
you looked at our circulation
numbers? I need stories, gripping
stories!

*

This is hard for Poe to admit.

POE

Henry...

(tapping his skull)

It's a bloody windswept desert up
here. I've got nothing left.

*

*

*

HENRY

Try laying off the liquor and the
tinctures. They rot your brain.

*

*

POE

I only drink occasionally. To be
social. And the tinctures are
purely therapeutic.

*

*

Henry opens the door.

HENRY

(ushering Poe out)

Write something I can sell.

CUT TO:

INT. PRINTSHOP - DAY

Shafts of muted afternoon sunshine slice across the wooden
floor. Fields stands in the center of the room reading from a
collection.

FIELDS

(reading)

"A careful search soon brought to
light the hidden spring. I pressed
it, and, satisfied with the
discovery, forbear to upraise the
sash."

CANTRELL

I do love that writer, what's his
name?

*

Close on the title page in the collection: MURDERS IN THE RUE
MORGUE by...

FIELDS
 (with distaste, almost
 grudgingly)
 Poe...

*
 *
 *

CUT TO:

 BELOW IS:
 VERSION #1 OF THE HEART SCENE

*
 *
 *

INT. POE'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

With macabre precision, Poe slices into a human heart with a straight razor.

POE
 ...surprisingly tough.

*

CARL, a fluffy RACCOON he considers more a companion than a pet, watches intrigued as Poe uses a magnifying glass to peer into the organ.

POE (CONT'D)
 Consider Carl, if you will, the human heart. Ensconced behind a wall of fibrous sinew, the pericardium, lies this small chamber, a vacancy where gases are wed to fluids and all the secrets and mysteries of our species are hidden... where the soul and invention, hunger and longing...

*
 *

Finding nothing, he gives up. Stabs it casually, leaves the razor in jammed to the haft.

*
 *

POE (CONT'D)
 Ah, Christ...

*
 *

He is an artist searching for inspiration, like an itch in the middle of his back he is unable to reach.

*

Carl decides to continue the investigation on his own when there is a knock at the door.

*

Poe opens it to find Emily.

EMILY
 You think you're so clever don't you?

POE

If I could thrive off "clever" I'd
have bought and sold your father
ten times over by now.

*
*
*

She pulls the note from her muff and reads.

EMILY

"The angels, not half so happy in
heaven,
Went envying her and me-
Yes!- that was the reason (as all
men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud
by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel
Lee."

She arches an eyebrow up at him.

POE

Continue.

*

EMILY

"But our love it was stronger by
far than the love
Of those who were older than we-
Of many far wiser than we-
And neither the angels in heaven
above,
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the
soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee."

POE

You like?

EMILY

I think it is the most romantic
thing I've ever read.

She throws her arms around him and kisses him passionately.
They grapple their way inside and Poe kicks the door shut.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You know I had to hear about your
stunt all afternoon.

POE

I was trying to see if that little
vein on the side of his neck would
explode.

They kiss again, Poe nuzzling at the warmth of her arched throat. He works his way up to her ear.

*
*

POE (CONT'D)

I consider it my duty to wrestle
you away from that gun-toting
philistine.

EMILY

And into the arms of you of all
people?

POE

Who better?

EMILY

Then why do you always antagonize
him?

*
*
*

POE

Because you love it when I do.

*
*

EMILY

But wouldn't it be easier if...

*
*

POE

Besides, I can't help it. I despise
self-inflated know-nothings.
Specifically self-inflated know-
nothings who despise me. And it's
the devil's own work that the woman
I adore...

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

EMILY

(cutting him off)

Edgar? Edgar, please. We need to
talk.

*
*
*

Disentangling herself, she crosses into the room, taking a
seat on the divan.

POE

Emily, what is it?

She begins pulling her gloves off when she notices Carl
ripping another bite out of the heart.

EMILY

What is Carl eating?

POE

A heart.

*

EMILY
A human heart?

He nods and sits beside her, immediately kissing her de-gloved hands.

EMILY (CONT'D)
How in heaven did you come by...

*

POE
An admirer. Works at the morgue.
He's asked me to write a prelude to
"The Tell-Tale Heart."

*

*

EMILY
Naturally.

POE
I was searching for inspiration and
lo and behold...

He works his way up her arm. As delightful as his kisses are,
she knows she must stop.

*

EMILY
Edgar, wait. Stop. We can't keep
going on like this.

She again wrests free as he slips off the divan, landing on
his knees.

POE
What is it, Emily? What do you
want?

EMILY
To start, I want you to get off
your knees unless you intend to use
the position for another purpose.

*

He considers her voluptuous stockinged legs.

POE
Such as...

*

EMILY
A proposal.

POE
(thickly)
A proposal for what?
(he recoils)
You mean marriage?

*

*

*

*

Emily stands. Miffed.

EMILY
It's not such a horrible thought.
People still do it from time to
time.

*

POE
Really? When?

EMILY
When they're in love, I suppose.

Poe smiles. He begins to unbutton her blouse. She lets him.

POE
Love? Tell me about that.

*

EMILY
Don't be an ass.

POE
If I were in love, would I think
about the other person all the
time?

EMILY
Most likely.

Poe has undone her blouse and runs his hand up her back. She
in turn begins to pull his jacket off of him.

POE
And would I feel great desire to
spend every waking moment
smothering that person with
affection?

EMILY
It has been described as such.

The two are now trying their best to undress each other -
their lips on each other's faces but still they are able to
carry on this ridiculous conversation.

POE
Even if that person were easily
distracted?

And she is definitely distracted now.

Poe takes Emily's hand.

POE (CONT'D)
And I'm afraid I'm left with no
other choice.

Poe drops to one knee, again. And with utter sincerity:

POE (CONT'D)
Emily Hamilton, will you be my
wife?

Emily gasps and kisses him. Then pulls away.

EMILY
I love you, Edgar. You ridiculous
man.

Poe begins to untie the back of her skirt as his hands move
up her leg.

POE
Emily, you know I'm financially...
in extremis. Most likely always
will be.

*
*
*
*

EMILY
Who on earth would marry you for
money? Besides, I've enough for the
both of us. You're an artist, my
darling, be one without
distraction. My wedding gift to
you.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

POE
(kissing her hands)
And what of your fire-breathing
father?

*
*
*

EMILY
I've been thinking about that.

Emily kisses Poe passionately and reaches for his belt.

*

EMILY (CONT'D)
We'll announce it at my birthday
ball on Friday. In front of all of
Baltimore.

*

POE
If I were a better man, I'd forbid
it. But...

Poe sweeps his love into his arms.

EMILY
...but you're not.

BELOW IS:
VERSION #2 OF THE HEART SCENE

INT. POE'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

With macabre precision, Poe slices into a human heart with a straight razor.

POE
...surprisingly tough.

CARL, a fluffy RACCOON he considers more a companion than a pet, watches intrigued as Poe uses a magnifying glass to peer into the organ.

POE (CONT'D)
Consider Carl, if you will, the
human heart...

There's a knock at the door. Poe casually stabs the heart,
leaves the razor in jammed to the haft.

Poe opens the door to find Emily.

EMILY
You think you're so clever don't
you?

POE
If I could thrive off "clever" I'd
have bought and sold your father
ten times over by now.

She pulls the note from her muff and reads.

EMILY
"The angels, not half so happy in
heaven,
Went envying her and me-
Yes!- that was the reason (as all
men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud
by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel
Lee."

She arches an eyebrow up at him.

POE

Continue.

*

EMILY

"But our love it was stronger by
 far than the love
 Of those who were older than we-
 Of many far wiser than we-
 And neither the angels in heaven
 above,
 Nor the demons down under the sea,
 Can ever dissever my soul from the
 soul
 Of the beautiful Annabel Lee."

POE

You like?

EMILY

I think it is the most romantic
 thing I've ever read.

She throws her arms around him and kisses him passionately.
 They grapple their way inside and Poe kicks the door shut.

They kiss again, Poe nuzzling at the warmth of her arched
 throat.

*
*

EMILY (CONT'D)

Is that a heart?

*
*

POE

That?

*
*

EMILY

A human heart?

*
*

He nods and sits beside her, immediately kissing her de-
 gloved hands.

*
*

EMILY (CONT'D)

How in heaven did you come by...

*
*

POE

(while kissing)

An admirer. Works at the morgue.
 He's asked me to write a prelude to
"The Tell-Tale Heart."

*
*
*
*
*

EMILY

Naturally.

*
*

POE
 (mood-shifting beat)
 Come here...

He brings her to the table. She's not the least bit
 squeamish.

He works the razor deftly

POE (CONT'D)
 Consider, Emily, if you will, the
 human heart. Ensconced behind a
 wall of fibrous sinew, the
 pericardium, lies this small
 chamber, a vacancy where gasses are
 wed to fluids and all the secrets
 and mysteries of our species are
 hidden, where soul and invention,
 hunger and longing...

In a fit of artistic exasperation he tosses the heart to the
 floor, where Carl continues the exploration.

POE (CONT'D)
 Ah, Christ...

EMILY
 Maybe you're exploring the wrong
 organ.

POE
 Come again?

EMILY
 (pulling him away)
 I'm a greater admirer of the brain.

They re-entangle, Poe tracing her collarbone with his
 fingertips.

EMILY (CONT'D)
 You know I had to hear about your
 stunt all afternoon.

POE
 I was trying to see if that little
 vein on the side of his neck would
 explode.

He works his way up to her ear.

POE (CONT'D)

I consider it my duty to wrestle
you away from that gun-toting
philistine.

EMILY

And into the arms of you of all
people?

POE

Who better?

EMILY

Then why do you always antagonize
him?

POE

Because you love it when I do.

EMILY

But wouldn't it be easier if...

POE

Besides, I can't help it. I despise
self-inflated know-nothings.
Specifically self-inflated know-
nothings who despise me. And it's
the devil's own work that the woman
I adore...

EMILY

(cutting him off)

Edgar? Edgar, please. We need to
talk.

Disentangling herself, she crosses into the room, taking a
seat on the divan.

POE

Emily, what is it?

He resumes his tender assault. As delightful as his kisses
are, she knows she must stop.

EMILY

Edgar, wait. We can't keep going on
like this.

She again wrests free as he slips off the divan, landing on
his knees.

POE

What is it, Emily? What do you
want?

EMILY
 To begin with, I want you to get
 off your knees unless you intend to
 use the position for another
 purpose.

*
 *
 *
 *
 *

He considers her voluptuous stockinged legs.

*

POE
 Such as...

*

EMILY
 A proposal.

POE
 (thickly)
 A proposal for what?
 (he recoils)
 You mean marriage?

*
 *
 *
 *

Emily stands. Miffed.

EMILY
 It's not such a horrible thought.
 People still do it from time to
 time.

*

POE
 Really? When?

EMILY
 When they're in love, I suppose.

Poe smiles. He begins to unbutton her blouse. She lets him.

POE
 Love? Tell me about that.

*

EMILY
 Don't be an ass.

POE
 If I were in love, would I think
 about the other person all the
 time?

EMILY
 Most likely.

Poe has undone her blouse and runs his hand up her back. She
 in turn begins to pull his jacket off of him.

POE

And would I feel great desire to
spend every waking moment
smothering that person with
affection?

EMILY

It has been described as such.

The two are now trying their best to undress each other -
their lips on each other's faces but still they are able to
carry on this ridiculous conversation.

POE

Even if that person were easily
distracted?

And she is definitely distracted now.

Poe takes Emily's hand.

POE (CONT'D)

And I'm afraid I'm left with no
other choice.

Poe drops to one knee, again. And with utter sincerity:

POE (CONT'D)

Emily Hamilton, will you be my
wife?

Emily gasps and kisses him. Then pulls away.

EMILY

I love you, Edgar. You ridiculous
man.

Poe begins to untie the back of her skirt as his hands move
up her leg.

POE

Emily, you know I'm financially...
in extremis. Most likely always
will be.

*
*
*
*

EMILY

Who on earth would marry you for
money? Besides, I've enough for the
both of us. You're an artist, my
darling, be one without
distraction. My wedding gift to
you.

*
*
*
*
*
*

POE
 (kissing her hands)
 And what of your fire-breathing
 father?

*
 *
 *

EMILY
 I've been thinking about that.

Emily kisses Poe passionately and reaches for his belt.

*

EMILY (CONT'D)
 We'll announce it at my birthday
 ball on Friday. In front of all of
 Baltimore.

*

POE
 If I were a better man, I'd forbid
 it. But...

Poe sweeps his love into his arms.

EMILY
 ...but you're not.

END OF VERSION #2 - HEART SCENE

*
 *

INT. CHAMBER - NIGHT

LUDWIG GRISWALD is bound tightly to a table. A figure moves
 in the shadows that surround him.

GRISWALD
 Please... mercy... I have
 children... please!

The shadow continues its business as we hear a series of
 mechanical parts being manipulated.

GRISWALD (CONT'D)
 Why are you doing this? Why?!
 What have I done?!

A final, heavy clunk is heard as a large lever is thrown.

Now an oiled orchestra of ratchets and cogs click and clock
 echoing throughout the chamber as a large, heavy rush of air
 is heard above.

Griswald looks up into the pitch darkness, searching for some
 kind of understanding of what is happening.

As he hears the approaching whoosh again, he catches sight of a curved, bladed edge that winks like a Cheshire smile and is gone.

INT. SOCIETY HALL - MORNING

A meeting of the CHESAPEAKE BAY LADIES' POETRY SOCIETY. The audience is packed with Baltimore's fairer sex. Older ladies nibble finger sandwiches. A few eligible debutantes sit in the front row, their eyes eagerly locked on Poe. Poe stands before them reciting, for the millionth time, his most famous work.

POE

And the Raven never flitting, still
is sitting, still is sitting, on
the pallid bust of Pallas just
above my chamber door;

Poe pauses for effect, notices one of the young ladies in the front row, her bosom almost heaving out of her dress.

POE (CONT'D)

And his eyes have all the seeming
of a demon's that is dreaming, and
the lamp - light o'er him steaming
throws his shadow on the floor;

Every woman in the room is now on the edge of her seat. Poe throws himself into the final stanza with dramatic intensity.

POE (CONT'D)

And my soul from out that shadow
that lies floating on the floor;
shall be lifted - NEVERMORE.

A brief moment of silent ecstasy before... THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. The ladies blush and beam in the presence of this 19th century rock star.

POE (CONT'D)

Who's next?

MRS. BRADLEY, a plump, rosy cheeked woman in her 50's, timidly rises and trembles as she holds her poem.

MRS. BRADLEY

Well, here goes. It's called The
Butterfly and the Bee.

POE

(already in pain)

An exquisite title, Mrs. Bradley.

*

MRS. BRADLEY

(reading)

The butterfly to her brother bee
did sing a song of spring. Come
listen to my ode of thee thou honey-
making thing--

POE

Please, stop.

Mrs. Bradley stops mid-stanza, embarrassed.

MRS. BRADLEY

It's terrible. Oh, I knew it was.

POE

"...thou honey-making thing?"

MRS. BRADLEY

I tried to rhyme it.

POE

You succeeded.

MRS. BRADLEY

I knew I shouldn't have gone next.
I'm sorry, Mr. Poe. It's horrible.

POE

On the contrary. It's...
indescribable.

Mrs. Bradley beams with pride.

POE (CONT'D)

The juxtaposition of the beauty in
nature with the horrors of our
recently mechanized society, i.e.,
reducing the brother bee into
nothing more than a honey-making
THING. A meaningless cog, bound for
destruction within the machine of
nature.

Mrs. Bradley looks confused.

POE (CONT'D)

Brilliant, Mrs. Bradley.
Terrifying, but brilliant.

Poe wipes a bead of sweat from his brow and is pleased when
the CHURCH SECRETARY sheepishly enters.

SECRETARY

I'm so sorry to interrupt.

POE

No, no. By all means, do come in.

Facing away from the ladies for the moment, Poe takes a blindingly fast, well practiced nip from his chest pocket flask.

*
*
*

SECRETARY

(a little taken aback, but
no stranger to the grape
himself)

*
*
*

There's someone here to see you.

POE

Who is it?

*

REVERSE ANGLE TO: six Baltimore police OFFICERS. And not one is smiling.

Mrs. Bradley covers her mouth in high drama.

SMASH CUT TO:

*

INT. CHAMBER

The blade drops another quarter of an inch and catches the fabric between two buttons of his shirt. The thing has really gained momentum now.

Griswald has nearly pulled his wrist free. He is struggling with every strength in his being.

*

GRISWALD

HEEEELLLLLP! HELP MEEEEEE!

He sobs as he hears the relentless mechanism lower again.

CA CHUNK

The blade halts at the apex of its swing and then begins its fearsome descent.

GRISWALD (CONT'D)

NOOOOOOO!

Another quarter inch and at first you just hear the SOUND. It's the same sound as when you cut a fresh melon - only wetter.

Griswald screams as the blade arcs gracefully up and away.

CUT TO:

INT. FIELDS' OFFICE - DAY

CLOSE ON: A magnified strand of BLONDE HAIR stained BLACK at one end. PULL BACK TO REVEAL: Fields examining the HAIR through a MAGNIFYING GLASS. We see the hair suddenly bend upward on its own as if it were alive. PULL BACK FURTHER TO REVEAL: Fields holding a horseshoe-shaped magnet just inches above the hair. He lets go of the hair and it flies up to the magnet just as the door opens and Poe is forced inside. SLAM. The door is locked behind him.

*

POE
What's going on here?

Fields doesn't look up. He pulls the hair free.

*

FIELDS
Why would hair be attracted to a magnet?
(separating the soot)
It couldn't be the chimney soot...

*
*
*
*

POE
What?

FIELDS
Soot is merely carbon residue from coal and wood.

POE
Am I under arrest?

FIELDS
(not looking at him)
I'm Detective Fields. Please sit down Mr. Poe.

*

POE
I'd rather stand. Makes it easier to leave.

FIELDS
I am a reader of your work.

*

POE
I admit some of my admirers have gone to excessive lengths to meet, but...

*
*

FIELDS
I didn't say "admirer" and this is
not a social call.

*

Poe waits.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
The night before, a young girl and
her mother were found murdered. The
daughter's body was lodged in a
chimney, the mother's head was
nearly severed by a straight razor.
The killer eluded capture through a
window in which a lock was feigned
with a nail sawn in half. Does any
of this sound familiar to you, Mr.
Poe?

POE
But you're talking about my story,
a work of fiction--

*

Fields nods to Cantrell, signaling him to hand the paper to
Poe who now reads the details under the headline "Grisly
Double Murder."

*

FIELDS
(looking at Poe for the
first time)
I'm afraid I'm not.

*

*

*

Stunned, Poe now takes his seat.

*

FIELDS (CONT'D)
According to various witnesses, you
were drunk two nights ago in a
tavern near the harbor. What time
did you leave?

*

POE
I don't remember. My leaving was...
involuntary.

Poe reaches into his chest pocket again for his flask. He
takes a swig and as he does, Fields sees his hand is shaking.

*

POE (CONT'D)
You think I murdered these people?

FIELDS
May I see your hand?

*

Poe holds his frail hand out and Fields quickly measures the
distance between thumb and pinky.

He shakes his head to himself.

POE

What?

FIELDS

(more to himself)

Perhaps with the help of
accomplices some scenario might be
conceivable,

(sharply, to Poe)

but what can't be disputed is the
fact that your imagination is the
inspiration of a horrendous crime.

POE

(sharply, but rattled by
what he's being told)

Is imagination a felony then? Am I
being charged?

Suddenly, Captain Elderidge throws open the door of the
office.

ELDERIDGE

Inspector!

INT. ANTE-CHAMBER - DAY

As Fields enters he sees Henry Maddox, hands on knees, as he
tries to draw fresh air and collect himself.

ELDERIDGE

This is Henry Maddox editor of the
Baltimore Patriot. He was brought
in to identify the body.

Henry struggles upright.

HENRY

His name is, I mean was, Gris...
(tastes his own bile)
Griswald. Ludwig Griswald.

FIELDS

He worked for you?

HENRY

Freelance. A writer.

FIELDS

What kind of things did he write?

HENRY
Some poetry. Mostly criticism, you
know, the easy stuff.

FIELDS
And did he by chance have any kind
of a relationship with Edgar Allen
Poe?

*
*

HENRY
Did he ever. They hated each other.
Had a nasty feud about a year ago.
Sold a lot of papers.

*
*

Elderidge looks at Fields who considers this piece of
information.

FIELDS
How long have you known Mr. Poe?

HENRY
Edgar? Well past ten years.

FIELDS
You published another one of his
stories - "*The Murders In The Rue
Morgue*"?

*

HENRY
He wrote that one several years
back for Graham's magazine when he
was in Philadelphia. I reprinted it
a couple of times here - people
loved the gory ones.

FIELDS
(with distaste)
So they do.

*

HENRY
Edgar isn't a suspect is he,
Inspector?

*

FIELDS
At this point everyone is a
suspect, Mr. Maddox.

HENRY
Forgive me, sir. I know Eddy can
set up house in some dark places...
(tapping his temples)
But they're all up in here. As far
as something like this?
(regarding the shadowed
(MORE)

*
*
*
*
*

HENRY (CONT'D)
 chamber beyond him)
 The only thing he's ever killed is
 a bottle of port.

*
 *

FIELDS
 Thanks for your time, Mr. Maddox.

*

Mr. Maddox is lead away as the Inspector turns to the dark
 maw leading into the chamber.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 You said there was something
 covering the victims face?

ELDERIDGE
 Yes, it's just here.

A red mask is on a table of strange and ominous looking
 tools.

The Inspector picks it up and examines it.

Inside he finds a sentence written with careful and precise
 penmanship.

FIELDS
 "'Who dares? Who dares insult us
 with this blasphemous mockery?'
 cried Prince Prospero."

ELDERIDGE
 What's it mean?

*

FIELDS
 I haven't a clue but I know who
 will.

INT. CHAMBER

Poe timidly steps out of the dark throat of hall leading into
 the chamber.

The aftermath of Griswald's evisceration has transformed the
 room into a SLAUGHTERHOUSE. The floor is awash in BLOOD and
 INTESTINES.

The MASSIVE PENDULUM blade is violently wedged in the center
 of the table which is soaked through with blood. Poe is
 stunned by the contraption.

*
 *

It's his imagination come to life and enormity of it makes
 his knees buckle. It's as if he's literally walking around
 inside his own fevered head.

*
 *
 *

Inspector Fields and Elderidge are waiting for him.

FIELDS
I apologize for calling you once
again, Mr. Poe but I'm in dire need
of your expertise.

*
*

Poe is still in shock.

*

He tries to sound cavalier to cover his disorientation, but
it's a fairly transparent effort.

*
*

POE
(voice quaking)
I hadn't imagined the counter-
ratchet to be so large... but it
really is ingeniously designed...

*

FIELDS
(seeing right through him)
So it is.

*

On the floor near the Inspector are two bloody sheets
covering the severed victim.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
We have reason to believe you knew
the victim.

*

Fields gestures as Elderidge lifts the corner of the sheet
exposing the deceased's face.

*

POE
(recoiling a little, but
standing fast)
No. I don't know. How could anyone
tell?

*
*
*
*

FIELDS
Perhaps this will jar your memory.

*

He reads from an old paper.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
"Never has the perfunctoriness of
plot been so mechanized and twisted
by soulless contrivance as in '*The
Pit and the Pendulum*.'"

POE
(startled)
Griswald?

*
*

FIELDS
So you do know him?

POE
(rattled, speedy)
Yes, I mean, we traded barbs, as in words not actual weapons of any sort, as writers often do to sell newspapers or gain a little favor... But I'd never even met the man, wouldn't know him if we were in the same bathtub.

FIELDS
"The Pit and the Pendulum."

POE
It was published. In '42. In *"Tales of Ratiocination."*

ELDERIDGE
"Ratio-what."

POE
(distracted)
Literary how-do-you-do for reasoning logically or methodically.

FIELDS
Tales... the other stories in the collection...

POE
What of them?

FIELDS
Are they specifically about murder?

POE
(beat)
I'm afraid so.

FIELDS
Then perhaps, as unfortunate as this is, you may be uniquely qualified to cast light on our killer. There's a logic underlying these deaths--

POE
You think this is the act of a logical mind? I commit my crimes on paper. Someone who can actually
(MORE)

POE (CONT'D)
carve a human being in half doesn't
come from a place of logic.

FIELDS
Then from where?

POE
Passion. Obsession. Mental disease.
A contradiction of incredible self-
control and the utter lack of it.

Fields considers those insights.

FIELDS
And what then do you make of this?

He hands him the mask.

POE
"The Masque of the Red Death."

Poe reads the text inside. He blanches.

FIELDS
What is it?

POE
This quote from the story mentions
Prospero, a character who hosts a
costume ball to which death comes
in disguise.

(a tad pedantic now)
I created him to, to symbolize
man's arrogance; even when
confronted with certain oblivion,
man, in all his--

FIELDS
(cutting him off)
Understand something, Mr. Poe.
Before we can go on working
together... I need to tell you that
as a policeman of this city I've
been up to my chin in true horror
and inhumanity and it's neither
ingenious nor symbolic, mainly just
heartbreaking and pathetic. And
sadly plentiful... So when I say
I'm no admirer of your work it's
because I find you a literary
tittillater, a verbal dance man.
Your stories are an offense to the
truth of my profession.

Somehow this calms Poe down, almost makes him smile.

POE
Yet you read them.

FIELDS
(embarrassed)
A few. I didn't say they were badly
writtren.
(slightly placating beat)
I've said what I said to clear the
air.

POE
(invigorated by Fields'
honesty)
Consider it cleared.

FIELDS
(holding the red mask)
I believe our killer is taunting
us. He wants us to know he is going
to strike again.

POE
Charles Hamilton is hosting a
costume ball at the new railway
station. Tomorrow night.

CUT TO:

EXT. HAMILTON'S HOUSE - EVENING

The offices of HAMILTON RAILWAY AND HOLDING COMPANY. Rain
pounds the cobblestone street as carriages race to and fro.

INT. HAMILTON'S LIBRARY - EVENING

Charles Hamilton sits behind his desk. Fields stands in front
of him.

FIELDS
(reading from a book)
And one by one dropped the revelers
in the blood-bedewed halls of their
revel...

Hamilton takes a sip of SHERRY, holding it in his mouth and
considering.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

If "*The Masque of the Red Death*" is his next intended story, we must use this opportunity to capture this man at your costume ball.

Hamilton spits the sherry into a SPITTOON.

HAMILTON

Too harsh. I want something older.
Six cases should be enough.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: A well dressed SALESMAN who notes the request and begins packing his samples. Fields moves in on Hamilton as he continues reading.

FIELDS

(reading)

And darkness and decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

Hamilton regards the papier-mâché mask.

HAMILTON

So this gentleman dresses up like a
what, like a...

FIELDS

(reading)

"The figure was shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat. And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around. But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the Red Death. His vesture was dabbled in blood -- and his broad brow, with all the features of the face, was besprinkled with the scarlet horror."

(closing the book)

That being said, I doubt he'd appear so slavishly adhering to the description. Too easy to spot, so...

HAMILTON

So he might dress up like anything,
a corpse, a ghoul, a demon, a
devil, then come in at the stroke
of midnight and kill everyone?
Goddamn Poe and his pustulous fairy
tales. I ordered him away from
Emily and now he's trying to...
this is ridiculous.

*
*
*
*
*
*
*

FIELDS

The similarities here are too
coincidental. I'm asking you again,
to allow me to have my men
scattered about your ball, in
costume so we can hopefully capture
this monster.

*

*
*

HAMILTON

I'll hire extra security myself but
I will not have this turn into some
policeman's ball. Understood?

*

FIELDS

I've seen the effects of this man's
determination. If he's chosen your
gathering to--

*

HAMILTON

You will not destroy an evening
that Baltimore looks forward to
every year.

FIELDS

Then I insist my officers be
present.

HAMILTON

Fine. Just make sure they scrape
the shit off their boots.

Fields crosses to the door.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

And who the hell was this Propero
anyhow?

*
*
*

FIELDS

He was the host of the ball.

*

HAMILTON

The host. Well that's just dandy.

*
*

Hamilton follows him to the door and the men walk into the next room.

FIELDS
And the first to die.

A sobering look suddenly falls upon Hamilton's face.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMILTON'S PARLOR - EVENING

Fields and Hamilton walk and see Emily, a vision of exuberance, playing Chopin on a piano in front of a small gathering for the well-to-do. GUESTS delight themselves on ample food and spirits.

MRS. BRADLEY
She's so wonderfully full of life.

HAMILTON
Her mother was exactly the same way. God took her too early and left me with a daily reminder in my daughter.

MRS. BRADLEY
Positive thoughts, tomorrow will be a great celebration. I am going as Pocahontas.

Fields squelches a laugh at the visual of the fat woman in an Indian costume. Hamilton gives him a look of disapproval.

HAMILTON
An excellent choice, Mrs. Bradley.

*

MRS. BRADLEY
I'm reading a wonderful story about early settlers and their--

Hamilton's conversation is suddenly interrupted by Poe who walks over to them.

HAMILTON
What the hell is he doing here?

FIELDS
He's with me and we were just leaving.

POE

Hello Captain. This is quite the spread you have here.

HAMILTON

Mr. Fields, I can assure you that if Mr. Poe has anything to do with your investigation--

*

FIELDS

Mr. Poe has a unique perspective on certain aspects of the crimes.

*

*

HAMILTON

Certain aspects... So the killer is a raving alcoholic?

*

POE

And all of Baltimore considers you a man completely devoid of wit. Imagine that.

*

*

*

HAMILTON

Sometimes I find myself staring at your head, marveling at what a lovely ashtray the top half of your skull would make.

*

*

*

*

*

Emily rushes over to her father to tell him news.

EMILY

Father, I've decided to change my costume...

Suddenly she sees Poe and Fields.

POE

Really? I hear your father will be going as a sputtering blunderbuss. Shouldn't be too much work.

*

*

*

Emily tries her best to stifle a laugh. And Fields notices this odd threesome.

*

HAMILTON

Fields, again I'm happy to indulge your request with the additional security but if I see this man there tomorrow night you'll have to protect him from me.

*

*

EMILY

Why do we need more security?

The question once again unnerves Poe, brings home the reality of what they're doing there. But he strives for a tone of insouciance to protect Emily. *

POE

It seems my writing has become the inspiration to an actual killer. If I had known my work would have this sort of affect on people I would have devoted more time to eroticism. *

HAMILTON

You're a vile little man.

FIELDS

As I said, we were just leaving.

Hamilton waves Percy over.

HAMILTON

Percy, please show these men to the door. Ms. Bradley, would you join me in the other room? *

Percy leads the men to the door. Poe steals a moment with Emily.

POE

Emily, I think we should reconsider our announcement.

EMILY

What? Are you backing out?

POE

No, no, never, but if your father sees me there tomorrow I may not live to marry anyone. Oh, and there may well be a killer on the guest list. A bit much for one night don't you think? *

EMILY

I think it sounds thrilling. *

POE

Does it? *

EMILY

How else should the great Poe commit himself to eternal love than under threat of death.

POE
 (playing jaunty for her
 sake, but a little
 seasick)
 My god, you're right. It is
 perfect.
 (he kisses her)
 Tomorrow.

*
 *
 *
 *
 *

Then Poe takes off to catch up to Elderidge and Fields.

*

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD -EVENING

A lone raven sits overhead in a tree. The giant bird watches as Poe runs his hands over the cold etchings on a tombstone. CLOSE ON: VIRGINIA ELIZA POE; b. August 22, 1822; d. January 30, 1847. A cold November rain pelts Poe, who, like the raven, remains almost motionless in the blue hue of twilight.

POE
 It doesn't have to end like this...
 It won't end like this.

*
 *
 *

CUT TO:

INT. RAILWAY STATION - NIGHT

A MASQUERADE BALL in full swing. Revelers in all manner of costume celebrate a perfectly enchanted evening as they dance to the spirited melodies of a STRING QUARTET. Giant crystal chandeliers refract rainbows of light throughout the great hall to create an intoxicating dance of light and joy. Henry Maddux, Poe's editor, stands by the bar. He raises his glass and finishes off the last sip of champagne.

REVELER
 Must be selling a hell of a lot of
 papers these days, Henry. Two
 murders in one week.

HENRY
 Circulation is indeed improved
 despite unfortunate events.

REVELER
 Or because of them.

Henry checks his gold pocket watch.

HENRY
Time for a piss.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILWAY STATION - NIGHT

Nervous but methodical, Fields goes over last minute instructions with a large group of UNIFORMED DEPUTIES.

SECURITY GUARD
Death? We're supposed to look for death?

Some of the younger guards chortle.

FIELDS
In some shape, yes.

SECURITY GUARD
You mean the grim reaper?

FIELDS
The grim reaper. A ghost. The headless horseman if you like. He should be easy to spot.

*

Fields motions to CANTRELL.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Cantrell, take some of these men and patrol the back.

CANTRELL
Yes, sir.

Fields studies the revelers in their bright costumes. The station clock, high above the crowd, reads 11:30 PM. While Fields scans those inside, we...

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - NIGHT

A cloaked figure, dressed as a SKELETON, gallops along the tracks toward the lights of the RAILWAY STATION.

BACK TO:

EXT. RAILWAY STATION BALCONY - NIGHT

Emily, unmasked, stands alone on an upper deck of the Gothic building. She watches THREE SLAVES below shoveling coal into a wooden carriage. The workers strain and sweat in the cold night air. Without warning, a tall man, dressed as a CONQUISTADOR, steps into the darkness behind Emily.

CONQUISTADOR
May I have this dance?

The Conquistador removes his mask. It is Hamilton.

EMILY
Not now, father.

*

Emily turns back to the moon.

HAMILTON
I'm not sure what's troubling you
but your happiness is more
important to me than I can possibly
describe.

*

EMILY
I really hope you feel that way at
the end of the evening.

HAMILTON
Whatever this is all about, I need
for you to be a little more social.
This is an important gathering for
me and for us.

*

*

EMILY
I know exactly what's expected.

*

HAMILTON
Glad to hear it. Now please can we
try and enjoy the evening?

*

EMILY
I intend to.

Emily's looks around the room. Still no sign of Poe and she's becoming more and more anxious. Hamilton watches her disappear into the crowd. Below, the slaves continue to shovel coal.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILWAY STATION - NIGHT

GUARDS check each person as they enter the room. The two exits are manned, making it impossible for someone to enter or exit undetected.

INT. RAILWAY STATION - NIGHT

Fields studies the crowd from a remote corner. Every face is MASKED and many are drunk and grotesque in the gaslight. The Inspector sees a UNIFORMED GUARD across the room who is likewise scanning for the killer. They briefly acknowledge each other and keep moving through the crowd. Fields' gaze suddenly fixes on the back of a LARGE MAN dressed in flowing RED ROBES and a wide brimmed hat. Fields' heart races. The costume is exactly that of Prospero's described in Poe's short story. Desperate, Fields pushes his way through the crowd and people push back in anger.

FIELDS
Please. Step aside.

Fields grabs a PISTOL from his waistband and searches for the 'Catholic cardinal' in vain. The cloaked man has disappeared into the crowd. Now near panic, Fields spins in all directions. CLOSE ON: A COURT JESTER. He turns again... MARIE ANTOINETTE. Again... JOHN CANTRELL. The Cardinal has disappeared. Fields stops. Panicked as the guests continue to party. A beat before... There he is! The man in the RED CLOAK lifts his mask. He is almost SEVENTY YEARS OLD and laughs drunkenly as his wife swipes CAKE FROSTING off his nose. Not our killer. Fields exhales as he tries to quell his worry. Instinct tells him he's missed something.

CUT TO:

INT. RAILWAY STATION - HAMILTON - NIGHT

Hamilton, now on his third copita of sherry, looks out over his lavish party. His driver, Percy, approaches.

HAMILTON
Fields' men aren't causing any trouble, are they?

PERCY
No, sir.

HAMILTON
What about Poe? Any sign of him?

PERCY
Not so far.

CUT TO:

INT. RAILWAY STATION - POE - NIGHT

Poe, dressed in a BLACK CAPE, stands in the shadows and studies the revelers. Slowly, a woman draws Poe's gaze as she moves across the expanse. His eyes never leave the beauty and despite her costume, Poe is certain the woman behind the feather headdress is the love of his life. Poe pulls a MASK from his pocket and slips it over his face.

POE
(to himself, eyes on
Emily)
This time it will be different.

*
*
*

He grabs a passing glass of champagne, throws it down and grabs another before the tray is out of reach.

Hoping she won't recognize him, Poe crosses the room and extends his hand for a dance. Emily smiles politely, but...

*

EMILY
(possibly recognizing him
and playing the part)
No, thank you. I'm waiting for
someone.

*
*

Poe slips his hand into hers and gently pulls her toward him.

POE
(possibly playing along,
knowing that she knows)
Please.

*
*

Emily accepts the "stranger's" offer. The two dance uninterrupted for a moment, transported in each other's arms.

*
*

EMILY
You dance passionately. Sir.

POE
If I could, I would dance with you
throughout time.

EMILY
Oh, Edgar...

*
*

POE
I can't believe you agreed to dance
with a stranger in a mask. Don't
you remember there is a murderer in
our midst?

Over her shoulder, Poe sees Hamilton and Percy making their
way toward Emily.

POE (CONT'D)
Speaking of murder...

*

He quickly grabs another passing tray, filling both hands.

EMILY
Steady, Edgar. You can do this.

Hamilton marches through the crowd as the station clock
begins to toll MIDNIGHT.

Just then, SCREAMS erupt across the great banquet hall. Percy
instinctively draws his pistol, as he and Hamilton push
toward the commotion.

CUT TO:

INT. RAILWAY STATION - CENTER - NIGHT

The thunder of a HORSE'S HOOVES echoes across the marble
floor as a MASSIVE STEED leaps through the doors and gallops
into the center of the hall. The rider, cloaked in a SKELETON
COSTUME, beats the animal forward against the throngs of
panicked guests racing for the doors.

In the chaos of the surging, parting crowd, Poe and Emily are
separated.

POE
Emily!

*

He sees a uniformed officer moving to protect her.

UNIFORMED OFFICER
Miss Hamilton! Come quickly!

The rider bears down on Poe as if hunting him but--

Before he can reach him, Hamilton draws his pistol and fires--

The black rider's shoulder ruptures in blood and his horse
rears up--

Amidst the screaming guests, pitching him back, tumbling to the marble floor just as Fields and his men swarm around him.

Fields and his men converge upon the horseman with their PISTOLS drawn. Fields snatches the skeleton hood from the man's head and reveals... a very frightened man... obviously in pain.

YOUNG MAN

Ohhh god, my arm, my arm! He told me you'd ordered it for the party. He said--

FIELDS

Who?! Who ordered it?!

YOUNG MAN

I was supposed to... I'm supposed to deliver this.

He holds AN ENVELOPE in his quivering hand. Before Fields can reach it, Hamilton grabs the letter from the messenger. The STATION CLOCK begins to toll the hour as Hamilton's cheeks flush with terror.

HAMILTON

My daughter. He has her.

*

FIELDS

Seal off this building. NOW!

Guards move toward every exit but it is too late. Chaos abounds as the BELLS remain steady. Nine..ten...

CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE CITY STREET - MORNING

Bells still echo from the previous scene the but sun light casts an orangy glow on the cobble stone street as people start their day.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT - MORNING

A dozen policemen listen as Detective Fields reads from the same note we saw delivered at the party.

FIELDS

(reading)

"I challenge the brilliant detective mind of Edgar Allan Poe. A game of wits with Emily's life in (MORE)

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 the balance. You will immortalize
 for the exquisite pleasure of your
 readers this, your very own
"Descent into the Maelstrom..." Is
 that another one?

*
 *

Poe nods wearily.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 (reading)
 "...which shall appear in serial
 form in the Baltimore Patriot.
 Know that I will kill again and on
 that new corpse, I will leave you
 clues that lead to Emily. If I do
 not read a vivid accounting of this
 convergence of Fact and Fiction,
 then dear Emily will die."

Poe compulsively rocks in his chair.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 (reading)
 "Your only hope is to imagine a way
 to save her. I dare you to try to
 conceive of the painstaking care I
 have taken to secure her and the
 elegant means leading inexorably to
 her end. Are you up to the task,
 Mr. Poe? Are you even capable of
 imagining the means to save your
 Beloved's life? Or shall this tale
 end as all your stories do, 'with
 Madness, Sin and Horror the Soul of
 the Plot.'"

Fields folds the letter.

OFFICER
 It's Poe. His writing made this
 happen.

*

The cops look at Poe; a silent beam of condemnation.

*

ON FIELDS - At first he is without pity too, given what he
 thinks of Poe's writing and what it has wrought.

*
 *

But then he sees that the man is truly suffering, and he
 softens a little in his condemnation.

*
 *

FIELDS
 There are a few things we know.
 From the description given to us by
 last night's messenger, we know he
 (MORE)

FIELDS (CONT'D)
is tall - at least six feet. He is
obviously educated--

POE
Your men are right. I've killed
her.

The room falls silent.

FIELDS
We must assume Miss Hamilton is
still alive.

POE
Six years ago my young wife
Virginia, she had a lovely voice
and one day when singing she began
to cough up blood and I knew,
everyone knew, what that meant, but
we were so poor, I was so poor,
that there was nothing I could do
for her and when death came I just,
just... I couldn't even give her a
proper burial... If it wasn't for
the kindness of Mrs. Shew who
dressed her for the grave,
purchased the casket... I don't
know what... And, I live with that
every day of my life, Every day,
every night.

But with Emily, she was strong,
spirited, in no need of my pathetic
earnings, and I thought, Eddy, this
one, this one's safe, this one will
be different. But now she'll die
cold and alone too. Because of me.

The room is visibly uncomfortable.

FIELDS
As I've said, Mr. Poe, we must
assume Miss Hamilton is still
alive. This killer is determined to
play this out. He'll keep her
alive to keep you involved. It's
part of his game and that's the
logic that'll trap him. It's the
facts of this case that give us an
advantage.

An awkward silence, then... BANG! Charles Hamilton charges
through the door followed by Percy and a substantial posse.

HAMILTON

I suggest you tell your people at the front desk to familiarize themselves with my face. They will be seeing it every hour until my daughter is returned to me.

FIELDS

Mr. Hamilton. I'm very sorry.

*

HAMILTON

As well you should be, she was taken under your watch.

FIELDS

If you would please restrain...

*

Hamilton charges up to Poe.

*

HAMILTON

What's he doing here?

Without warning, Hamilton punches Poe in the face. Poe does not flinch, but rather wipes the blood from his mouth onto his sleeve. Hamilton reaches back to punch Poe again but is stopped by Cantrell. The room quiets.

*

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

Arrest him. This is his fault.

FIELDS

Unfortunately, there's plenty of fault to be passed around and I'm sure you understand what I mean by that, Mr. Hamilton.

*

*

Hamilton rears up in rage but Fields is steady in his gaze and reproach and the older man reluctantly backs down.

*

*

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Mr. Poe is our only connection to the man who has your daughter. I suggest you remember that.

Fields grabs his coat and moves to the door.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

We'll reconvene in two hours. Until then, I want every street in Baltimore manned.

*

CUT TO:

INT. WASHINGTON COLLEGE HOSPITAL - NEXT DAY

*

Five MEDICAL INTERNS surround a metal CASKET atop a gurney in the basement morgue of the hospital. Beside the locked casket is a small table with a white cloth draped over the top. As the PROFESSOR, 50s, speaks, he produces a series of cutting instruments from a leather bag and carefully arranges them on the table.

PROFESSOR

The human body is to be revered. We must at all times be respectful, and remember that a cadaver is more than a mere learning tool.

The students draw closer in anticipation as the Professor inserts a key into the PADLOCK of the metal casket.

PROFESSOR (CONT'D)

We will examine the lungs. This man is an alleged victim of consumption.

The Professor stops dead in his tracks.

STUDENT

What is it?

The man stoops over the casket. We hear a very faint sound... of SCRATCHING coming from the casket. Then silence. A few of the students step closer. Others step away. Then out of the silence... FRENZIED SCRAPING, like fingernails on metal.

PROFESSOR

Dear God!

The Professor scrambles to undo the lock and when the lid is opened... a MASSIVE RAVEN, wild-eyed from his captivity, bursts into flight. The beast CAWS madly as it flies for the rafters. Students duck for cover as the bird soars to and fro across the room, until, exhausted, it alights at the head of the metal casket. Finally, we see the bird's casket companion: a YOUNG WOMAN.

She wears a red nightgown. Her eyes and cheeks are heavily made up and her hands are bloody. She stares out in bulging horror. One of the medical students wretches. It is a grotesque sight.

*
*
*

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. WASHINGTON COLLEGE HOSPITAL - LATER

POLICEMEN, in shock, stare at the victim. *

CANTRELL
Could be a prostitute the way she's
painted up.

Fields inspects the padlock of the steel case. There is a
black smudge near the lock.

FIELDS
Did you open this?

The Professor, white with fear, nods.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Were your hands clean?

The Professor studies his hands.

PROFESSOR
Yes. I don't believe I left that
smudge, Inspector.

Poe stands motionless. His eyes never leave those of the dead
woman's. Cantrell gestures to her bloodstained hands. *

CANTRELL
She must have fought him.
Scratched him.

Fields stoops toward the woman and carefully pushes aside her
hair to reveal a THIN WIRE in the folds of the woman's neck;
he follows it around to the knot at her nape. *
*

FIELDS
She didn't fight him.

CANTRELL
But there aren't any wounds on her
wrists. It can't be her blood.

FIELDS
He came at her from behind.

POE
Strangled. *

FIELDS
Another of your stories? *

Overwhelmed, Poe is silent. *

Fields clips the cord with his knife. He holds the knot up to the light. *

FIELDS (CONT'D) *
Mr. Poe, I asked... *

POE
"The Mystery of Marie Roget."

FIELDS
It's a sailing knot.

POE
A bowline knot to be exact. Just as it is in the story.

FIELDS
Alright, then what of it. Who was she?

POE
She worked in the stores near the quais in Paris. But she was drowned, and there is no mention of blood on her hands. He's added that detail.

Fields checks his watch. He turns to Poe. *

FIELDS
You must write it now. Every detail. The knot, her dress, her hands--

Poe stares at the cadaver.

POE *
Her eyes, her end...

ON FIELDS - absorbing Poe's haunted face. *

CUT TO:

INT. POE'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Poe sits at his desk. A TREE BRANCH scratches against his window as it must have when Poe wrote *"The Raven"*. One gets the sense of spectres lurking.

Almost trance-like, Poe's voice plays over the scene as he begins to write for the first time since he became blocked.

The images come into his mind with relentless ferocity.

POE (V.O.)
Her smile...

CLOSE ON: A WOMAN'S BLOODIED FINGERS CLAWING AT A THIN WIRE.

POE (V.O.)
...portended nothing... Her
innocence...

ECHO LAUGHTER.

POE (V.O.)
...was the first part of her soul
to die. And while it happened, he
stood still, watching...

CLOSE ON: A HAND HOLDS A GLASS OF RED PORT WINE. THE HAND
SQUEEZES THE GLASS UNTIL IT BREAKS AND WINE AND BITS OF GLASS
EXPLODE.

POE (V.O.)
...to fully enjoy the dreadful
metamorphosis...

CLOSE UP: A FLY CRAWLING INTO A HUMAN EAR.

POE (V.O.)
...from a life full of hope to a
death without purpose.

FULL FRAME: EMILY'S FACE. SCREAMING A SILENT SCREAM AS SHE
FALLS TO HER KNEES.

FIELDS (O.S.)
Mr. Poe.

BACK TO:

INT. POE'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Poe is confused. He isn't sure if the voice was imagined or
real but then the man POUNDS on the door again.

FIELDS (O.S.)
It's Fields. Open the door.

Poe opens the door. Fields straightens his hat.

*

There is an awkward beat between them. Fields looks around
the meager dwelling.

*

*

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 Not to disturb you, but I was
 concerned about...

POE
 My progress.

FIELDS
 Yes.

POE
 (pacing, seized by the
 diabolicalness of his
 task)
 I feel like I've gone from author
 to character in one of my own
 tales. I feel like, I couldn't have
 devised a more... I'm, I'm as
 trapped and bedeviled as any
 hapless bastard I've ever created.

FIELDS
 I can appreciate that.

POE
 I've been digested by my own... my
 own...
 (can't find the word)
 But, as, as much of a literary
 busker as you may think of me,
 Fields, I won't, I will not fail
 her.

FIELDS
 I know you won't.
 (beat, cough)
 I think I was overly harsh in my
 comments to you the other day.
 (beat)
 I apologize.

POE
 You know, Fields, the first time my
 Virginia ruptured a blood vessel, I
 prepared myself for what was to
 come, lost all hope... But she
 recovered. It was a miracle. At the
 end of the year though, the vessel
 broke again, then again and again
 and again at regular intervals and
 each time I went through the
 agonies of preparing for her death
 and each time I felt the resounding
 of hope and in the end this, this
 (MORE)

POE (CONT'D)

oscillation between hope and
despair, those endless torturous
waves, it was like being insane,
with long intervals of horrible
sanity. And when she finally died,
I felt in honesty, a great release
from the madness but none from the
melancholy which followed me like a
black dog... until I met Emily.

(beat)

You truly believe she's still
alive?

FIELDS

I know it.

POE

(brokenly)

Thank you.

FIELDS

(awkward)

Do you mind if I stay? I thought
perhaps I could be of some support,
if not help.

POE

No... of course.

Poe crosses back to the desk.

POE (CONT'D)

Are you a married man, Inspector?

FIELDS

Perhaps we should stop conversing.

(beat)

You have work to do.

Fields settles somewhat stiffly in a chair across the room as
Poe goes back to the text. It is late as the candle burns
down we...

INT. KILLER'S LAIR - GRAVE - SAME

Emily lies rigid in a dark confined space. We hear thuds
above her. It's the sound of dirt being shoveled onto the top
of the casket that she now discovers that she's trapped in.
As she makes this realization - panic sets in.

EMILY

Help me! NO! Stop! Please let me
out!

There are a few slats in the lid and bits of dirt fall through. Shafts of light cross her face. With each shovel of dirt, it gets darker and colder. She pounds and scratches at the lid.

KILLER
(whispering)
If you don't shut it, Miss, I'll
shut it for you permanent.

EMILY
(more hushed, but still
panicked)
Yes. OK. I'm sorry, I'm sorry,
I'll...

Suddenly the dirt stops being shoveled. There's just enough light to see how horrible her situation really is.

Closing her eyes and determinedly sucking air through her nose, Emily fights against the weight of the boards on top of her to free something from her corset. We PAN DOWN to Emily's right hand. Her knuckles bleed but at last, the effort pays off.

Emily breaks a whale bone rib from the base of her corset and begins to work the soddened ceiling with the jagged three inch weapon. As she chips away we...

INT. PATRIOT PRINT ROOM - NIGHT

An ashen faced Poe watches as Henry still in his nightgown, pours breathlessly over his first installment.

Eyes dart over the page rushing to the end and when he finishes he crumples in his chair the air leaving his body.

HENRY
Magnificent...

He pulls the night cap from his head.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Poe, you've done it again. The
invention is, is breathtaking, the
lines of truth and fiction have
never been so, so... I'm not sure
about your headline--

POE
Don't, do not change a word.

HENRY
Fine. Ivan! Ivan!

Ivan comes stumbling into the office.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Reset page one immediately.

INT. POE'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - DAWN

Home again, Poe finally tries to sleep. Impossible.

He rises, returns to his desk and removes a tincture of
Laudanum from a drawer.

INT. POE'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Still fully dressed, drugged and wracked by nightmares, Poe
is sprawled on his disheveled bed.

There's a pounding at the door again, Poe not lurching
upright until its intensity reaches the level of booming.

It's Cantrell.

CANTRELL
The blood, Mr. Poe. It's fake.
Inspector Fields sent me to fetch
you.

POE
The what? What blood?

CANTRELL
On the prostitute. She's not a
prostitute. It's stage blood. She's
an actress. Inspector Fields...

POE
(to himself)
Which explains the heavy makeup and
the gown. Blood on the hands, blood
on the hands...

CANTRELL
He's already at the theater, sir.

POE
The Imperial, I'm assuming.

CANTRELL
 (surprised)
 Very good, sir. We should get
 going.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - CONTINUOUS

TWO MEN stand on the sidewalk, repulsed but riveted by the
 paper. The headline blares: THE SERIAL KILLER!

SECOND MAN
 He's like the hangman, Poe, that
 right bastard, making money off the
 dead.

The police carriage rattles past, horses straining at their
 top speed

INT. THE POLICE CARRIAGE

Poe and Cantrell. Poe seems more shadowed than ever.

EXT. THEATRE - DAY

POE'S POV - As the carriage approaches the Imperial, an early
 Victorian style theater, he sees Fields pacing in front with
 a small group of officers...

And then from adjoining streets, five other carriages seem to
 converge with Poe's.

The carriage doors fly open and MORE OFFICERS pour onto the
 wet cobblestone streets.

FIELDS
 (re: the stage blood,
 showing his palms)
 Molasses mixed with food coloring.
 How quickly did you guess the play?

POE
 Quickly enough.

Fields leads a dozen officers through the theater's front
 doors.

As the pass, CLOSE ON: A marquee poster in a glass case
 reads: LIMITED ENGAGEMENT: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S IMMORTAL
 TRAGEDY, MACBETH.

INT. THEATRE - CONTINUOUS

*

Well-heeled patrons (Hamilton's crowd) sit in plush red velvet seats watching the matinee performance. Gas footlights starkly illuminate the garishly painted faces of the actors on stage.

Fields leads his men straight down the aisle and into the backstage wings. The invasion causes a commotion among both the patrons and the actors.

INT. THEATRE BACKSTAGE - CONTINUOUS

A STAGE MANAGER rushes up to Fields and blocks his path.

STAGE MANAGER

What the hell is happening? Who are you?

FIELDS

By order of the Police Department, I have a warrant to search these premises.

A giant CASTLE WALL suddenly descends from the ceiling. Gears grind. In the stage lights, dusts casts sparkles in an air funnel.

STAGE MANAGER

What for? There's a show going on.

FIELDS

Bring all your stagehands here now.

STAGE MANAGER

They have to man the ropes. Christ, first Lady Macbeth takes a powder, now you bastards...

*
*
*

Elderidge draws his pistol and cocks it between the man's eyes.

*

ELDERIDGE

Ten seconds.

*

Muttering, the Stage Manager turns to the stagehand, motions to gather the sailors.

*

INT. THEATRE BACKSTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The play continues. From on stage we hear the famous plea...

LADY MACBETH (V.O.)
*Out damn'd spot! Out, I say! One -
 two - why then 'tis time to do it.
 Hell is murky...*

A line of men assembles. The SAILORS arrive in all shapes and forms. Some wear gloves, but most pull the heavy rigging bare-handed. Fields studies each man.

FIELDS
 You, step forth.

The sailor obliges, spits tobacco on the ground an inch from Fields' boots.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 Put out your hands.

The sailor obeys but with clear disdain. Fields doesn't measure the man's grip, rather, he moves to another man with gloves.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 You too, step forth. Take off the gloves.

POE
 Is this your entire crew?

The Stage Manager takes a quick head count. *

STAGE MANAGER
 Yes.

POE
 You're sure?

STAGE MANAGER
 I am.

POE
 Count them. You seem a little too sure.

SALTY SAILOR
 You know you've got no more than seven minutes until the act change.

Fields yanks the Sailor forward. *

FIELDS
 You, where are you from. *

SALTY SAILOR
Port of Liverpool. And I've got
three days shore leave to make some
extra scratch. So if you don't
mind...

*
*
*
*

Fields hands the man a flier for the show.

FIELDS
Read it.

The Sailor tenses. Clearly he cannot read.

*

SALTY SAILOR
It's Macbeth. I know the show.

The Stage Manager moves down the line and counts.

STAGE MANAGER
Someone's missing.

FIELDS
Who is that?

STAGE MANAGER
Maurice.

FIELDS
Where is he?

STAGE MANAGER
I don't know, but no one is allowed
to leave until the show is over.

POE
Then he's here.

Fields draws his pistol and turns to one of his surrounding
officers.

FIELDS
If any one of these men try to
leave... shoot them.

*

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE BACKSTAGE - LADDER - DAY

Poe peers up a wooden ladder into the pitch black of the
backstage fly space. All that's visible is a chaotic tangle
of ropes, disappearing into the darkness. He tucks his pistol
into his belt and climbs.

LADY MACBETH (V.O.)
*Yet who would have thought the old
 man to have had so much blood in
 him...*

As Poe climbs, he looks up into the catwalks and can barely make out the sight of ropes swaying. From above, he can hear wooden planks creaking under someone's footsteps. Poe climbs faster.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE BACKSTAGE - STAIRS - DAY

Fields descends a narrow iron SPIRAL STAIRCASE into the basement. He shines his lanterns on old props that include animal pelts, papier mâché trees, swords, pikes, shields. Under lantern light, a horrific world of make believe.

LADY MACBETH (V.O.)
Here's the smell of blood still.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE CATWALKS - DAY

Poe slowly makes his way across the wooden plank catwalk. Through the slats, he can barely make out the stage deck thirty feet below.

Poe now stands beside the ropes he saw swaying on the way up. They are motionless now. But ahead, in the dark distance, another set of ropes are moving to and fro. Poe proceeds out across the narrow wooden slats and glimpses a man in fractious light.

POE
 STOP!

The shadow halts.

POE (CONT'D)
 I have a pistol.

As he makes his way toward the man he starts to cross an opening in the gantry. He leans over the opening and WHOOOSH! A wood-framed BACKDROP flies past, an inch from his face.

Poe reels backwards, loses his footing, and slips off the catwalk, grabbing hold of the wooden slats a millisecond

before plunging to his death. He looks toward the man who has now turned and runs off into the shadows.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE BASEMENT - SAME

Fields, candle in one hand, pistol in the other, scans the darkness. The dim light reveals various props, costumes, furniture, weapons. Inches above his head, Fields hears boots stomping across the stage. Dust falls into his eyes.

In a corner of the darkness... movement. A shadow darts from behind a pile of sandbags back into darkness.

FIELDS

You there! Come out! Show yourself!

But from the night, only silence.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE CATWALKS - SAME

Poe finally swings a leg up onto the walkway, then both hands clutch the railing. He desperately heaves his body up onto the catwalk, but as he does, his pistol begins to slip loose.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE BASEMENT - SAME

Fields cocks his gun.

FIELDS

I have a pistol aimed on you. Come out now. Put your hands where I can see them or I will fire.

From the shadows, a figure materializes in the darkness. A SMALL BOY, trembling and wide-eyed, stares up at the man with the gun. As he nears the candle light, we see his face is covered in blood. He's part of the play and not the suspect Fields was hoping to find.

CRACK!!! A PISTOL SHOT. The Boy shudders. Fields looks down at his pistol. It is still cocked. It has not been fired. The Boy begins to cry.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

You're alright. Listen...

The Boy nods.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Stay here.

Fields sprints.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATRE - DAY

Chaos abounds. Patrons leap over chairs in an effort to escape. The officers barricade the doors but are unable to control the rush of people trying to escape.

FIELDS
What happened?

POE
My pistol. I lost hold of it.

REVERSE TO... the sailors. The line has broken, many flee toward the exits.

FIELDS
Dammit. Get the doors. He's here.
(to the crowd)
By order of the Baltimore police.
You are to stay in...

*
*
*

But it's no use. Poe watches in vain as the doors give way and people flee into the streets.

*

FIELDS (CONT'D)
What was the name of the missing
stage hand?

*

POE
Maurice.

Fields quickly turns to leave back stage.

INT. THEATRE BACKSTAGE - DAY

Fields works his way through the maze of actors and crew. He eventually grabs another crew member.

FIELDS
Where do you keep your things?

CREW MEMBER
We have lockers down stairs. Why?

Fields with Poe behind him head toward the stairs.

INT. THEATRE BASEMENT - LOCKERS - DAY

Fields quickly goes to each locker as he looks for some sign of Maurice. Finally he finds a locker with an "M" written in chalk on it.

POE

Do you think he's hiding in his own
locker? Can't be a very big man can
he?

Fields opens the locker and sees it's empty - save a small wooden box on the shelf. He takes out the box and opens it to find... A quill pen. The pointed end of which is piercing through what looks like a small piece of meat.

POE (CONT'D)

What is that? It looks like a piece
of small fish.

FIELDS

It's a human tongue.

POE

Christ...

FIELDS

What does it mean?

POE

What?

FIELDS

A severed tongue.

POE

I have no idea.

FIELDS

Have you written anything...

POE

No. No. Wait. Yes. *"The Facts in
the Case of M. Valdemar."* A man
suspended between life and death by
mesmerism. He's, he's a living
conscious corpse who can only speak
via the vibrations of his tongue.

Cantrell works his way through the crowd and downstairs to find Fields and Poe.

POE (CONT'D)
 But it's a small detail and this, a
 severed one here, I don't
 understand, perhaps it's nothing to
 do...

*
 *
 *
 *
 *

CANTRELL
 Mr. Poe... sir...

Winded, Cantrell arrives by Fields.

FIELDS
 What is it?

CANTRELL
 There's been an accident.

CUT TO:

EXT. POE'S UNCLE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A RAGING FIRE consumes Poe's house. A fire brigade tries in vain to quell the flames; buckets of water are passed down the line and onto the INFERNO. The horses drawing the fire carriages rear and nearly tumble over. The dwelling is lost. Poe stands by a lone tree, watching. The Baltimore FIRE MARSHAL approaches.

FIRE MARSHAL
 The windows were shattered first.
 I don't think it was an accident.

Poe notices two men watching the blaze. They are the same men who were in the street reading the newspaper.

POE
 I'm certain you're correct.

CLOSE ON: A stack of Poe's BOOKS, the pages of which vanish as they are swallowed in the flames.

Poe takes a CIGAR from his pocket, crosses to a smoldering beam and lights his smoke.

POE (CONT'D)
 We weather the storm of acclaim and
 come out as hated as ever.

*
 *
 *

He backs away, accepting the loss as if he deserved it.

FIRE MARSHAL
 Sir, we did find... I'd be glad to
 take him if he's not yours. But
 (MORE)

FIRE MARSHAL (CONT'D)
 he's been sticking with us since we
 got here.

The Marshal retrieves a CAGE off a cart. It's covered by a blanket but from inside we can hear CHATTER. Poe recognizes Carl immediately without having to lift the blanket.

POE
 He's mine. I can tell by the sound
 of his voice.

And together, Carl in his cage, and Poe smoking his cigar, walk off into the night.

CUT TO:

INT. KILLER'S LAIR - GRAVE - NIGHT

Emily, her hands raw and bloody, strains to peer through a small hole she has bored into the lid using the jagged bone from her corset. All she can see is a damp ceiling illuminated by a faint light. Emily adjusts her head to the left to see... a single chair in the corner of the room.

EMILY
 Help...

A beat before we hear someone walk across the room.

We stay with her inside this casket for this entire scene.

All is quiet when suddenly we HEAR a loud thud as a man's weight hits the top of the casket.

Emily screams quickly now knowing what's coming next.

From inside the casket we can hear the man brush off some of the dirt. We then hear him adjust his weight and lay down on top of the casket.

Emily is terrified. We not only hear her breath but we now hear his as his lips and mouth are just above her, breathing into one of the open slats.

EMILY (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 Why are you doing this to me?

*
 *

The open wet mouth above her licks it's lips as a soft laugh escapes his throat. The two of them are so close. He's on top of her. Breathing into her face. It's horrifyingly intimate.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Please let me out of here.

KILLER (WHISPERING)
I can't.

EMILY
Yes you can. Please. I'm so cold.

The killer menacingly drops grains of dirt onto her face.

KILLER (WHISPERING)
Not much longer.

EMILY
Why are you doing this? Why?

A beat before a a man's eye suddenly fills the hole she's looking through.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Don't let me die in here. Please...

Emily suddenly thrusts the whale bone through the hole into the man's eye.

For a beat we think she has punctured the orb until the man yanks the bone from Emily's hand and begins to LAUGH manically.

We then hear him stand back up and lift up off the casket.

And then we hear the dreadful sounds of dirt again hitting the lid as he buries her hope.

EMILY (CONT'D)
No!!!! Don't do this! NO!

INT. FIELDS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Fields stands at his desk. INVOICES are stacked in two opposing piles and painstakingly, Fields records each one into a NOTEBOOK. Though he is physically exhausted, Fields is tireless in his effort and one gets the idea nothing will stop him except a faint KNOCK at the front door.

Fields grabs his pistol and moves toward the entrance. He stares through a small window at:

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELDS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Poe, looking like the exhausted vagabond he is, stands on the porch, Carl in hand.

FIELDS
Mr. Poe.

Poe speaks formally, but the sense is that he is in trauma.

POE
I'm afraid I've found myself
without lodging this evening.

FIELDS
(slow on the draw)
Yes. I heard.

*

An awkward beat passes.

POE
I don't mean to impose.

FIELDS
Oh, yes, of course. Forgive me for
not offering sooner. Come in.

Poe and Carl start to enter the house. Fields stops him.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Not the animal.

POE
He's very well mannered.

Fields takes the cage from Poe's trembling hand.

FIELDS
If it's all the same, I think the
porch is more suitable.

Fields sets the cage on the porch and Poe puts his coat over it to cover Carl from the night's chill.

CUT TO:

INT. FIELDS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Fields leads Poe into his study. Everything, down to the stacked wood in the corner, is ORGANIZED. An immaculate Regulator wall clock somberly tick-tocks the time.

Poe looks utterly defeated and at first, neither man speaks.

POE
 I wonder if I could impose on your
 hospitality.
 (removes empty flask)
 It seems...

*
 *
 *
 *

FIELDS
 I'm a teetotaler... My apologies.

*
 *

POE
 I would say just as well, but...
 (beat)
 The fire was intentional, did you
 know that?

*
 *
 *
 *
 *

FIELDS
 It was just a house. It can be
 rebuilt.

*

POE
 True. But sadly it was my uncle's
 house and it's going to be a very
 unpleasant burned to the ground
 home coming.

*

A beat. Fields adjusts his pocket watch to the Regulator.

POE (CONT'D)
 He was there, wasn't he. If I
 hadn't dropped my pistol--

*

FIELDS
 Perhaps. But we've made some
 headway. According to the theater
 records, the sailor's name is
 Maurice Robichaux. Does it mean
 anything to you?

Poe shakes his head no.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 Cantrell and I made some inquiries
 at the docks. He was signed on to a
 trading vessel which made port four
 days ago.

*

POE
 At the start of the murders.

*

FIELDS
 Like many sailors. Robichaux took
 employment at the theater to work
 the backstage riggings. But he
 wasn't there today.

*
 *
 *
 *

POE

Then he knew we would come? All of it, down to our entrance, was prearranged. He's watching us, Fields.

Fields holds up a handful of records.

FIELDS

Look, it may be arduous but I've learned that in order to find the needle in the haystack - you simply have to start to go through the hay. These ship's records will, I think, lead us in some...

POE

Ship's records? What the hell good are these?

FIELDS

I must remind you, Mr. Poe, that every detail is important.

POE

Three people are dead, Emily is hanging by a thread and you sit there poring over ship's records?

FIELDS

What else should we do? Run around all of Baltimore screaming out her name? Would you care to give us your definition of ratiocination again? Allow me mine.

CABOOM. THUNDER rattles the windows and both men startle.

A second later, a brief but intense flash of LIGHTENING illuminates the sky just long enough to reveal... A MAN. A cloaked FIGURE watches motionless by an ancient tree that sways in the storm.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Now please, think. Start with the sailor. Have you written anything...

POE

No.

Poe crosses to the window. The night has returned to darkness in-between the lightning bolts. Poe is unaware the man he seeks is mere feet away.

POE (CONT'D)

Did you speak with the Captain of the ship?

FIELDS

I did.

POE

And?

FIELDS

Robichaux was a valued crewman. Well-liked. Had a family back home.

POE

Where?

*

FIELDS

In France. Nimes. Does it mean anything?

*

POE

No. Possibly. Who knows?

FIELDS

See, but what I ask myself is why Baltimore? The Fortunato has docked in several ports around the world and the--

*

POE

The what?

FIELDS

It's been all over the world.

POE

No. The ship. What's its name?

FIELDS

Fortunato.

Poe freezes in his tracks.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

What is it?

POE

"The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could..."

Poe staggers, drops the poker.

FIELDS

What?

*

POE

It's the first sentence of "*The Cask of Amontillado*."

Poe paces the room, his mind spinning.

POE (CONT'D)

It's a story I wrote about revenge. A man kills his rival by walling him up. The victim, whose name is Fortunato, is entombed alive.

FIELDS

Where?

POE

In the catacombs of a palazzo. The story was set in Italy.

FIELDS

There are no catacombs in Baltimore.

The pieces fall together.

POE

No but there are tunnels underneath the city - the waterworks.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. TUNNELS CHAMBER ROOM - NIGHT

Darkness illuminated by the torches of twenty or so POLICE OFFICERS who carry SHOVELS, AXES, and CROW BARS through the damp and echoing tunnels of this city's sewage system.

FIELDS

You are looking for anything that would indicate recently laid masonry.

POE

EMILY!

FIELDS

We will be timing this, I will blow my whistle as such...

(he blows it)

...and we will shout her name in
(MORE)

FIELDS (CONT'D)
unison from all areas of the
tunnels. There will be a pause of
ten seconds of absolute silence
when we will listen for the
smallest sound, anything to
indicate movement from behind the
wall. If an officer detects
something, he will blow his whistle
and we will examine the wall at
that point. Are we clear?

The officers nod.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Then move out.

The men disperse in sets of two. Like on a deep ocean floor, STRANGE CREATURES scurry from light into darkness as the men pass with their torches. Fields begins the first round. He blows his WHISTLE and in unison the men shout, EMILY, then the interminable ten second wait. Nothing. They continue on.

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNELS - LATER

Several areas of wall have been excavated to yield nothing. Poe is caked with dust and sweat. He is exhausted and disoriented. The blackness of the tunnels seems eternal. Then... A WHISTLE! From a distant tunnel, again, and again.

POE
Emily!

Poe runs toward the sound with all his strength.

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNELS - BRICK WALL - CONTINUOUS

Fields arrives to find two officers hammering away at a brick wall while a third man blows his whistle over and over.

CANTRELL
The mortar is a different color.
Look.

FIELDS
(ripping off his coat)
Step back.

Fields grabs a shovel and slams it into the wall. A brick comes free and then another. Poe arrives wild-eyed and out of breath.

POE
What is it?

Poe claws at the bricks with his bare hands. Fields picks up a lantern to look through the small hole the officers have created. CLOSE ON: a woman's lace DRESS SLEEVE.

POE (CONT'D)
EMILY!

FIELDS
Keep digging.

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNELS - BEHIND BRICK WALL - SAME

The KILLER stands behind the body and watches patiently as the officers claw at the mortar on the other side of the wall. The victim's BLONDE HAIR cascades over a LACE DRESS and strands lift slightly in the air as the murderer exhales. The officers are close, and the madman seems to find their proximity thrilling.

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS - BRICK WALL - NIGHT

Poe grabs a PICK AX from an officer and hammers against the brick. He is obsessed. Bit by bit the facade begins to tumble. As it does, Fields holds his LANTERN close. The flame FLICKERS ever so slightly.

FIELDS
Hold up. Wait.

The men obey.

POE
Why are you stopping?

Fields places his ear against the hole and hears... FOOTSTEPS that retreat into the darkness. Fields draws his pistol.

CANTRELL
Inspector?

FIELDS
Stay on the wall.

Fields suddenly sprints down the tunnel.

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS, ADJACENT - CONTINUOUS

The cloaked figure flees.

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS - BRICK WALL - CONTINUOUS

The officers bring down more and more of the wall to expose A BODY.

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS, ADJACENT - CONTINUOUS

Fields comes to an intersection and stops. He listens. Nothing. Desperate, the Inspector douses his lantern and plunges himself into pitch BLACKNESS. Up ahead, a faint GLOW appears. It is the killer's lantern.

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS - BRICK WALL - CONTINUOUS

THE ENTOMBED BODY is finally freed into Poe's arms. It is Emily. Poe collapses to his knees and clutches the lifeless body until the officers raise their lanterns to reveal... the victim is not Emily, but rather A MAN dressed in a lace PETTICOAT and BLONDE WIG. Poe wails as he instinctively pushes the rigid body off him. The dead man's right hand clutches... a SCROLL.

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS, SHAFT - CONTINUOUS

Fields gains on the glowing lantern and fires his PISTOL. A beat before the light bends around a corner. The shot missed. Fields charges down the tunnel and into an intersection. The light from the Killer's lantern is replaced by MOONLIGHT that pours down a shaft from above. Fields looks up to see the figure's BLACK COAT TAILS billow as he escapes up a ladder.

Fields follows. He hurries up the shaft to the street and as the Inspector raises his head from the hole he is nearly decapitated by...

EXT. STREET, MILK WAGON - NIGHT

...A HORSE DRAWN MILK WAGON. Fields loses his grip and plummets the ten feet back into the tunnel. By the time Fields reaches the top again and safely climbs up into the street... THE KILLER IS GONE.

CUT TO:

INT. FIELDS' MAKESHIFT MORGUE - NIGHT

The DEAD MAN from the catacombs lies on a cold metal table that has been rolled into the center of the room. Poe paces, more angry this time than distraught. He reads the scroll found in the Dead Man's hand.

POE
(reading)
Do not bemoan the sailor's life.
He was sure to die anyway but his
demise did serve the purpose of
leaving you clues. Godspeed, Poe,
Emily weakens by the hour both
physically and spiritually.

Poe crumples the letter and heaves it against the wall.

POE (CONT'D)
I will kill him, no matter how this
ends, I will kill this perversion
of a man.

FIELDS
When does the press close?

POE
We have four hours.

FIELDS
Then we must use it wisely.

CANTRELL
Why would he dress him up like a
woman?

POE

The thrill of watching me think it was Emily outweighed the risk of getting caught.

FIELDS

Wait. Here... John. I found something, hold the light closer.

Fields, his sleeves rolled up past his elbows, lifts up the skull to look at the back.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Help me turn him over.

Fields and Cantrell roll the corpse onto its stomach.

CLOSE ON: A large TATTOO covering most of the man's back.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

We've obviously found our missing sailor.

The tattoo is of a large SEXTANT, the triangular brass measuring tool essential for nautical navigation. Poe grabs a lantern and holds it close.

POE

It's a sextant.

FIELDS

Natural choice for a seaman, I suppose.

CANTRELL

My brother went to sea. A lot of the men get these in the Orient.

Fields uses a magnifying glass to get a closer look.

FIELDS

But this notch in the flesh is fresh. Here. Bring the light closer.

Cantrell does. CLOSE ON: An X-SHAPED CUT in the skin marking a spot on the sextant.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

It's still clotted. The killer did this.

CANTRELL

Part of the struggle?

FIELDS
Too deliberate.

Poe grabs the lantern and leans closer.

POE
That's a latitudinal coordinate.
If you mark the angle of the sun at
its highest point in the day, that
tells you how far north or south of
the equator you are. But it's
useless without longitude.

Fields and Cantrell stare at Poe, incredulous.

POE (CONT'D)
Even in the Army, they teach basic
navigation.

Even more surprise from Fields and Cantrell.

POE (CONT'D)
I went to West Point.
(beat)
I was expelled. Look here..

Poe points to something metallic near the dead man's mouth.

FIELDS
Help me turn him over.

The three men do so, revealing a GOLD CHAIN dangling from the side of the Dead Man's mouth. Fields attempts to open the mouth all the way but sees it's been sewn shut. He grabs scissors and cuts it open. He digs his fingers inside the Dead Man's mouth.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
His tongue has been removed and
this has replaced it.

He pulls firmly on the chain to retrieve... a WATCH covered in blood and mucous.

CANTRELL
What's it for?

POE
Longitude. Get a paper and pen.

Fields races to his desk, retrieves paper and pen. Gives the paper to Poe and holds the ink well ready. Poe places the paper over the tattoo and begins tracing the outline of the sextant.

POE (CONT'D)
He's giving us a location.

And with that, Poe is out the door.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HAMILTON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Poe POUNDS on the front door to the mansion.

POE
Open up. Open the damned--

Percy releases the lock and as soon as the door opens a fraction, Poe forces his way inside.

POE (CONT'D)
Where's Hamilton?

HAMILTON
Get out.

REVERSE ANGLE TO... a robed Hamilton on the stairs. Fields steps forth.

FIELDS
We need your navigational maps.

POE
Celestial almanacs as well.

HAMILTON
What the hell for?

But Poe pushes into the library.

POE
Because he's giving us the location
of Emily.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMILTON'S LIBRARY - NIGHT

CLOSE ON: A CRYSTAL WATCH FACE, broken and frozen in time.

HAMILTON
This watch is mine. I thought I
lost it.
(choking anger)
The killer left this?

*
*
*

PULL BACK TO... Hamilton searching the chronometer through a magnifying glass. He steps back.

FIELDS
On the dead sailor.

POE
IN to be more exact.

HAMILTON
The utter gall.

POE
Along with this latitudinal
coordinate.

*
*
*
*

Poe gives Hamilton the traced sextant markings.

HAMILTON
Incredible.

Hamilton quickly crosses to the wall-sized BOOKSHELF.

FIELDS
You must forgive me, I have no
background in navigational
techniques.

HAMILTON
You need three things to plot an
exact position. A sextant. An
accurate chronometer. And...

Hamilton pulls a HEAVY TOME off the shelf and slams it onto a desk. He then grabs a roll of maps and spreads them open on the desk.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
...a celestial almanac.

Hamilton is on fire. He quickly searches the room for objects with which to weigh down the corners of the map. He seizes a brass FIGURINE of a hunting dog, a TEAPOT, a BOTTLE OF BOURBON and his PISTOL which he slaps down on the remaining map corner.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
A celestial almanac can tell us the
exact time at which the sun hits
its zenith.

POE
Exact noon.

Poe scans the map intensely. A MAID enters and reaches for the teapot.

HAMILTON'S MAID
Shall I bring some more, sir?

Poe grabs her hand.

POE
Leave it.

HAMILTON
Thank you, Matilda. Don't take that pot. Get another.

Hamilton furiously calculates, referencing the almanac and plotting lines on the map throughout the following.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
If you have a chronograph set to Greenwich mean time, you can then calculate how far east or west of Greenwich, London you are...

Poe studies the watch under the MAGNIFYING GLASS.

POE
Eight, seventeen. Rather sixteen.

HAMILTON
Which one, damn it?

POE
Sixteen.

Hamilton opens a book and scans it quickly.

HAMILTON
Eight sixteen then?

POE
Yes.

Throughout the following, Poe hands Hamilton a compass, which he uses to measure the angle traced onto the paper. Then Hamilton triangulates, drawing lines on a map. Despite their history, the two men work together.

HAMILTON
Longitude is a measure of time east or west. Latitude is angle from the equator. That's north and south. Seventeen degrees north.

Hamilton continues calculating and plotting, drawing straight lines across the map, which intersect...

POE
West Indies? It can't be.

Hamilton points to an exact location.

HAMILTON
Here.

CLOSE ON: The ISLAND OF ST. CROIX.

FIELDS
He couldn't have transported her.

HAMILTON
Impossible. It's a two week journey to the Danish West Indies.

POE
It's not an island.

Poe grabs his coat and flees for the door.

POE (CONT'D)
St. Croix. Holy Cross.

HAMILTON
Holy Cross Church. That's our parish.

SMASHCUT TO:

EXT. HOLY CROSS CHURCH - PREDAWN

Poe, Fields, Hamilton and a posse of OFFICERS arrive. The men leap from their horses and draw their pistols, as they run toward the massive front doors of the church. Failure. The doors are barricaded shut.

FIELDS
Cantrell, you and the others, around back.

Cantrell obeys and disappears around the side of the church. Hamilton heaves his weight against the oak door but it does not give way.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Fan out. If need be, break a window. We must get inside.

Poe and Fields sprint to the SOUTHEAST side of the church. Hamilton continues to work the door while Cantrell moves stealthily along the back of the rectory. He clutches his pistol and moves silently until... a pebble rolls down the TILE ROOF. The killer is there. Every muscle in Cantrell's body stiffens as he looks up. In the heart of the morning sun, a CAPED SILHOUETTE stands atop the roof. Cantrell shields his eyes, raises his pistol and fires. The BULLET misses and in a flash, the cloaked figure descends from the sky. He knocks Cantrell to the ground and forces a MASSIVE BLADE against the officer's throat. Cantrell screams...

CANTRELL
OVER HER--

...but the words are arrested when the killer SLASHES Cantrell's throat. Blood squirts into the air and the young officer collapses.

FIELDS (O.S.)
The shot... northwest corner!

Despite the approaching officers, the madman is calm. He watches Cantrell convulse for several seconds before he escapes into a nearby grove of maple trees. Fields rounds the corner just as the killer morphs into shadow. Already, the ground is soaked with Cantrell's blood. Fields yanks off his overcoat and presses the garment against his friend's neck.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Don't move. John. Listen to me...

But it's no use. The officer is almost dead and Fields is helpless. Frantic, Fields stands and screams...

FIELDS (CONT'D)
HELP! Someone. We need help!

CRACK!! A BULLET rips through Fields' shoulder and he is knocked to the ground. As the detective regains his bearings we REVERSE ANGLE TO... the KILLER, galloping away through the cemetery.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
He's over here!

Fields is defeated.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
He's over here.

Fields slumps onto the grass and waits for the army of officers to arrive. When they do, all he can do is point.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
There. Black horse.

The men immediately race for their mounts, but Poe is more astute. Though the wound in Fields' shoulder has not yet bled through, clearly something is wrong.

POE
Fields?

FIELDS
Get him. Find him, Edgar.

POE
But...

FIELDS
GO!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HOLY CROSS CHURCH HILLSIDE - MORNING

Poe rides in a reckless fever down a steep embankment. Jumping a hedgerow, he gains enough ground on the Killer to take aim for a shot. Dropping the reins, Poe levels his pistol, and while still galloping at breakneck speed, FIRES. But, the musket ball sails wide and Poe immediately reaches for his GUNPOWDER POUCH. Focused, he begins reloading his CAP-N-BALL COLT PISTOL, an arduous task standing still, a near impossibility riding a horse. The Killer races toward a dense forest as Poe struggles with his gun. Before he can fire again, the villain disappears into the trees, and Poe whips his horse ahead in an effort to apprehend, or better yet, kill the bastard.

BABUMP, BABUMP, BABUMP... Poe's horse gallops into the woods. Poe ducks low hung branches and then smashes his right leg hard against a tree trunk. Blood seeps through his trousers but Poe ignores the pain to fire another shot. BAM. The musket ball misses again as the killer rides effortlessly past sweeping evergreens. His black cape billows behind him like the wings of a giant bird.

Poe whips his horse onward and for a moment closes the gap until... the path descends suddenly into a bank of cold fog. What had been difficult riding has now become impossible due to the thick white cloud. Poe reigns in his steed. The horse snorts and trembles. Poe suddenly realizes he can no longer hear the hooves of the killer's horse. The forest has gone strangely silent. Poe waits. Crack. A tree branch falls twenty feet behind him. Poe spins around and fires his gun, blindly. The shot echoes and then the woods return to

silence. All that we hear is the sound of Poe's horse breathing in the cold air. Steam rises off his horse's back.

CRACK! The Killer fires on Poe from out of the fog. The bullet whistles inches past Poe's head. His horse rears in terror. Poe tumbles hard to the ground as the horse disappears into the fog. Silence.

Poe frantically scrambles for his gun, rises, and begins reloading.

POE
Come out, you son of a bitch!

We hear a crow clicking somewhere behind. Poe spins around. Aims on nothing. The bird takes flight. A beat and then... the bird is shot from the air. It flaps in the wind, at first in fear, and then in death. The madman shot it from feet away.

POE (CONT'D)
Coward! Take me!

*

Nothing but fog. And then the sound of HORSE'S HOOVES fleeing. The Killer is gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOLY CROSS CHURCH - DAY

Three men kneel beside Cantrell's now lifeless body. One struggles to remove the wedding band off the dead officer's finger. The officer wipes the blood clean, then puts Cantrell's wedding ring in his coat pocket. A grey-haired man, DOC CLEMENTS, 60s, gives instructions.

DOC CLEMENTS
One. Two. Three. Lift.

The men drop the body onto a large swath of BURLAP. One man holds the fabric in place while the other two ROLL the body into the burlap. Doc Clements unwinds a ball of TWINE and cuts off a few lengths with his POCKET KNIFE.

Fields leans against the church wall. He has lost enough blood to impact his energy, and yet, his sole focus is on his fallen comrade.

*
*
*

DOC CLEMENTS (CONT'D)
Bind it nice and tight - three times around ought to do it. What was your friend's name?

He takes a pencil from his coat pocket and begins filling out the death certificate.

FIELDS
John Cantrell. He was twenty-eight.

*
*

DOC CLEMENTS
Severed artery, bled out fast.
Didn't feel much, for what it's worth.

*
*

Fields silently walks away toward the church's graveyard.

EXT. HOLY CROSS CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DUSK

*

Fields stands over a FRESHLY DUG GRAVE and stares at the shallow pit. At the head of the grave we can see a makeshift wooden marker. Clements approaches Fields.

DOC CLEMENTS
I need to see to that wound.

But Fields is transfixed.

CLOSE ON: Carved into the marker, EMILY HAMILTON: May 20th, 1826 to October 7th, 1849. Fields turns to the doctor.

FIELDS
What's the date?

DOC CLEMENTS
Excuse me?

FIELDS
The date.

DOC CLEMENTS
Today's the sixth.

Off Fields' steely gaze we...

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET, CHURCH - EVENING

Like a wounded soldier back from battle, Poe limps along the road into town. A horse gallops toward him and slows alongside. It is Hamilton.

POE
He's gone.

Poe looks in both directions.

POE (CONT'D)
And so is my horse... What about
Fields? He was shot?

HAMILTON
He's at Clement's.

*

Up in the distance, the CHURCH BELLS begin to toll the evening hour. The sound is haunting and beckons Poe to a task he is unsure he can complete.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
And what of you?

POE
The paper goes to press in three
hours.

Poe's spirit is nearly gone and Hamilton can sense it.

HAMILTON
There is an empty grave. It has
Emily's name on it. That was his
clue. That is why he sent us
there.

POE
Perhaps, and to kill again.

Hamilton quickly dismounts his horse.

HAMILTON
Here. I'll give you a leg up.

Hamilton stoops and clasps his hands. In pain, Poe takes the aid and mounts.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
I am sorry, Mr. Poe. This is my
fault. I should never have gone
through with the ball.

Hamilton's eyes fill with tears.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
None of this would have--.

POE
They are my stories. And your
daughter's love for me is the
reason another man died today. Go
(MORE)

POE (CONT'D)
to Doc Clement's. I have yet
another story to write.

HAMILTON
Edgar?

Poe, reins in hand, looks at Hamilton. It is the first time
he has used Poe's first name.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
For today, she is still alive.

And with that, Poe gallops away.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. DOC CLEMENT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The ANGUISHED CRIES of a man in excruciating pain pierce the
night. We see a delirious Fields struggling to get out of the
blood-soaked bed, while Doc Clements and two officers wrestle
him down.

FIELDS
Let me go. We're running out of
time!

DOC CLEMENTS
Mr. Fields, you're not going
anywhere.

FIELDS
Where's Poe?!

DOC CLEMENTS
For God's sake, you've got a musket
ball in your chest. Now lie down
and let me do my job before you
bleed to death.

Fields grabs the Doctor's arm, pulls him close and growls...

FIELDS
The son of a bitch is going to kill
her today. So cut the bullet out
and patch me up. NOW!

Doc Clements looks to the officers.

DOC CLEMENTS
There's a bottle of whiskey in the
kitchen. Bring it here.

OFFICER AT DOC CLEMENTS

Yes, sir.

The man hurries from the room.

DOC CLEMENTS

You. Find Mrs. Clement downstairs
and tell her to bring me a needle
and thread.

The second officer dashes out. Doc Clements rifles through
his desk and takes out instruments he needs: clamps, a
scalpel, a fillet-sized knife and finally a large square iron
bar.

FIELDS

What's that?

DOC CLEMENTS

Magnet. I've got to find the bullet
before I can cut it out.

The first officer returns with a bottle of whiskey.

DOC CLEMENTS (CONT'D)

Good. Take that pillowcase and soak
it in the whiskey. Then give the
rest to him.

Doc Clements bares down on the wound with the knife in one
hand and the magnet in the other.

DOC CLEMENTS (CONT'D)

He'll need it.

CUT TO:

INT. PATRIOT PRINTING ROOM - NIGHT

Inside, Poe sits at a desk next to the printing press,
feverishly writing. He is a haunted man.

In the b.g. Henry Maddux quietly flits in and out like an
expectant parent.

A number of typesetters, including Ivan, are reduced to
hulking silhouettes.

POE (V.O.)

"The gossamer white of bone was now
visible beneath the tattered meat
of her fingertips as Emily clawed
madly at the wooden slats of her
(MORE)

*
*
*
*

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
coffin; a desperate drowning
animal."

We INTERCUT the scene of Poe writing and the scene of Emily trying to escape. Poe's imagination is now so attuned with the killer that he is imagining everything with near precognitive clarity.

CLOSE ON: Emily's bloody fingers digging at the splintered wood, the dirt from above draining into her coffin like hour glass sand.

Poe's vision is blurred by the pain in his leg. His cheeks are flushed with fever. He sucks at his bottle and plunges toward the conclusion.

POE (V.O.)
"The dirt rose around her; the
inescapable sand of an hourglass as
her final breath of air slipped her
into the twilight of consciousness
until..."

But Poe cannot let her die.

INT. KILLER'S LAIR - NIGHT

The board begins to crack along the grain. Then a hand, feminine, breaks through, cut and bleeding from the splintered wood. Emily gasps. She sucks in the excess air for a beat and then, with renewed strength, begins to beat against the floorboard until it finally gives way.

Emily, her entire body covered in dirt, stumbles from the tomb. Her legs buckle underneath her and Emily slams hard against the cold earth. She gasps, then relying on a last surge of strength, stands.

She hurries for the lantern and then, with horror, sees the truth of her killer's dungeon. The walls are wet with mud, and coal is stacked by a bloodied cot. A small furnace provides little heat to a windowless torture chamber. Emily moves about the room in a frantic search for the door.

The smell is overwhelming and she retches, accidentally knocking a stack of books that tumble over.

Panicked, she feels her way in the darkness for a door and just as she reaches it, a MASSIVE HAND, seemingly from nowhere grabs her, covering her mouth with an ether-soaked handkerchief.

KILLER
Stop fighting.

Emily tries to scream, inhaling the gas, immediately beginning to lose her sight. The world spins toward black as the Killer lifts her off the ground.

POE (V.O.)
"He knew now that all hope was lost. He had failed his Beloved and there was but one thing left to do, one last act..."

INT. PATRIOT PRINTING ROOM - EVENING

Poe looks like half of his soul and most of his physical strength have been drained.

Ivan stands at the press holding what Poe has just written.

IVAN
"A final desperate plea; one life offered for another's." Ohhh, Mr. Poe, no. No! You can't!

POE
Set the print, Ivan.

IVAN
But sir--

POE
Do it!

Broken hearted, Ivan begins to lay the printing blocks. He reaches into the desk to retrieve the bottle of whiskey. He offers it to Poe, who simply shakes his head no.

IVAN
You can't take it as your fault, Mr. Poe.

Poe clenches. For a moment he has the urge to strike the typesetter.

POE
Is there someone else you'd like to blame?

Ivan is too frightened to meet Poe's wild eyes. A beat, then Ivan meekly mumbles...

IVAN
It's the killer who's to blame,
sir.

HENRY (O.S.)
Finally. May I read it?

*

REVERSE TO REVEAL: Henry Maddux, ever the editor, snatches
the text out of Ivan's hands and reads...

IVAN
Sir, I need to--

HENRY
(reading)
"Poe could feel the poison already
feeding upon his blood as the
maggots were soon to do..."
(beat)
Jesus, Edgar...

Poe stares at Henry, his eyes burning with hatred. Suddenly,
Poe lunges, grabbing Henry by the throat.

POE
YOU LIKE THIS, DON'T YOU? YOU SON
OF A BITCH!

Ivan jumps in to save Henry, struggling to pull Poe off of
the editor.

IVAN
Mr. Poe, don't!

POE
ARE YOU MAKING ENOUGH MONEY, HENRY?

IVAN
Mr. Poe!

POE
IS IT ENOUGH?!

*

Finally, Ivan manages to pull Poe off. Henry gasps for
breath, chokes and sputters...

HENRY
It's your own damned fault, you
daft bastard! You brought this on
yourself! You want me to publish it
or not? Because God help me I won't
and then see what happens to your
precious Emily!

*
*
*
*
*
*

Poe slams out the exit. Shaking with fury.

*

EXT. HOLY CROSS CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DAWN

The rain has stopped, but Baltimore is blanketed in a thin layer of ice. It sparkles and yet the landscape is bleak, as the sun makes little progress to warm the world. The bells of Holy Cross toll FIVE TIMES. CLOSE ON: A RAVEN, perched on an icy branch.

PAN DOWN TO REVEAL: Poe stands over the empty grave, staring at the marker, which foretells Emily's death. Poe sinks to his knees, sobbing.

POE

I'm so sorry... I'm so sorry.

INT. FIELDS' HOUSE - MORNING

FIELDS' MAID, 23 is asleep on a chair in front of a fire that has long since died. Poe, dazed and defeated, comes in from the cold, waking up the Maid.

FIELDS' MAID

I'm sorry, sir. I fell asleep waiting for you and the Inspector.

POE

What time is it?

Poe notices the clock.

FIELDS' MAID

Just past six, sir. The paper's here for you. Rather remarkable seeing that people are stealing other's papers. They can't print enough of them. Between the election today and this horrible killing they keep writing about.

Poe takes the morning paper. He quickly searches the Patriot for his text when:

FIELDS' MAID (CONT'D)

There's something else, Mr. Poe.

POE

What is it?

The maid reaches into her apron and retrieves a NOTE. Poe snatches it from her hand and reads:

POE (CONT'D)
(reading)
"It is a masterpiece, Mr. Poe. A
epitaph worthy of your gifts."

He stares at the note, something not making sense.

POE (CONT'D)
When did this come?

FIELDS' MAID
I don't know exactly. But before
the paper was delivered.

POE
Why do you say that?

FIELDS' MAID
It was underneath the paper.

POE
Impossible. Look at the streaks of
ink.

FIELDS' MAID
I don't understand. I'm sorry, Mr.
Poe.

POE
The note's been rained on.

FIELDS' MAID
It rained last night. Before dawn.

Poe holds up the newspaper which is dry and smooth.

POE
But the newspaper is bone dry.

FIELDS' MAID
Sir, I'm not sure what-- The paper
was delivered later. After it
stopped raining.

POE
(raising his voice)
No! That's impossible. This note is
in response to what I wrote - in
THIS paper. He delivered the note
BEFORE the paper. He knew the story
in advance.

FIELDS' MAID
But--

POE
He knew it, because he's already
read it.

CUT TO:

INT. DOC CLEMENT'S HOUSE - DAY

Fields, drenched in sweat, lies unconscious in the bed. His chest and shoulder are wrapped with a blood soaked bandage. A beat before the Inspector gasps, jerks awake, fevered and in tremendous pain.

FIELDS
CLEMENTS!

Willing himself upright, Fields stumbles toward his coat which hangs on the back of the door to the room. He rummages through the coat's pockets but doesn't find for what he is searching.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Where's my gun?

Fields stumbles toward a desk in the corner. With his one good hand, Fields rifles through the desk. Except for the debris from his surgery, the drawers are empty.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Damn it.

Fields knocks objects off the table top. He swaggers like a drunk from the loss of blood, inadvertently topples an ink well, getting ink on his hands, then knocks his wounded shoulder against the corner of the desk. *

FIELDS (CONT'D)
AHHHH!!

CLOSE ON... a small droplet of ink that separates itself like mercury from the spill and beads against the magnet Doc Clements used to extract the musket ball from Fields' shoulder. Disbelieving, Fields snatches the magnet off the ground and holds it a small distance above the spill. One by one, dots of ink lift off the ground and coagulate against the magnet's flat surface. Fields is shocked. He grabs the ink well and reads the label: IRON GALL RED #2

FIELDS (CONT'D)
The ink.

Fields stares at the ink smudges on his fingers, then pulls out a few strands of his hair. He brings the now-ink stained *

hairs near enough to the magnet to see them gravitate to the bar just as they did in the original murder.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
 (regarding his inky
 fingertips)
 The paper...

CUT TO:

INT. PATRIOT EDITOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Poe enters Henry's office. It's dark and he can see the shape of a figure behind the desk. We can see he has his gun out.

POE
Henry, I have to know where she is.

Poe slowly moves around the side of the desk and is careful not to let him out of his sights. As he gets closer he can see that the figure is unnaturally still.

He lights the lantern on the desk and now sees Henry isn't doing so well.

Tied to his own chair, Henry has bled out, his hands severed from his wrists. A stupefied expression hangs from his waxy, luminous skin.

Poe follows his gaze to the desk where his severed hands rest, a quill poised in one of them above a sheet of parchment, the words "Getting warmer..." scrawled in blood.

INT. PATRIOT PRINTING ROOM - NIGHT

From behind, we watch as Ivan works the great iron PRINTING PRESS under the light of a single lantern. PULL OUT TO REVEAL: POE. He forces the barrel of a gun against the back of Ivan's skull.

Ivan smiles but does not turn around.

Ivan. POE

Ivan now turns lifting his hands in the air.

Surprised? IVAN

Poe is a little confused by his reaction.

POE
Where is Emily?

He cocks the gun.

IVAN
Dying. More quickly than I
expected. So I had to speed things
along and deliver the morning
edition so you could finally
realize it had to be none other
than your humble typesetter and
biggest fan.

*

Ivan reaches for his flask.

IVAN (CONT'D)
Drink?

He pours each of them a shot.

IVAN (CONT'D)
You don't know how I've looked
forward to this moment sir, to sit
here, like this, no more masks,
artist to artist.

*

POE
(seething)
Artist to artist...

*

*

*

IVAN
(smiling shyly)
Though I admit as I read your final
chapter, I felt more muse than
artist.

*

*

*

Poe clutches the gun with trembling hands.

*

POE
Where is Emily?

IVAN
"Where is Emily?" Just like that?
No probing the devious twist and
turns of man's darkest motives? No
prying into the mysteries of his
conscience? So very unlike you, Mr.
Poe.

*

POE
WHERE IS SHE?

IVAN

Ow. Rather disappointing denouement, I have to say. But that's life, isn't it? So much less satisfying than fiction.

He sighs.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Very well. Give me the gun.

POE

What? No!

IVAN

You've come this far, Mr. Poe are you really going to back out now? You know what happens next. You are the one who wrote it after all.

Poe begins to understand his inexorable doom.

IVAN (CONT'D)

You either pull that trigger and kill me and young Miss Emily or you give me the gun.

Trembling, he knows he has no choice. He hands Ivan the gun.

POE

She will live?

IVAN

That was your solution, right? I have to admit, I don't cry easily but you had me bawling like a baby.

He smiles again as he pulls out a small ampoule.

IVAN (CONT'D)

And I've always had a fancy for poisons. That's how I done my dad. The idea of drinking something that will kill you but having time to carry on a conversation is as they say, 'fraught with dramatic possibilities', right?

He fills Poe's glass.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Listen to me, talking about "dramatic possibilities" with one of the greatest writers of our

(MORE)

IVAN (CONT'D)
 time. Although I was proud of my
 utilizing the tongue from Mr.
 Valdemar, quite the subtle
 metaphor, I thought.

*
 *
 *
 *

POE
 Subtle? It made no sense at all,
 you mutton-for-brains. Valdemar was
 trapped in his own body between
 life and death just like every
 manjack on earth. What the hell is
 subtle about that? What kind of
 clue was that? Christ! Even at the
 end, I am once again in the
 presence of a hack.

*
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 *
 *
 *
 *
 *
 *

IVAN
 (sheepish)
 I guess I had that coming.

*
 *
 *

The two men stare at each other.

IVAN (CONT'D)
 Well, go on, sir. Bottoms up.

Poe takes the glass. His hand trembles as he looks into the
 liquid that he knows will take his life even as it saves
 Emily's.

INT. DOC CLEMENT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Blinded by pain, Fields stumbles down the stairs, shouting.

FIELDS
 I need a carriage. NOW.

Clement's Maid appears from around the corner.

CLEMENT'S MAID
 Inspector.

Fields grabs her.

FIELDS
 Get a carriage and send a messenger
 to Charles Hamilton's house. Tell
 him to get to the Baltimore
 Patriot.

The Clement's Maid hesitates.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

DO IT!

CUT TO:

INT. PATRIOT PRINTING ROOM - PREDAWN

Poe throws the drink down in one shot.

EXT. STREET, FIELDS - PREDAWN

A carriage races through the streets. The horses strain against a whip. There is no time.

POE (V.O.)

So it has been written, I will die today. A hole of moldering earth awaits.

At the corner, the team is joined by several Baltimore OFFICERS on horseback.

INT. CARRIAGE, FIELDS - PREDAWN

Fields, with a coat draped over his bloody bandages, loads his pistol.

POE (V.O.)

It is a just end to a man consumed by death his entire life. Emily, take this kiss upon the brow!

CUT TO:

INT. PATRIOT PRINTING ROOM - PREDAWN

Ivan reads Poe's words. Smiles.

IVAN

Really good stuff, sir. A poet to the end. I suppose this bit is for Miss Hamilton?

Poe is fading in and out of consciousness.

IVAN (CONT'D)

I tell you, Mr. Poe, I used to live for your stories. Just lived for them! When you stopped writing, I guess I went a little nuts. But I
(MORE)

IVAN (CONT'D)
 kept on believing. Even when you
 closed me out, I still believed in
 your vision, in a future where
 people would stand in lines to see
 the kind of things that only people
 like you and I can see.

Ivan shines his boots one last time then stands.

IVAN (CONT'D)
 I knew you had one more in you,
 sir.

He hugs him.

IVAN (CONT'D)
 No one will ever forget you.

Turning, he dons a broad brimmed hat and grabs his coat.

IVAN (CONT'D)
 Have you ever been to France?
 There's a young writer over there.
 Jules Verne. You heard of him? He
 really reminds me of you, sir.

*

POE
 Please... I beg of you, where is
 she?

He smiles one last time.

IVAN
 "Anything was better than this
 agony. Anything was more tolerable
 than this derision. I could bear
 those hypocritical smiles no
 longer."

Edgar recognizes the passage with growing horror.

POE
 "*The Tell-Tale Heart*." She's here.

The door to the shop is banged on and for a second Ivan
 stands still as does Poe. Then a voice calls out.

CARRIAGE DRIVER (O.S.)
 Carriage for Mr. Reynolds.

Edgar digs his fingers into the crevices of the floor boards
 and pulls for his life. He tries several boards, but none of
 them budge. He scrambles to his feet, grabs a hammer from the

work bench and begins banging on the floor to find a hollow spot.

POE

EMILY!!!

A board answers the hammer's blow with a hollow knock. Poe stabs the claw end into the crevice and pries up the plank. He hooks the claw onto the adjoining board and heaves, but it is jammed under the heavy work bench.

Poe throws his full weight against the massive work table covered with tools and print blocks, but it won't budge. With one sweep, he sends the tools and blocks scattering across the floor, steadies his back against a wall, and uses both legs to overturn the heavy oak table.

Poe swipes up the hammer, spears the board with the claw end and yanks. It easily comes loose, sending Poe sprawling to the floor, but revealing a TRAP DOOR with a rope handle. He throws open the door and sticks his head down into the pitch darkness.

POE (CONT'D)

EMILY!!

Poe finds a lantern and races down the rickety homemade ladder into the darkness.

INT. KILLER'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

The spilling light reveals only a dirt floor, bedrock walls, low-hanging beams strewn with cobwebs, and, further on, a narrow passage.

POE

EMILY? PLEASE ANSWER ME!!!

Poe passes along the dark passage into a small dirt and stone room. Along one wall is a half-full COAL BIN. Poe swings the lantern around to reveal what Emily had not seen before.

Against the opposite wall is an elegant bookcase stacked floor to ceiling with leather bound books. Next to the books, is a small WRITING DESK. Neatly arranged writing paper, an INK WELL, and an elegant FEATHER QUILL PEN all create the impression of a gentleman's office. The scene looks like Poe's own study.

POE (CONT'D)

EMILY!!!

Poe's voice echoes off the basement walls. The poison surging through his blood makes the room spin. He falls dizzily to his knees. His breath is limited but his will is not. He summons all his strength to survive a few minutes longer as he screams:

POE (CONT'D)
EM-IL-Y!!

Out of the silence... nothing. Then, ever so faintly... scratching.

POE (CONT'D)
Emily?

And at last... a whispered voice.

EMILY (O.S.)
Edgar?

Poe spins around. He is still uncertain whether to trust it.

EMILY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Edgar.

This time the voice is louder. More certain. At last Poe hears Emily's muffled CRY from beneath him. Poe drops to the floor.

POE
EMILY!!

But the sound has stopped. Poe cups his ear to the ground but there is no answer until... scraping. Like Poe, Emily is dying. Frantic, Poe uses the hammer to pound against the planks. He swings with all his might, scraping, clawing at the wooden boards.

EMILY
Eddy...

His heart almost bursting, Edgar tears at the tomb like a wild animal.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STREET, HAMILTON - MORNING

Hamilton's carriage races through the empty streets of Baltimore as rain begins to fall. The HORSE'S HOOVES pound against the stone in an echoing rhythm that mimics a heartbeat.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: A posse of OFFICERS ride like hell to keep up. Each stride taken delineates the ever decreasing moments of Poe's life.

INT. KILLER'S LAIR - CONTINUOUS

The floorboards lift away in large chunks until at last, Emily, is released from her tomb. Unconscious, Poe pulls her up into his arms.

POE
Emily, please, open your eyes.

Poe clutches her face.

POE (CONT'D)
OPEN YOUR EYES.

There is no response, so Edgar lowers his lips to hers and forces the last bit of breath he still possesses into her lungs. A beat and then... A COUGH. Emily opens her eyes to find, Poe, staring back at her. Emily begins to weep.

POE (CONT'D)
It's alright, it's alright.

EMILY
Is it really you?

Poe strokes a thin strand of blond hair away from Emily's eyes. He studies her face, knowing that in a short time he will never see her again.

POE
Yes, Emily. It's me.

Emily clutches Poe's hand as she closes her eyes.

EMILY
I love you, Eddy. I love you.

Poe's entire body trembles as he lifts Emily off the ground and stumbles toward the stairs. Emily starts to drift in and out of consciousness.

POE
Emily, stay awake. We're almost there.

She rouses some and wraps her arms around his neck.

EMILY
You did mean it?

POE
Mean what?

EMILY
When you said you would marry me.

POE
In this life and the next.

Emily closes her eyes and the world goes BLACK.

CUT TO:

EXT. PATRIOT - DAY

Chaos. OFFICERS secure Emily on a stretcher. Hamilton grips his daughter's hand as they head toward a carriage.

HAMILTON
You're going to be fine. I'm here.

Hamilton is back to his old self.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
What's wrong with you fools, clear the street. NOW.

Fields appears out of breath.

FIELDS
Where's Poe?

HAMILTON
He was here a moment ago.

EMILY
Eddy...?

The officers section off the route as Emily is loaded into a carriage with her father and whisked away.

Fields looks around the shop and cannot find Poe anywhere. He calls to one of his men to start looking for Poe as well. The scene seems to fade a bit as we move away from the action and turn toward the park across the way.

A lone figure, pale as a ghost, watches from a PARK BENCH across the street. It is Poe.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

Snow falls in graceful clumps. Poe's eyes are nearly closed now. But he is not alone.

An Older Gentleman stands in front of him with a look of worry on his face.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
Sir, you're Edgar Poe correct?

POE
I am. For a few minutes more
anyway.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
Are you alright? Is there someone I
can call for you?

Something dawns on Poe

POE
Reynolds.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
You want me to find Reynolds. Does
he have a first name?

POE
No find Fields and tell him his
last name is Reynolds.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
Sir, I'm sorry but you're not
making much sense.

POE
He needs to know his last name is
Reynolds.

Poe is losing conscious.

OLDER GENTLEMAN
I am an associate of your uncle. I
will send for him to come and
retrieve you Mr. Poe.

POE
Reynolds. Tell Fields...

The Older Gentleman starts to walk away in a hurry as Poe can no longer keep his eyes open.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

The bright morning sun shines off the white walls of the hallways. Fields has his back to us as he stares out the window. He is soon approached by and older Dr. John Morgan.

MORGAN

Mr. Fields? I'm Dr. John Morgan.

FIELDS

Yes. Thank you for seeing me.

The two men begin to walk and talk.

MORGAN

I assume this is about Mr. Poe. I understand you two were friends?

FIELDS

Yes, Doctor. May I see him?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The two men walk into a stark white hospital room where on the bed Poe lies -- very much dead.

MORGAN

I'm afraid he died early this morning. His family is having the body moved later today. They were very shocked. It seems no one has heard from him well over a week.

FIELDS

Do you have a cause of death?

MORGAN

I'm sorry but I don't. I have a few ideas but as you know he was in a very deranged state when he was brought in. His clothes were ripped and un-presentable. He was a bit worse for the wear.

Fields begins to sift through the belongings of Poe. He touches the cane he often carried.

FIELDS

I'm told he was ranting?

MORGAN

Yes. He kept on and on about telling you that your last name is Fields.

FIELDS

I'm sorry?

MORGAN

"Tell Fields his last name is Reynolds..." over and over. Then he would just scream Reynolds. But isn't your last name Fields?

FIELDS

Yes. It is.

MORGAN

Is that helpful or just gibberish?

FIELDS

Maybe both.

Fields writes down Reynolds name. We see that he's written it under the name "IVAN?"

He then says his good-byes.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Thank you for your help, Doctor. I would be interested in hearing your final analysis.

MORGAN

I should publish that in the next few weeks. It's a shame, such a talent. But as I understand he did live a rather troubled life.

FIELDS

Yes. Well goodbye, Doctor.

Fields leaves.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCH GRAVEYARD - DUSK

It's a cold, dark day. A penetrating wind sweeps over the bell towers of Baltimore. The world is blanketed with ice.

POE (V.O.)

Take this kiss upon the brow!

Emily sits in a wheelchair beside an open grave. Her father stands beside her and watches silently as a COFFIN is lowered into the ground.

POE (V.O.)
And in parting from you now, Thus
much let me avow.

A lone RAVEN rests on the chapel spire and watches as Emily tosses a handful of DIRT into her lover's grave. As the gravel splatters across the coffin we PULL UP AND OUT. Just beyond the cemetery walls, a few people have gathered. The very people who had once despised and chastised the great writer, have now come to pay their final respects. Sadly there are only about 10 people.

POE (V.O.)
You are not wrong who deem that my
days have been a dream.

As the sky darkens, we follow the giant bird as it lifts from the spire and circles the cemetery once before soaring into the vast unknown. As we come down from the cold gray sky, black coal SOOT billows up into frame, and we:

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILWAY STATION PLATFORM - DAY

A passenger train's locomotive smokestack. An overhead station sign announces: NEW YORK, NY. A man sits on a bench. We cannot see his face because he is reading a NEWSPAPER while the train lumbers into the station.

A WHISTLE BLOWS and for a second the world stands still. Then... the train doors open and people step off onto the platform. The CROWD increases as luggage is unloaded and children leap into their parent's arms.

CLOSE ON: a pair of meticulously shined black BOOTS stepping onto the platform. PULL BACK TO REVEAL: a TALL MAN in a WIDE-BRIMMED HAT. As he picks up a SUITCASE and heads away from the train, a blast of STEAM from the locomotive causes the tails of his TOP COAT to billow and flap like the wings of a giant bird.

POE (V.O.)
All that we see or seem is but a
dream within a dream.

The TALL MAN walks down the platform when a YOUNG PORTER holds a sign that says "Reynolds."

YOUNG PORTER
Mr. Reynolds, please follow me to
you carriage.

We see the tall man is Ivan. He gets to his carriage and
climbs in while the Young Porter loads up the bags.

INT. CARRIAGE, IVAN - DAY

Just as Ivan sits down he is surprised to see there is
someone else in the carriage sitting across from him.

We reveal that it is Fields who has his gun trained on him.

FIELDS
Hello, Ivan.

CUT TO BLACK.