

POE

by

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EXT. - GRAVEYARD - PRESENT DAY - BALTIMORE

It is 3:30 AM and a HUGE PALE MOON glows over the city on this bitterly cold night.

As the wind swirls around the surrounding trees, a SLIGHT MAN IN A HOODED jacket meanders through the TOMBSTONES finally arriving at his destination.

The hooded man glances down until his shadowed eyes come to rest on A WEATHERED TOMBSTONE upon which is etched the name "Edgar Allen Poe."

Delicately putting a gloved hand on the tombstone as if feeling for a sign of life, BOWING HIS HEAD HE GINGERLY PLACES A HALF EMPTY BOTTLE OF MARTEL COGNAC on the grave. The ominous rumble of DISTANT THUNDER is heard. WE CUT TO THE PAST.

EXT. - COVERED BRIDGE - THE YEAR IS 1833 - NIGHT

Thunder rips the sky apart as HELLISH RAIN POUNDS away at the foggy night.

A COVERED BRIDGE stands in the distance as water rushes dangerously beneath its trestles.

A black THOROUGHbred with bulging veins stretched over heaving muscles surges through the night. The violent animal's eyes are nearly white in anticipation. Overhead thunder clouds boil as the BEAST'S HOOVES POUND furiously on the flooded roadway.

Seated securely upon the back of the excited stallion is a DASHING FIGURE dramatically clad in all black. The rider's cape whips wildly above the stranger's shoulders as the beast rears in anticipation.

A thunderbolt rips the darkness and reveals A SLIGHTLY BUILT STRANGER in a soaked draping hooded cape that reaches to the soaked earth.

HOODED MAN

(unearthly)

You know the wager?

RIDER

A hundred in gold to jump the barrier -
Get on with it!

The rider swings the animal towards an ominous covered bridge that stretches across A SWOLLEN RIVER.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOODED MAN

...There is time to reconsider.

RIDER

(bellowing)

...Your money is mine, fool! I'd bet my head on that!

HOODED MAN

...So be it.

The rider pulls hard on the stallion's mouth, causing the creature to snort in anger.

RIDER

Your money's mine!

The horseman whips the beast around and the enraged animal charges forth into THE ESCALATING DOWNPOUR.

Water explodes from beneath THE POUNDING HOOVES into the echoing darkness of the covered bridge.

Maniacally whipping the horse from side to side with the water-soaked reins, the beast is SPURRED TO MAXIMUM SPEED.

The lightning flash from the far end of the covered bridge reveals THE WOODEN BARRIER the horseman must jump to win the wager. At best there is only a two foot clearing before the rider would fatally collide with A CROSS BEAM.

The hooded man steps forward as the lightning bursts behind him. From out of the horseman's throat, A CRY OF DEFIANCE as he guides the thoroughbred towards the barrier. As the animal lunges mightily, the front hooves clear the first barrier which cause the rider to bellow with more exuberance until his cries of victory are suddenly cut short and replaced with A BONE-SHATTERING COLLISION.

The horse and rider clear the barrier except for one minor detail...THE RIDER IS MISSING HIS HEAD.

The horse's frantic galloping is cut short by a sudden bolt of lightning that GOUGES A HOLE in the animal's path. The terrified horse pulls up short, rearing wildly, DUMPING THE HEADLESS RIDER into a collection of swirling brown water.

With great deliberation the hooded stranger steps forward and with a bony hand covered in decaying flesh, retrieves the decapitated head.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HOODED MAN

...Bet gold, young man, but never, ever
bet the devil your head.

A heart-stopping lightening bolt finally exposes A HORRIFYING MAN'S FACE which is nothing more than a skull layered in sinewy remnants of decaying flesh and draped skin.

He glances up at THE BLOODY WIRE STRETCHED ACROSS THE TOP OF THE BRIDGE'S EXIT and laughing aloud, strolls away into the night's tempest gently swinging his trophy by its hair.

INT. - COMMANDANT OFFICE - DAY

The SCENE FADES UP on a judicial hearing that is being held at West Point. As the sunlight traverses THE AUSTERE ROOM, the camera comes to settle on the countenance of Cadet EDGAR ALLEN POE. He stands before a judicial PANEL OF COMMISSIONED WEST POINT OFFICERS.

Poe is a TRIM, MEDIUM-BONED MAN, WITH WELL DEVELOPED FEATURES. His voice is pleasing in tone, almost rhythmic and HIS SOUTHERN-TINGED ACCENT only enhances his well-chosen words.

GENERAL

Step forward, Poe. You have been summoned before the disciplinary board to face the charges of multiple offenses.

CAPTAIN

(reading)

On the 23rd day of January in the darkness of the night, Cadet Poe did cause a great disturbance by tossing a butchered chicken on a slumbering cadet, declaring it was

(pausing)

...it was Napoleon Bonaparte's puckered ass.

GENERAL

How did Cadet Poe arrive at that conclusion?

POE

Alcohol haze, Sir.

CAPTAIN

Intoxication is noted.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GENERAL

I see - How do you plead?

POE

Culpable and blamable, Sir.

CAPTAIN

In the past year said Poe has amassed a sizable gambling debt which he is unable to pay.

POE

Jinxed and unblessed, as of late, Sir.

CAPTAIN

Silence! - Cadet Poe, when unable or unwilling to repay a loan from a fellow cadet, was honorably challenged to a fencing duel at sunrise on October 11th of this year - He failed to attend the contest.

POE

Unfortunately, I'm not that good in the morning.

GENERAL

Silence!

CAPTAIN

Am I the only one present who finds this cadets attitude towards this court cavalier and mountingly offensive?!

POE

Sir - I don't believe I've the qualities to be West Point material.

GENERAL

Attendance here is a privilege!

COLONEL

With the court's permission - In lieu of Cadet Poe's outstanding performance in the United States military prior to his arrival at West Point, in the capacity of a sergeant major, he performed his duties with merit.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COLONEL (cont'd)

While at this establishment Poe's academic studies have been sterling, with superior abilities evident in creative writing, and a fluency in Greek, Latin, French and German. - Considering his performance in other areas perhaps a stern reprimanding with a suspended sentence would be in order.

POE

Sir...

COLONEL

Yes, Cadet?

POE

The wool uniform.

COLONEL

What of it??

POE

Sir, I've never been able to withstand wool for long periods of time.

COLONEL

Really? - I see.

GENERAL

His uniform itches?

COLONEL

Apparently General.

GENERAL

~~Certainly a sound~~ reason for terminating ones education in one of the most prestigious institutions in the nation. If this a lame attempt to make light of your predicament with dismissive drollery, I only see failure ahead for you, Cadet - How do you respond?

POE

Truthfully - rather than awake each morning by a ditty played on bugle, and saluting people, such as yourself, Sir, with stars on their shoulders I'd prefer to chase a star of my own.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GENERAL

...So be it.

EXT. - RICHMOND, VIRGINIA - FRONT STREET - DAY

Now out of his uniform Poe cuts a rather romantic figure, as the hungry young artist. The sky above is DARK AND POE SEEMS OBLIVIOUS TO THE LIGHT MIST. Arriving at a comfortable dwelling, he opens the gate and bounds up the four stairs that lead to the humble home.

He knocks and a man about Poe's age answers. He is BARRETT SHELTON, a weed-thin, pompous landowner, and a dramatic contrast to the man standing before him.

SHELTON

I know who you are.

POE

And who are you?

SHELTON

I heard you were coming.

POE

Shall we try this again. Who're you?

SHELTON

You have no further business here so why don't you leave?

POE

I've never struck anyone before noon; today may be the exception.

SHELTON

I take that as a threat?

Poe angles his way past the non-threatening figure and cranes his head just BEYOND THE DOORWAY.

POE

Sarah!

SHELTON

You're trespassing!

Poe moves through the FOYER and angles into the PARLOR.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELTON (cont'd)

Your reputation as a vulgarian is duly warranted -

POE

Sarah!

SHELTON

You'll be arrested if you do not leave now!

POE

That's enough from you!

SHELTON

Is that a threat!?

SARAH

(O.S.)

Eddie.

SHELTON

Sarah, stay away - I'll see this through.

MR. ROYSTER

That won't be necessary, Barrett.

Sarah's parents, MR. AND MRS. ROYSTER stand protectively in front of their daughter, Sarah. SARAH is a woman in her early twenties and quite beautiful with hair neatly combed in an auburn display.

SARAH

(privately)

Eddie.

MR. ROYSTER

I demand that you leave this house, now!

POE

(to Sarah)

Why? Have I done something? I do have lapses, but I don't remember offending anyone in this room.

SARAH

Eddie, I have no choice.

POE

Choice?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHELTON

Yes, 'choice' - You've been asked to leave, civilly. Care to make it a legal issue?

POE

Whoever or whatever you are, this has nothing to do with you! What has happened here?

MR. ROYSTER

You're not welcome.

POE

I'm gathering that.

SARAH

I wanted to tell you -

MR. ROYSTER

Exactly what did you wish to tell him, Sarah.

SHELTON

Why wait any longer? I'll get the authorities,

SARAH

No!

MRS. ROYSTER

Yes - At once!

Shelton exits carefully angling past Poe.

POE

What have I done?

MR. ROYSTER

Sarah is to be married and there's nothing more to discuss, so have a degree of decency and leave before you're arrested!

POE

(to Sarah)

Is this true?

SARAH

I -

(CONTINUED)

MRS. ROYSTER
(overriding Sarah)
My husband gave you the answer - you
are not wanted!

MR. ROYSTER
(to Poe)
The word of your conduct and dismissal
from West point only supports your
step-father's claim that you won't
amount to salt or anything worth a
damn for that matter.

POE
My step-father put you up to this?

MR. ROYSTER
He's a business associate and I trust
him and he has stated in no uncertain
terms that you will never inherit
anything from his estate, so that
coupled with your rebellious attitude,
makes you a poor choice for my
daughter's hand, doesn't it - and
that man you managed to insult is
Barrett Shelton, who's family's
credentials are impeccable, and
fortunately he's chosen to wed our
daughter. So you can move the hell
on.

POE
And I thought you liked me.

MRS. ROYSTER
~~Never.~~

SARAH
Mother!

POE
(to Sarah)
I left West Point to come back here -
to you.

Sarah does not react, obviously intimidated by her father's
presence.

POE (cont'd)
Didn't we made promises?

CONTINUED:

SARAH

I know.

MRS. ROYSTER

She should have been married three
years ago.

(to Sarah)

Do you think a woman's desirability
lasts, forever, for God sakes, Sarah!

MR. ROYSTER

You'd better leave - forever.

POE

(smiles)

Just had to add 'forever.' Sarah may
I speak with you?

MR. ROYSTER

No, she can not!

Poe looks at Sarah who averts his eyes.

MR. ROYSTER (cont'd)

You've brought this on yourself.

POE

Isn't life such a continual mystery?

(to Sarah)

How could something so sweet

(looks at father)

Come from something so sour?

Poe exits. Sarah finally breaks free and runs up to him.

MR. ROYSTER

Sarah, get back here. Sarah!

MRS. ROYSTER

Let her be - it will only make more of
a scene.

MR. ROYSTER

(gloatingly)

You didn't think I had the nerve to
say it to his face?

Sarah finally catches up to Poe who doesn't appear to be
angry but rather defeated.

(CONTINUED)

SARAH

...I tried to write you, but not everybody can put their feelings into words.

POE

(hinting)

"Go away" - it's not that complicated.

SARAH

Please, it's not that simple - you know I've waited and you know how difficult they are. In my family you marry another so those around you can be comfortable too. You know that, you've always known that.

POE

I know I don't belong here if you don't want me here.

SARAH

Why can't you understand it's not only a matter of what I want.

POE

Of course it is. Do I have money? No. Do I have a loving family like you? I would venture to say there's more love in hell than our household, so, no, all I have is a belief that I can do something different than someone else.

SARAH

But does a "belief" put a roof over your head, provide food or anything for that matter?

POE

I thought we'd find that out together.

SARAH

- I wanted to be your wife so badly, but I have responsibilities.

POE

You don't love him?

SARAH

Can't you tell?

CONTINUED:

POE

So that person, sharing your bed
wouldn't really be your husband, but a
lump put there...

SARAH

I wouldn't say 'lump.'

POE

Lump, put there by your parents to
benefit themselves. Am I the only one
who thinks this is supremely wrong?

SARAH

I have no choice.

POE

No, Sarah, it's the only one thing
everybody has.

Poe starts off.

SARAH

So you're just leaving without another
word?

POE

Your mind's made up.

SARAH

I don't know what to do.

POE

...Of course you do.

SARAH

Please forgive me...please don't hate
me.

POE

You sacrifice, how can I respect that?

Poe slowly backs away, and WIPES THE MIST from his face.

POE (cont'd)

...Your hair even looks good in the
rain...

SARAH

Eddie, please -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE
 (backing away)
 You have the type of hair that poets
 write about.

SARAH
 And you are a poet, aren't you?

In an almost gallant gesture, Poe backs away and shrinks into the distance.

EXT. - ALLEN HOUSE

Poe arrives at JOHN ALLEN'S MANSION on the corner of TOBACCO ALLEY. Rain drips into his face as a young groomed slave answers the door.

POE
 Hello, Dab -

DAB
 I have orders not to let you inside
 this house no more, I've got orders.

POE
 Dab, we grew up together, remember?

INT. - ALLEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Sixty-year old JOHN ALLEN, helpless from dropsy sits in A WICKER WHEELCHAIR reading a TABLOID by candle light. He is an embittered vestige of a man whose life has held little emotional meaning.

He looks up at the commotion in the front of his doorway.

ALLEN
 ...You're not welcome here.

POE
 I know.

ALLEN
 Then be gone.

POE
 (dryly)
 I defended the Allen name my whole
 life - it was hard, but I did.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ALLEN

I do not need to be defended by a beggar like you - a parasite for money!

POE

I don't want your money.

ALLEN

Without my money you're worthless in this world. It's what binds us together! But I've never had any need for the likes of you! It was my departed gullible wife who brought you onto this house not me. I would never bring a shiftless, conniving white nigger into my home!

POE

All I ever asked of you is respect.

ALLEN

Respect you say! You've never shown respect to me, you only covet my wealth! Very well, if you wish to have it all, you may have it by eating my flesh when I die like the parasitical low born son of a whore you are!

POE

Mention my mother again and I'll wheel you to the grave myself.

ALLEN

Your mother died of disease while dancing for pennies and her only legacy was two worthless sons and a half-wit bastard daughter - see how the truth pains him.

POE

You're all alone except for me and you even chased that away.

ALLEN

Look how he trembles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

You had so much to give but you'd rather take it all to hell with the hopes that everyone's life will be as miserable as yours -- I'll never allow that to happen.

ALLEN

You're a man who'll wear misery like his skin and I shall die a happy man knowing I said this to you and that you will never forget that these were my last words: You're a wasted soul...you can leave now.

EXT. - ALLEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Poe exits the home and stares out into THE MOONLESS NIGHT. He suddenly flashes upon a ROUGH-HEWN WAGON seen through the eye of his IMAGINATION. He sees himself in a very desperate and physically ill position suspended half off the back of the wagon as it travels into the blackness. COMING BACK TO REALITY a moment later he heads off down the EMPTY STREET.

EXT. - YORINGTON'S BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

A modest, CLAPBOARD TWO-STORY located near the Richmond waterfront.

INT. - YORINGTON'S BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

Poe sits in the cramped confines of his room, writing. The wind from the river gently blows THE CURTAINS behind him as he drinks brandy and palms away the sweat that forms on his forehead.

The scene DISSOLVES into the horrifying finale of the "Tell Tale Heart."

POE INSERTS HIMSELF into the story he is composing. He now stands in the gloomy shadows outside an old man's room. An almost obscene pounding of AN IRREGULAR HEARTBEAT overwhelms the senses as Poe observes the SICKLY OLD MAN reclining on his sagging bed.

POE

(V.O.)

"The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room! He shrieked only once, only once!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (cont'd)
The instant I dragged him to the floor
and pulled the heavy bed over him."

As Poe holds A FLICKERING CANDLE over the victim, we see that the old man in the scene is none other than POE'S STEPFATHER, JOHN ALLEN.

POE (cont'd)
"He was stone, stone dead and his eye
would trouble me no more. If you think
me mad, you will think so no longer
when I describe the wise precautions I
took for concealment of the body.
First of all I dismembered the
corpse..."
(dissolve)

EXT. - JOHN ALLEN'S STREET - MORNING

A pair of DARKLY CLAD UNDERTAKERS carry John Allen's body from his home and place it in a HORSE DRAWN HEARSE. With a sense of professional decorum the undertakers draw a curtain on the hearse. In the distance, we see Poe observe the scene.

As the wagon rumbles away, Poe lowers his eyes to the ground. Looking up once again he PERCEIVES A SHOCKING SPECTACLE.

IS IT REAL OR IS IT IMAGINED? John Allen's body seems to sit upright and for a moment the corpse smiles malevolently at him then reclines back into the coffin.

EXT. - MACKENZIE'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Poe arrives at the quaint two-story building that houses a boarding school that serves as a shelter for FIFTEEN YOUNG GIRLS. MISS JANE MACKENZIE, the head mistress, a forty-five year old spinster, sees Poe through a ground floor window.

Jane MacKenzie exits the building.

MACKENZIE
Well, well look who has returned! My
goodness.

POE
Miss MacKenzie.

MACKENZIE
Edgar Poe - Isn't it good to see you
again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Such a fibber you are - How's Rosalee?

MACKENZIE

(delicately)

Well, as 'well' as to be expected. She has a good heart.

POE

Yes she does.

MACKENZIE

And that's all that matters.

POE

Would you tell Rosalee that their second oldest brother would like the honor of her company?

MACKENZIE

Surely - Are you staying in the city?

POE

Not likely.

MACKENZIE

Then Rosalee will miss you.

Jane MacKenzie looks toward the window and sees ROSALEE POE catching a first glimpse of her brother. Rosalee is nineteen years of age and MENTALLY IMPAIRED. Though in possession of a simple mind she does make up for it with a warm gregariousness.

ROSALEE

Eddie! I knew you would come back soon!

POE

Of course you knew! Miss MacKenzie says you're doing very well.

ROSALEE

Yes -

POE

- That's very good.

ROSALEE

But I've been sleeping a lot - Why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Maybe you're still growing.

ROSALEE

(laughs)

Maybe I'm growing to be bigger than you.

POE

Bigger than this house -

ROSALEE

Where will I sleep then?

POE

Wherever you choose - Rosalee, I'm going to go visit brother Billy in Baltimore.

ROSALEE

But who'll visit me? - Who'll talk to me?

POE

You have friends.

ROSALEE

Yes - But you're my family.

POE

Do you think a person can be two places at the same time?

ROSALEE

Two - I don't know - ~~you?~~

(taps her temple)

In here and

(points in the distance)

over there - somewhere, maybe.

POE

Yes 'somewhere' is where I'll be
(touches his chest)
And in here's where you'll be.

ROSALEE

Good...I hardly know brother Billy -
Is he smart like you?

POE

Much more.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSALEE

I want to be smart too, but I'm not.

POE

You have a good heart Rosalee.

ROSALEE

A smart heart. Think you'll ever come back? Soon?

POE

Of course, but not soon.

ROSALEE

When you're famous?

POE

I'm already famous.

ROSALEE

For what?

POE

For having a most wonderful sister,
finest in Richmond.

Poe embraces his sister and gently kisses her cheek.

ROSALEE

I love you.

POE

...I love you too.

The wind flutters his cape as he ~~steps~~ around THE PICKET
FENCE and strolls off into the early morning sun.

EXT. - SARAH'S HOUSE - MORNING

Poe passes by her home, pausing only long enough to glance
into the front window. He sees Sarah and she catches his eye.

SARAH

(exiting)

Where are you going?

POE

Baltimore.

SARAH

Will I never see you again?
You won't forgive me will you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Would you?

SARAH

It's not all my decision, you know that.

POE

As long as I'm not with you, I hope you are never happy.

SARAH

..What a terrible thing to say.

POE

Sarah, he doesn't deserve you, you don't deserve him - And as I stand here now, truthfully I don't deserve you either, but soon I hope I will.

SARAH

What will it matter? Time will change everything.

POE

One never knows.

Poe wants to respond but can only lean forward and lightly kiss her cheek.

POE (cont'd)

...You really do have the hair that poets write about.
(departs)

EXT. - BALTIMORE - DAY

Superimposed across the screen is the word "BALTIMORE."

Poe strides towards a house unfashionably located at the end of BALTIMORE'S MECHANIC'S ROW. He passes by a run-down corner tavern above which hangs a weathered sign, "WIDOW MEAGLE'S OYSTER BAR."

Side-stepping A COCK FIGHT being held in the mouth of an alley, he finally arrives at his destination. Knocking upon a peeling, warped door, he is greeted by his AUNT CLEMM.

Aunt Clemm, who everyone addresses as MUDDIE IS A STOUT, KINDLY FORTY-FIVE YEAR OLD and the sister of Poe's natural father.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUDDIE

Eddie! Come in, come in. My goodness you must be worn to the bone.

POE

It's not as bad as it looks.

MUDDIE

Goodness, no! I didn't mean to imply you were worse for wear, oh no.

HENRY, Poe's cousin sulks in a doorway. He's TWENTY, NEGATIVE AND PAINFULLY STUPID. Small and stoop-shouldered, he works in the stone quarry which explains why his clothes are tattered and covered with stone dust.

MUDDIE (cont'd)

Henry, this is cousin Eddie.

HENRY

Ma -

MUDDIE

(sighs)

Yes, Henry -

HENRY

You listen, Ma.

MUDDIE

What is it, Son?

HENRY

We got enuff damned mouths to feed around here.

MUDDIE

We don't talk to family this way.

HENRY

Hell with family, if I had my way I'd sew up near half this family's mouth and let 'em starve. Folks better damn well be workin' till their backs be breakin' an' ass-crack be fillin' with toil sweat, or they ain't gettin' a crumb to eat!

POE

I know we're going to be close.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY

...Hell.

Henry slinks away.

MUDDIE

Don't pay much mind to Henry, he's learned the poor manners down at the stone quarry - come in, please, Cousin Virginia's up north visiting Uncle Nelson - she'll be returning soon.

POE

How's my brother feeling?

MUDDIE

Trials and tribulations I'm afraid.

POE

How poorly?

MUDDIE

Can't hardly catch a decent breath. Doctor says it's consumption.

INT. - MUDDIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Poe enters a NARROW ATTIC where WILLIAM POE lays sleeping. Even in his withered condition, the brothers bear a striking resemblance.

POE

Billy?

WILLIAM

(awakening)

...Eddie Boy?

POE

Yes - I thought you were asleep.

WILLIAM

Or dead, both situations bear an eerie resemblance.

POE

How're you feeling?

WILLIAM

When you're rotting away, the days can become a little long.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

What happened?

WILLIAM

Either it's some accursed disease I picked up sailin' around those wretched South Sea Islands bedding beautiful savages or I'm just carrying on our family's quaint tradition of disintegrating in their prime.

POE

You'll survive this.

William coughs and removes a BOTTLE OF WHISKEY from beneath the covers.

WILLIAM

Said he without a flea-sized amount of conviction. Anyway I'm glad you came by because soon I'll be in hell pumping thunder.

(coughs)

And since we're on the subject of cursed souls how's your miserable life fairing, Edgar?

POE

I have no complaints.

WILLIAM

The stench of deception fills the room...

(offering whiskey)

Care to get your tail up? Don't worry, you can wipe the top of ~~hot~~ if you're dying to catch what I've got. Whatever the bugger is, it keeps the weight off.

William takes another swig from the bottle.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Tell me about that foster father of yours.

POE

He died.

WILLIAM

-- Of course he left you no inheritance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE
It doesn't matter.

WILLIAM
Being rich matters, Brother.

POE
I don't believe that.

WILLIAM
Really? - Have you ever heard of a
"beautiful" young woman marrying a
"poor" old man?

POE
Point well taken.

WILLIAM
And while on the subject of women -
I'm in desperate need of one - tall,
short, hunchback, or homely enough to
curdle milk, I'd welcome her with all
my heart because truthfully, in my
condition, I cannot afford to be
choosy.

POE
Your condition'll pass - I know you'll
get through this.

WILLIAM
Never.

POE
Why do you say that?

WILLIAM
Never - God hates our family.

POE
You don't mean that.

WILLIAM
(seriously)
God hates our family - Let's not dwell
on the subject.
(smiles)
Back to a more urgent problem, such as
needing immediate female attention;
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILLIAM (cont'd)
 but I'm deluding myself because I
 barely have the strength to raise this
 bottle much less firkytoodle with the
fairer sex.

POE
 Firkytoodle?

WILLIAM
 Firkytoodle - Raise the red flag up
 the mast!

Poe smiles.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
 - Put the plaster on King Solomen's
 knob! -
 (William's enjoying this
 immensely)
 Take the friendly grey donkey for a
 hairy gallop! God, how I love the
 female, I do; even though I realize
 the diabolic dangers!

Having learned not to interrupt his brother during one of his
 thoughts, Poe nods and plays along.

WILLIAM (cont'd)
 Ah, the perilous pursuit of pretty
 paramours -

POE
 (smiles)
 Perilous? Really?

WILLIAM
 Yes. Do you realize that more men,
 more wars, more tragedies have
 transpired pursuing that small dark,
 erotic patch of real estate that
 happens to be not only situated in a
 difficult location, where not much
 will grow on it, and it is guaranteed
 to go through catastrophic monthly
 eruptions that can drive a man insane,
 and to final resting place if he's
 foolish enough to aggravate the lovely
 creature - So why, pray tell, knowing
 the difficulties, doesn't the pursuit
 of this complicated and mysterious
 creation of beaver ever go out of
 fashion??

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

I've missed you, Billy.

William begins laughing then his body stiffen with A WRACKING COUGH which alarms Poe.

WILLIAM

(weakly laughing)

I don't know about you but I've worked up an appetite.

INT. - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Muddie enters and sets a bowl of STEAMING DANDELION leaves on the depressing table. Dumb cousin HENRY is also present. Also seated at the table is VIRGINIA CLEMM. In the near future she will become Poe's child bride, but presently she is a somewhat shy, raven-haired beauty of above average intelligence and an immense curiosity.

MUDDIE

Virginia tell everyone how it was visiting your Uncle Nelson.

HENRY

Uncle smells like a wet dog.

VIRGINIA

Henry -

(to mother)

There's really not much to tell.

HENRY

Good, 'cause we didn't care none to hear 'bout that wet dog anyways.

MUDDIE

(ignores Henry)

You must've have had a good time.

VIRGINIA

Not really - just did chores and spent time with other cousins.

HENRY

...Real excitin'.

MUDDIE

Henry, would you say grace?

HENRY

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUDDIE

Please.

WILLIAM

(intoxicated)

Before we give boundless praise for this steaming dish of coddled cow turds, may I say that my brother Eddie, the creature sitting to my right, is an good poet and an excellent swimmer.

HENRY

Who the hell cares -

WILLIAM

He won first prize swimming seven miles upstream against the James River.

HENRY

So the hell what? Ain't no big deal?

WILLIAM

'Ain't' it? Considering you'd drown in a gob of snot, Cousin, it's a prideful accomplishment.

HENRY

(at a loss)

So the hell would you drown in snot.

WILLIAM

(matter of factly)

So, here I am, dying, but this home-bound dimwit who has the ability to breed and will probably live well past the century mark. Who says God doesn't have a vicious sense of humor.

HENRY

Watch your dumb tongue, 'fore God yanks it outta yer mouth.

WILLIAM

Clever word choice, 'yanks.' Well while we're on the subject of 'God' let us pray -

(bows his head)

Dearest Lordy - Lordy, we's bees thankin' thees for this delicious bowl of bile -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUDDIE

William -

WILLIAM

(to Muddie)

This is not meant to offend you,
Aunt, you do the best you can, it's
for the 'Prankster' above that I have
contempt.

POE

Billy!

Cousin Virginia finds all this very amusing.

WILLIAM

Apologies! Amends! And self-
condemnation - 'ow's that?

HENRY

This weasel's always gotta be tearin'
at the Lord?

WILLIAM

(to Poe)

Weasel?

HENRY

A 'sick' damn weasel who deserves a
cow hidin'.

POE

He apologized.

HENRY

Who cares!? What if God gets mad an'
down at the quarry God figures he's
gonna punish somebody for muckin'
about with his words, an' just drops
this rock on my neck an' I die all
kinda painful for his sins.

WILLIAM

(to Eddie)

God doesn't like me, Henry, but you he
adores.

HENRY

!How the hell's he know that!!

WILLIAM

Take my word.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIRGINIA

The Lord provides us with our share
and no more, Billy.

WILLIAM

'Provides' Cousin? Satan provides his
sinners mutton, while the Lord feeds
his faithful farts ala carte!

(to Poe)

Doesn't irony just burn your ass?

MUDDIE

How we live is not for us to decide.

WILLIAM

When do you suggest we decide? When
these ungodly vegetables pass out our
ecclesiastic asses and back into the
pot?! Stop looking skyward for help!
Help yourselves.

HENRY

Shit!

(stands)

Get on your feet.

MUDDIE

My God!

HENRY

Git the hell up!!

POE

He's not getting up!

(to brother)

Billy, no more.

HENRY

(outraged)

I'll break all his bones!

WILLIAM

Then come ahead you clod hopping,
fucking lump!

MUDDIE

My God! I'm beyond the pale!

Henry Clemm angrily flings a WOODEN SPOON against William's
chest.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIRGINIA

Henry, no!

WILLIAM

(to Eddie)

...Actually that felt good.

HENRY

(incensed)

Everybody's going to be glad when
you're dead, an' just rottin' in the
goddamn dirt!

POE

No one here is dying.

WILLIAM

..Of course I am.

HENRY

And best of all he knows it!

Henry glares into Poe's eyes, then breaking the stare grabs
THE BOWL of dandelion leaves and HEAVES them onto the floor.

HENRY (cont'd)

(to William)

Eat up, Judas - you'll be in hell soon
enuff.

WILLIAM

...I'm very fond of the tropics.

Virginia cannot contain her laughter. Henry boils then and
Henry stalks out of the house as William faces the remaining
congregation.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Always overdoing it, aren't I?

POE

Always - So much for dinner - what's
for dessert, Muddie?

INT. - ATTIC - NIGHT

Poe is in A FEVERISH SWEAT as he composes another nightmarish
story. In the background we hear his brother's labored
breathing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The SCENE TRANSFERS to Poe's brother being TRAPPED IN A COFFIN as grave diggers, six feet above the pinewood coffin, finish shoveling moist soil in the hole.

POE

(V.O.)

"And now, amid all my infinite miseries, came sweetly the Cherub of hope."

Writhing with super-human effort William Poe tries to break free of his PREMATURE BURIAL.

POE (cont'd)

(V.O.)

"I writhed amidst my spasmodic exertions to force open the lid: it would not move. There came suddenly to my nostrils a strong peculiar odor of moist earth! I had died among strangers and they had buried me as a dog nailed up in some common coffin!! In a nameless grave! As this awful condition forced itself. Into the inner chamber of my soul, I once again struggled to cry aloud!"

BACK TO REALITY, William suddenly bolts upright, CLUTCHING HIS CHEST, gasping for breath. Throwing down his pen, Poe rushes to his brother.

POE (cont'd)

I'm here, Billy, what can I do - what can I do?

WILLIAM

(pointing to a bottle)

The pain - the pain!

Poe reaches for A BROWN APOTHECARY BOTTLE and hands it to his brother. Desperately raising the bottle to his parched lips, but it's empty. Suffering insane pain, Billy heaves it aside. Poe retrieves the bottle and reading the label, bolts from the room. He passes VIRGINIA AND MUDDIE.

POE

Stay with him, please!

EXT. - BALTIMORE STREET - NIGHT

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe moves through the impoverished neighborhood until he arrives in front of a decrepit shop above which hangs a WEATHERED SIGN reading, "WILSON SMITH, CHEMIST."

INT. - CHEMIST SHOP - NIGHT

Poe stands in front of WILSON SMITH, an old, thin, druggist. The man, garbed in a shapeless flannel sleeping gown, looks at Poe with rising irritability.

SMITH
 (retrieving a bottle from
 the cluttered shelf)
 William's brother, are you? Be that as
 it may, I don't take kindly to having
 to leave my bed.

POE
 I apologize, but he needs the medicine
 badly.

SMITH
 Yes - nothing like a little laudium
 extracted from the finest opium to do
 the deed.
 (steps down)
 A concoction to take away the pain of
 consumption -

Poe reaches out for the bottle. Smith pulls it beyond his reach.

SMITH (cont'd)
 I don't see your money, son.

POE
 How much?

SMITH
 Normally, one dollar. Being so late
 and all, two is the going price.

Poe digs into his pocket and retrieves TWO DOLLARS. Taking the bottle he bolts away.

INT. - MUDDIE'S HOUSE - ATTIC - NIGHT

Poe is with his brother who downs a hefty swig of THE OPIUM MIXTURE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILLIAM

...I never imagined being ill could feel
so damn good...

(weakly)

Thank you.

Poe nods and returns to his small writing table.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

I was reading these tales of yours.

POE

When?

WILLIAM

Doesn't matter - They're good - very
good. Therein may lay the problem.

POE

Problem?

WILLIAM

Always hope for the best, but prepare
for the worst.

POE

You've lost me.

WILLIAM

These stories of
terror - they're brilliant. But they
will unhinge people - you frighten
people - you don't write for the
common mind.

POE

I want to be different.

WILLIAM

Be different and know you
may never gather an audience
until long after you're no longer here
- such is the fate of men who
dare to be different.

POE

Always trying to cheer me up.

WILLIAM

It's always like that - few
exceptions.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

William drinks from the medicine bottle.

POE
Is it wrong to make a promise to take
life by the throat and
not let go until one succeeds?

WILLIAM
No, not at all - But see we are both
suffering from a dreaded disease -
mine is obvious, yours can be just as
fatal...

POE
The name of this 'disease?'

WILLIAM
Integrity.

POE
(smiles)
So be it.

WILLIAM
(dozing off)
Yes...so be it.

EXT. - STREET - MORNING

In the heart of Baltimore Poe is seen passing in front of an establishment above which is a sign reading "THE SATURDAY EVENING COURIER." His eyes rest upon a small advertisement that states "ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS will be rewarded for the best short story."

ASSISTANT EDITOR
...I have your story, now please go.

INT. - OFFICE OF SATURDAY EVENING COURIER - DAY

Poe stands before a wispy, balding young man who presently smokes A LONG STEM PIPE while perusing a daily paper.

POE
I can see you are a busy man,
may I ask you a question?

ASSISTANT EDITOR
...Ask.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

I'm wondering if I enter this contest
will my story be thrown into a waste
bin the moment I walk out of here?

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Why, has it happened before?

POE

Definitely.

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Judged against the competition - Now
if you don't mind, I'm quite busy.

Poe glances around the totally inactive room.

POE

Forgive the interruption.

Poe exits.

INT. - MECHANIC'S ROW (MUDDIE'S HOME) - NIGHTFALL

Poe seems a bit worn as he approaches his aunt's home. He is
called from across the street. Turning he sees MARY
DEVEREUX, a rather hard, but attractive girl of twenty. Her
auburn hair is worn (as the style was then) in "FRIZZED
PUFFS."

MARY

What's your name?

Poe pauses, not sure if this brazen woman is addressing him.

MARY (cont'd)

Are you a mute? Your name is?

POE

Edgar.

MARY

Any relation to the sick one who's
always staring at me through the
window?

POE

He's my brother.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARY

Haven't seen him lately. He getting tired of leering? I'm still worth a gander, don't you think?

POE

Perhaps he's found something more interesting to 'leer' at?

MARY

It is his loss. My name's Mary. You have a nice face hanging on you - that's an invitation to take me for a strollin' this evening and place my beauty alongside nature's.

POE

Always so timid?

MARY

Why be coy? Maybe Edgar's thinkin' the lady's talkin' too fast, too much; maybe he fancies a more 'gracious' breed of women - a wrench on 'one's high horse' more to your liking, Edgar.

Poe is transfixed by Mary's aggressiveness.

POE

Finished, Mary?

MARY

Does the gentleman think I'm a whore because I've eliminated the violins and flowers; a tart 'cause she thinks like a man?

POE

Goodbye, Mary.

Poe moves away.

MARY

What's wrong? Don't like women? Saving for the sugar-boys, Edgar?

Mary opens the door to her home. Mary's horribly intoxicated red-nosed, wretched mother steps into view.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

Get inside! Inside now!

(to Poe)

If the 'spirit' moves you, you know my whereabouts.

INT. - MUDDIE'S HOME - EVENING

Muddie is fast asleep in the corner of the CRAMPED PARLOR. Only a FLICKERING CANDLE reveals her sleeping form. On the back stoop Virginia washes the remainder of the dinner plates as Poe stands beside her and assists with the drying.

VIRGINIA

Seems like some days these plates never stop appearing from the bottom of this water. It must be magic. That's what it must be - You never said if you're going to be staying with us much longer?

POE

No longer than any other penniless intruder would.

VIRGINIA

So we'll be charmed by your company a tad longer.

POE

"Charmed?" Never been accused of that.

VIRGINIA

Tell me something - Are you always writing? Seems you never stop long enough to do anything else.

POE

It's a bad habit writers have.

VIRGINIA

Are you making fun of me?

POE

A bit.

VIRGINIA

A 'bits' fair - What're you doing now?

POE

It's nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIRGINIA
Won't you tell me?

POE
You're really interested>

VIRGINIA
It's the only thing of interest around here.

POE
I'm writing a short story about a unique murder in Paris that the authorities are unable to solve.

VIRGINIA
Tell me more.

POE
The victim's body has been found lodged up a fireplace chimney in such a manner that no human being would possess the strength to accomplish that task.

VIRGINIA
So who did it?

POE
Ah - Or what did it?

VIRGINIA
Tell me more, please.

POE
So the authorities are baffled and seek the help of a strange but brilliant intellectual named C. Auguste Dupin to solve the mystery by using a clever method of deductive reasoning called ratiocination.

VIRGINIA
I'm a little lost now.

POE
Should I go on?

VIRGINIA
Please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Admit you're fascinated.

VIRGINIA

(smiles)

...Of course not.

POE

Ratiocination is this - if you approach a problem from every logical aspect and you still haven't arrived at a logical solution whatever remains, no matter how illogical no matter how simple sounding, it must be the truth.

VIRGINIA

So who did it...

POE

Ready?

VIRGINIA

Ready.

POE

An orangutan.

VIRGINIA

Begging your pardon?

POE

A pet orangutan that had escaped from his master, a French sailor.

VIRGINIA

I should have known it.

POE

What?

VIRGINIA

That every time someone is pushed up the chimney, it's always the monkey's fault - Monkey's living in Paris have foul tempers - everyone knows that.

POE

You're a lot of sarcasm in such a small package.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIRGINIA

...I'm sorry, I'm just trying to keep up.

Just then the front door is heard CRASHING OPEN with a vengeance and Poe and Virginia rush to the commotion.

EXT. - MUDDIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sprints to the door Poe finds brother William stumbling in THE STREET looking wretched and completely disoriented. The RAIN AND WINDS are picking up.

POE

Billy!

William stumbles to the ground as Poe runs to his aid. Muddie steps out of the house.

Henry steps to the doorway, and observes the scene without a trace of compassion.

HENRY

...Good riddance.

WILLIAM

...It hurts. Oh, it hurts, Eddie.

MUDDIE

The medicine's finished! The pain is making him out of his mind.

POE

(to Henry)

Help me get him inside! --

HENRY

Ask 'GOD' for help!

Henry retreats inside as the others help William to his feet.

EXT. - STREET - NIGHT

Sprinting through the rain, Poe arrives at WILSON SMITH'S CHEMIST SHOP. Pounding on the door, a light is finally seen drifting through the dark shop.

SMITH

(angry)

You again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

My brother needs medicine quickly!

SMITH

That so -- that'll be three dollars.

The old chemist holds THE LAMP HIGHER to see Poe's agitated expression.

SMITH (cont'd)

Hear what I said?

POE

I don't have it - I don't have dollars.

SMITH

(glancing up)

Cold night.

The chemist slams the door.

POE

(pounding)

But you know me!

SMITH

(O.S.)

I know your money, not you!

The old man attempts to lock the door but Poe SHOVES it open, and snatching THE OIL LAMP from the chemist he proceeds to the shelf and grabbing three bottles of medicine, Poe shoulders past the chemist, and dashes out into the rain.

INT. - ATTIC - NIGHT

Muddie and Virginia are attending William who is curled in a fetal position. A twisted rag is between his teeth. Virginia applies cool water to his brow. Poe enters.

POE

He's freezing - We need more covers.

MUDDIE

There are no more.

POE

Then get my overcoat - get everyone's coat!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe kneels down beside his brother.

POE (cont'd)
 Drink, Billy - Here's you medicine.

Downstairs, A LOUD THUDDING is heard coming from the front door. Virginia goes to answer.

EXT. - MUDDIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The front door opens and Virginia is staring into the somber expressions of A PAIR OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS.

INT. - JAIL - NIGHT

Poe sits in a DANK STONE CELL. A three-day growth shadows his face.

VISUAL - The scene dissolves into the horrifying tale of the "PIT AND PENDULUM." Poe's brother is seen fastened on a large rack, as a massive, razor sharp blade, swings in a deadly arc just over his heart. Rats scurry over his body. As the blade makes CHILLING SLICES through the air, Poe (as the writer) becomes more and more rigid as he frantically writes. BACK TO THE FANTASY the blade's massive edge just cuts into the first layer of William's flesh, when Poe's concentration is broken.

Panting heavily, Poe stares almost trancelike at his sleeping cell mate. Poe observes a pair of rats crawling across the old man's leg. In this disoriented state, Poe throws a tin cup at the rats who scatter.

INT. - JAILHOUSE - DAY

Virginia arrives at the dismal establishment. COUNTING COINS, she places them in small stacks as a stout bailiff looks on.

EXT. - JAILHOUSE - MORNING

Poe is lead outside and deposited on the stoop by the bailiff.

POE (cont'd)
 (hoarse)
 ...Thank you - How's Billy?

VIRGINIA
 Not well.

INT. - ATTIC - NIGHT

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe enters the attic as Muddie and Virginia walk out. He arrives at Billy's bed.

WILLIAM

...Eddie?

POE

It's cold in here - Here, this may help.

(removes his jacket)

WILLIAM

I'm sorry.

POE

For what? You have nothing to be sorry for.

WILLIAM

...All my life I've been a burden.

POE

You've been your own man, and you'll continue to be.

WILLIAM

Not hardly...the end is near.

POE

No, it's not - not even close.

WILLIAM

In case there is one - I should have never offended God -

William grimaces and squeezes Poe's hand.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

Experience it with me.

POE

Experience what?

WILLIAM

Death. See it through my eyes. It's the only thing I can give you, this experience.

POE

I don't want it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WILLIAM

It's the only thing I have left.

POE

I don't want you to leave, Billy.

WILLIAM

There's no choice - take my hand.

POE

Fight it.

WILLIAM

I'm so tired...be with me.

POE

(weakening)

I'm with you.

WILLIAM

..Stay with me.

POE

I am with you.

WILLIAM

It's near now. The light - the light turns gray, and more gray - My legs are getting colder, like they are no longer part of me...my hands are cool. Laughing - I hear laughing...I see something, a mouth...laughing, silently, oh God...I see pieces of faces, faces I have known - mates - mother...she is wrapped in darkness, I can see through her, like smoke. Above is an opening. Faces looking into a hole - I don't see heaven, nor hell, oh God, only blackness, 'my grave,' my body is going, I'm above it, the trees, my body is going and I'm above it, looking down, I see over the river...over the clouds - over it all.

Poe mournfully sighs and lowers his head onto William's still chest.

WILLIAM (cont'd)

...that was close.

POE

!Christ!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe leaps to his feet as though electrified.

POE (cont'd)
 Are you insane!? No more of
 these stupid damn games! No more,
 please - your sense of humor is
 getting out of hand...

Poe pauses in mid-sentence and stares down at his brother.

POE (cont'd)
 Billy?...Billy?

He touches William's eyes and his hands which now rest so comfortably in a peaceful repose. Poe exhales and kisses his brother's forehead for the last time.

POE (cont'd)
 Goodbye, Billy.

EXT. - RED SHARK TAVERN - NIGHT

A devious PIGTAILED CHINAMAN clutches a small, TWINE-WRAPPED PACKAGE as he scurries down a narrow alleyway and enters the disreputable tavern.

INT. - RED SHARK TAVERN - NIGHT

The Chinaman moves through the tavern's ROWDY CLIENTELE and enters a tiny back room. Upon opening the door, a rich HAZE OF SMOKE escapes from its dark interior. Lounging among four other men on pallets is Poe. Smoke swirls around his face as he draws on AN OPIUM PIPE. A glazed dream-like serenity dominates his expression.

Peering into the black void of the low ceiling he summons up the image of A BEAUTIFUL ANGELIC FIGURE, reminiscent of Sarah, his lost love from Richmond.

Suspended on transparent angel wings through which courses rivulets of scarlet blood, the translucent vision swirls in a violet vortex.

POE (cont'd)
 (whispering)
 ...An angels throng, bewinged,..
 mimes in the form of God.

Poe gently reaches out to TOUCH THE IMAGE...a POCKMARKED RUFFIAN observes this as he swills a mouthful of rum and passes the bottle to his smaller companion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POCKMARK

...talkin' to the fuckin' devil again.

EXT. - MUDDIE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Stepping out of the gloom, Poe stands before Muddie's derelict home on Mechanic's row. He looks at the stark façade and his heart sinks.

He IMAGINES HE HEARS the metallic sound of IRON-RIMMED WHEELS rolling across cobblestones. IN HIS MIND'S EYE he sees the haunting shape of a rickety wagon, one that he has seen many times before in his sub-conscious. On the back a man, barely conscious, resembling himself, comes into view. Poe snaps out of his foreboding nightmare vision and comes back to reality.

INT. -- ATTIC - NIGHT

Poe is deeply engrossed in writing. A FLICKERING CANDLE reveals the glazed-over expression, as he composes the famous story "Fall of the House of Usher."

In the gloomy distance, perched above a DESOLATE LANDSCAPE, a GRAY STONE MANSION. The structure defines the description of sheer utter melancholy.

POE

(V.O.)

"During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing along on horseback through a singularly dreary track of country; and at length found myself as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher."

Poe is the STRANGER ON HORSEBACK. His eyes peer deeply into the fog.

POE (cont'd)

(V.O.)

"I looked upon the bleak walls - upon the vacant eye-like windows, and decayed trees. And with utter desperation of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after dream of the reveler on opium."

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (cont'd)

What was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It's proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been my companion in boyhood. He had written me speaking of an acute bodily illness and mental disorder which oppressed him."

The scene dissolves as the AUTHOR IS TRANSPORTED into the House of Usher. In an oppressive room, covered by SOMBER TAPESTRIES, stone floors and PHANTASMAGORIC ARMORIAL TROPHIES, he stands before RODERICK USHER, a sickly skeletal man.

POE (cont'd)

(V.O.)

"I gazed upon Roderick feeling pity and awe. Surely, a man had never been so terribly altered, in so brief a period as Roderick Usher. A cadaverousness of complexion; eyes large, liquid and luminous beyond comparison, his lips were thick and very pallid."

We see the haunted figure of Roderick Usher speaking to the author. His gestures are FEEBLE AND UNNERVING.

POE (cont'd)

(V.O.)

"He spoke of his mental condition and he admitted that the particular gloom which afflicted him could be traced to the severe dissolution of his tenderly beloved sister. Her death had left him the last of the ancient race of Ushers."

DISSOLVE TO:

A vaulted area located in the DARK MOIST CELLARS. The author stands with A TORCH beside the quaking form of Roderick Usher.

POE (cont'd)

(V.O.)

"Roderick Usher informed me that the lady Madeline, his beloved sister was no more and that he had every intention of preserving her corpse in one of the vaults within the main walls of the building.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (cont'd)

The vault chamber which had been so long unopened that our torches were half smothered in its oppressive atmosphere. We partially opened the yet unscrewed lid of the coffin, and looked upon the face of Lady Madeline."

Our attention is drawn to a woman whose face is in the first stages of decay. A MYSTERIOUS SMILE lingers upon her lips.

INT. - ATTIC ENTRANCE

Balancing a candle in one hand, Virginia steps out of the shadows and observes Poe in his manic writing mode. She studies his demeanor with a sense of wonderment.

Transferring back INTO THE MIND OF POE, he is in his sleeping chamber located deep in the recesses of the House of Usher.

POE

(V.O.)

"It was upon retiring to bed late at night of the seventh or eighth day after placing Lady Madeline in her vault that I experienced a nervousness which had a dominion over me. I endeavored to believe that much, if not all of what I felt, was due to the bewildering influence of the gloomy room, and a rising storm that rattled the windows and fitfully swayed the draperies upon the walls. I was overpowered by an intense sentiment of horror when Roderick Usher violently rapped at my door. His appearance was cadaverously wan, a madness filled his eyes!"

USHER

"Do you hear? I hear it, and have heard it! For many hours I have heard it! I tell you that I've heard her moving in the coffin! I've heard it for many days! I've heard her footsteps on the stairs! I hear the horrible beating of her heart! - I confess! I have put her living in the tomb! - I buried her alive!"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe tries to guide the hysterical man away from the opening of his chamber.

CUT TO:

INT. - ATTIC

Suddenly THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN and the BLOODY FIGURE of LADY MADELINE lunges at her brother. Emitting a hellish wail, her SKELETAL HAND seizes Roderick's neck, crushing it and now in her final death agonies, drags him to the floor, A CORPSE.

BACK IN THE ATTIC and sweating profusely, Poe quickly dips his quill into the inkwell when out of the corner of his eye he sees Virginia observing him. He leaps up.

VIRGINIA

(retreating)

...I'm sorry. I'm very sorry.

POE

No, wait!

Virginia pauses and swallowing her own embarrassment, refaces Poe.

VIRGINIA

I didn't want to interrupt you.

POE

...I'm finished.

VIRGINIA

Really I felt I should not have
~~disturbed you.~~

POE

No - It was time - I've done enough
work for one night.

VIRGINIA

What were you writing about?

POE

About 'The House of Usher.'

VIRGINIA

What's it about?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Not an orangutan.

VIRGINIA

Of course. I just wanted to see you work.

POE

Not very exciting to watch, I'm sure.

VIRGINIA

It is - Around here, everybody mostly works with their hands - What you do, it's a gift. I should go, good night.

Virginia begins to RETREAT, then pauses at the door where she EMITS A COUGH.

POE

Are you all right?

VIRGINIA

Fine - perfectly fine - I've prattled long enough.

POE

Feel free to "prattle" whenever you like.

Virginia exits the room and Poe dips his quill, takes a swig of bandy and resumes his labors.

EXT. - THE UNDERSTATED FAÇADE OF THE OFFICES OF THE "BALTIMORE SATURDAY VISITOR"

The front door swings open and Poe exits, a buoyancy in his step.

INT. - MUDDIE'S HOUSE DAY

Muddie is presently engrossed in DARNING SOCKS while a MOUNTAIN OF LAUNDRY is piled at her side. Poe enters.

POE (cont'd)

Put that needle away and prepare for a celebration.

MUDDIE

What's happened?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Your days of taking in strangers
soiled rags are over!

Out back, Virginia is churning a small metal tub full of
laundry over a low burning fire. Hearing the commotion she
enters.

VIRGINIA

What's wrong?

POE

What could be wrong with
a hundred dollars? I won.

MUDDIE

My God, what are you going
to do with all that money?

POE

We're leaving.

MUDDIE

And where will we go?

POE

Philadelphia, New York, cities where
they'll be buying my stories as fast
as I can spit them out. If I can be
successful here, imagine how I'll do
in cities ten times this size - And I
want you to come along because like it
or not, you're the only family I have.

MUDDIE

~~But I've been here all my life.~~

POE

If it doesn't work you can always
come back. Tempt fate.

VIRGINIA

Or help it along.

MUDDIE

What about your brother?

VIRGINIA

Momma, he'll have this house and he'll
be fine. Plus the Lord watches over
people like Henry, you always said
that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUDDIE

I don't know why but I'm
scared, why?

VIRGINIA

So am I - But Momma, there's nothing
here for us, really.

POE

..You won't regret it.

Virginia smiles and manages to disguise a slight cough which
she conceals from Poe and her mother.

MUDDIE

It all sounds lovely and you are
like a son to me. But the lapses.

POE

What?

MUDDIE

The drinking - The intemperance.

POE

Yes, I had bad lapses losing my
brother.

MUDDIE

I believe you had this problem before
you arrived.

VIRGINIA

Mother, please.

POE

It's all right - I promise I'm done
with it. My word.

MUDDIE

I believe people who learn to respect
themselves will very soon find that
they are respected by others. Virginia
could you leave us alone for a moment?

VIRGINIA

We shouldn't have secrets.

MUDDIE

Please, only a moment.

Virginia exits.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUDDIE (cont'd)

If your intentions are for us to live together to truly be a family, then I want to feel as though you mean it. I want a commitment, Eddie.

POE

A commitment?

MUDDIE

...Yes.

POE

For what?

MUDDIE

For Virginia - a marriage commitment.

POE

(at a loss)

...Virginia's quite young.

MUDDIE

Young marriages are acceptable, even fashionable these days.

POE

Does Virginia know about this?

MUDDIE

I know how she respects you, and you respect her.

~~POE~~

This to sudden - And if I decline, I go alone to Philadelphia?

MUDDIE

To uproot our lives I have to know you truly care about us - a commitment proves that.

POE

I suppose it does.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUDDIE

I know you may not have feelings for Virginia, not the marrying kind, but we all want to leave this place, Eddie - this is not living, this is working till you die - And she's all I have that's reliable on this earth - and a girl like her, with no grand family name, nor dowry to give, where would she end up? ...Relations are not expected, if would be a union of convenience.

POE

I need time to think this out.

MUDDIE

Eddie, she's not well - I know you've sensed it. How long she is for this world, I don't know, but however long, I want her to feel special and loved - that's all I ask.

EXT. - SUPERIMPOSED: "PHILADELPHIA"

We see A MONTAGE of Poe entering and exiting a VARIETY OF BUSINESS FRONTS above which advertise the names of LOCAL MAGAZINES.

Throughout this barrage of rejections, Poe is seen at home WRITING UNDER INCREDIBLE DURESS. A nearly extinguished candle is the only light that pervades the room and casts a delicate glow on VIRGINIA who sits in the shadows watching her husband go through the frustrating mechanics of trying to compose.

Poe is about to enter the offices of the "ALEXANDER WEEKLY," when his attention is drawn across the street to a tavern advertising "FRANK JOHNSON'S FAMOUS NEGRO BRASS BAND." With music filling his head, he crosses.

INT. - TAVERN

Poe stands beside the bar. His unkempt hair frames a pair of eyes that could be described as piercing and uncompromising.

POE

"For the moon never -"

DRUNKARD

...Enough -

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The tavern is occupied by FIFTEEN DERELICTS, three-quarters of which ignore Poe. The BRASS BAND is sitting silent while Poe continues to recite.

POE

Patience is appreciated -

DRUNKARD

Piss off!

POE

... "For the moon never beams
without bringing me dreams
of the beautiful Annabel Lee -"

DRUNKARD

...Piss off!

POE

(exasperated)

"The stars never rise, but I
see the bright eyes."

DRUNKARD

What "Bright Thighs?"

(crowd laughs)

We've heard enough from you -
Here...

(holds out several coins)

Poe steps forward to the "patron." Since the tavern is situated in A BASEMENT the only light present is that which emanates from candles, which cause shadows to dance across the patrons' faces. Poe accepts the coins.

~~DRUNKARD~~ (cont'd)

You tried our fuckin' patience, so
here - drink with us.

POE

(inebriated)

Time to go.

DRUNKARD #2 (WOMAN)

Bosh, Sit, have a tumbler - I ain't
the same as these muzzy goatheads, I
like all yer words!

POE

...Next visit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe eyes the AMBER LIQUID hungrily. Poe's turn and with great reluctance grabs his threadbare overcoat and exits.

EXT. - TAVERN -- NIGHT

The streets are quite empty as the evening gloom has settled in.

Lingering on the street's edge, POE IMAGINES a wagon, a DILAPIDATED WAGON, the wagon he has seen before in his waking nightmarish dreams. On the rickety object is a prostrate man whose bearing is IDENTICAL TO POE'S. A LAMPLIGHT swinging from the rear of the wagon cast a strange pallor across the unconscious man's countenance. The imagined wagon disappears around a corner.

Shaken by the visual, Poe heads off in the opposite direction.

EXT. - POE'S HOUSE (11th and Locust Street) - NIGHT

As THE WIND blows with mounting strength, Poe approaches a dilapidated structure.

Turning towards the shadows of a nearby tree, Poe sees an apparition of his FOSTER FATHER, JOHN ALLEN, balancing his rotting flesh on two canes. Poe moves warily forward.

ALLEN

(hollow)

...There is nothing more you can do for these people. Remember failure and collapse are in your bloodline, Edgar.

Like your brother who drowned in his own spew, like your father before him, like your whore of a mother, a victim of disease.

Like a moth to a flame, Poe inches toward the vision.

ALLEN (cont'd)

All you possess is either dead or dying, like your wife, who dies nightly in her bed...you're cursed, Edgar, a wasted soul.

Poe is inches from the HORRIBLE APPARITION when it fades and he finds himself staring only into darkness.

INT. - POE'S HOME - NIGHT

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe stands beside his bed looking down at the delicate form of VIRGINIA. Her skin is GHOSTLY PALE. The silence is broken by a wet cough and Virginia shifts onto her side, continuing her restless slumber.

Poe slumps against the wall as his dejected outline is traced by the moonlight filtering through a single distorted bedroom window.

EXT. -- LOCUST STREET - MORNING

Several HORSE DRAWN CARTS and workers amble by the impoverished residence as the front door opens. Virginia steps into view.

MUDDIE

Where shall I say you've gone?

VIRGINIA

(weakly)

I don't know...to meet a friend, say that.

MUDDIE

We've yet to make any friends, so he won't believe it.

VIRGINIA

Then say I went for a stroll.

MUDDIE

I know what you're up to.

VIRGINIA

Please.

VIRGINIA (cont'd)

Think of something to tell him -

(coughs)

something, so he won't worry.

Virginia departs.

INT. - POE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Muddie re-enters the house and hears a wash basin being filled in the adjoining room. Poe splashes the sleep out of his eyes and stares at his fatigued expression in A SMALL CRACKED MIRROR.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUDDIE

(O.S.)

Good morning, Eddie.

Poe realizes she is merely being kind.

POE

Yes - it is a good morning because I feel good - yesterday was a 'good' day.

MUDDIE

What happened?

POE

Nothing, I'm lying.

Poe steps into the room and kisses his mother-in-law. He is fighting a supreme hangover.

POE (cont'd)

Where's Virginia?

MUDDIE

Out for a stroll.

POE

Strolling? - Strolling where?

MUDDIE

She just needed some fresh air. Are you running low on ink? Shall I go to the shop?

POE

Am I running low on ink? Meaning am I working?

MUDDIE

No - Eddie, we know you're doing your best.

POE

(slightly disjointed)

Am I? ...Here's something you'll find amusing: Most editors that read my work become very upset because they believe the tone of the work is disturbing and depraved. Imagine.

MUDDIE

And what do you say to that or them?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

I say if you think these stories are so horrible, cheer up, because you only have to read them, having these thoughts bouncing around in your poor head, day and night?

MUDDIE

And what do they say to that?
(smiling)

POE

Usually, 'get out.'

Poe walks to the window, he glances out without much enthusiasm.

POE (cont'd)

Did you know where Virginia went?

INT. - BURTON'S MAGAZINE - DAY

Virginia sits in the office of WILLIAM E. BURTON, editor and proprietor of "BURTON'S GENTLEMEN'S MAGAZINE." Burton himself is a rotund Englishman and an ex-actor of broad-faced comedy.

BURTON

Strange writer.

VIRGINIA

He works very hard, Mr. Burton.

BURTON

Hopefully - Might I say you look a bit young to be doing his bidding.

VIRGINIA

I know, but I'm really an old soul.

BURTON

Of course - How unobservant of me ----
Why doesn't he pop over himself?

VIRGINIA

He's busy meeting with other editors.

BURTON

A statement intended to whet my palate, yes?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIRGINIA

Sorry, it's pollen season again -
Edgar's always told anyone who'll
listen that he's an admirer of your
magazine - more than any others.

BURTON

(laughs)

I accepted with a tiny grain of salt.

(laughs)

You may tell Mr. Poe he's invited to
share a brandy with me at six
tomorrow.

INT. - POE'S HOUSE - DAY

Poe sits at his tiny writing table. He's hung a **THREADBARE BLANKET** over the window so only a minimal amount of light seeps through.

He is feverishly writing the climax of "THE BLACK CAT." Poe envisions himself as **A DERANGED HUSBAND**, who in the dank cellar of his home, is surrounded by police.

POE

(V.O.)

"Upon the fourth day the police came...
They left no nook or cranny unexplored
until they were thoroughly satisfied...
I am
prepared to depart, Gentlemen I said
at last, "I am delighted to have
allayed your suspicions. By the by,
gentlemen, this is a very well
constructed house" I rapped the wall
just above the very portion of the
brickwork behind which stood the
corpse of my wife. - No sooner had
reverberation of my blows sunk into
silence, then, was answered by a voice
from within the tomb..."

Poe stands before the **NEWLY CONSTRUCTED WALL**. Odd angles of light emitted from primitive lanterns are the only illumination in the macabre cellar. All presently, all hear **THE UNGODLY CRIES** coming from behind the bricks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (cont'd)

"A cry came forth, at first muffled and broken like the sobbing of a child and then swelling into one big long and continuous scream, a howl, a wailing shriek half of horror, half of triumph! Next stout arms were toiling at the wall pulling it down, until they beheld the corpse, greatly decayed and standing erect before the eyes of the spectators, and there upon its head with a red extended mouth, sat the hideous cat whose craft had seduced me into murder... Oh, foolish me, I had walled the monster up within the tomb!!"

As though completing an act of great perseverance, he slumps in exhaustion then as a victorious afterthought throws his QUILL PEN at the blanket covering the window. The quill flutters to the floor startling a young black cat belonging to the family.

VIRGINIA

(O.S.)

Eddie -

Poe's concentration is interrupted by the sound of a door opening in an adjoining room.

VIRGINIA (cont'd)

There you are.

POE

(entering)

There you are - Where were you? Are you all right?

VIRGINIA

Of course, I just had a short walk.

POE

I would've gone with you. -

Placing his arm around her shoulder, he guides Virginia to a chair.

VIRGINIA

I'm fine - really - I want to stand.
I'm so tired of being off my feet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE
(self-consciously)
I understand.

VIRGINIA
(buoyantly)
Look what was tucked in the door.

Virginia hands over the envelope.

VIRGINIA (cont'd)
(reading)
It's from William Burton.

Poe starts to read.

POE
Really - He's a publisher.

VIRGINIA
What is it? Tell us!

POE
He likes my work, and there's
a position open.

VIRGINIA
That's wonderful -

POE
- I'm not sure.

VIRGINIA
Why?

POE
Well, haven't I elevated the art of
poverty to perfection - why tamper
with perfection?
(laughs)
It's about time the wolf has left our
door.

Virginia smiles and presses to her husband and they embrace.

VIRGINIA
Can we walk a bit. I love it outside.

They step outdoors. Their voices trail behind as they drift
away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIRGINIA (cont'd)

Did you work today? It's important to not miss a day.

POE

Because I'll forget how it's done.

VIRGINIA .

You just have to - you're so good - Writing's like breathing for you, isn't it?

POE

Very well, I promise not to hold my breath.

She laughs and then tries to stifle a cough. The coughing increases and Poe embraces her. The coughing ceases. He guides her back in.

POE (cont'd)

It'll be fine. It's just the dust in the air.

INT. - BURTON'S MAGAZINE - DAY

Laboring in the cramped confines of Burton's Publishing office, Poe has a DAB OF INK smeared across the side of his face while his hands are nearly covered in the dark fluid as he assists a pair of young men SETTING TYPE on the bulky printing press.

Since his employment Poe has GROWN A MOUSTACHE and his expression has become strained.

BURTON

(bellowing O.S.)

Poe! Poe!

PRINTER #1

(Scottish accent)

Billy Burton's calling hard for 'ya.

Ignoring Burton, Poe completes placing the last bit of typesetting.

PRINTER #2

The big ham should've stayed on the stage where he fits in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BURTON

(entering)

Where the hell are you?

(sees Poe approaching him)

Well my good man, f you've completed this week's story and criticisms, here!

Appearing in the entrance way no more than fifteen feet away from Poe is a woman who could be described as a harlot.

BURTON (cont'd)

Eyeful, wot?

(draws close to Poe)

A leg of mutton in a silk stocking.

Poe avoids eye contact with the women.

BURTON (cont'd)

Found her prancin' at Stricker's Tavern, an' the lass turns out to be the best cancan dancer they had available at the price, if you gather my meaning! No bandy-legged kicker there; the buttock-broker plucked me the finest.

(off Poe's numb expression)

I can certainly see you're thrilled for me, Edgar.

Poe's eyes are riveted toward A RECEIPT in Burton's hand.

POE

Would that be payment for Longfellow's short story.

BURTON

What if it is? And yes it is.

POE

Fourteen hundred dollars - I reviewed that story. It was sub-standard.

BURTON

Your opinion - People enjoyed it.

POE

(dryly)

I only received fifty cents a page for my work.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BURTON

(blustering)

Don't rush me again with your woes
 Longfellow's famous! You're not. Not
 at 'tall

(to printer)

What would that be in your hand, Lad?

PRINTER #1

A review.

Burton walks over to the typesetting and reads.

BURTON

Wouldn't be trying to slip it past me,
 would you?

(reading)

"It is of my opinion the book in
 question is despicable in every
 respect. Works such as
 this bring discredit upon our national
 literature." Charming.

(faces Poe)

Is it any wonder why you're not
 invited into people's literary
 circles?

POE

It's the truth.

BURTON

Your truth is your own and at best
 questionable, which doesn't bode well
 with the fact that you were hired to
 write colorful tales not to inflame
 the contempt of your contemporaries.

(waving the review)

This is vulgarity of ambition!

(places a patronizing arm
around Poe's shoulders)

You're a better man than that and it's
 of grand importance the new
 proprietors to see that as well!

(Poe freezes)

POE

New proprietors?

BURTON

Yes - This magazine's now the property
 of a Mr. Graham, a very capable
 publisher in his own

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BURTON (cont'd)
right so at week's end I intend to
take my profits and for once fulfill a
life-long dream and purchase a music
hall.

(to printers)
All present will maintain their
positions with the new publisher.

POE
(distracted)
...You gave your word I'd become a
partner.

BURTON
Must be a promise written on water,
because it's certainly not on any
contract I can see.

POE
(to himself)
...promise written on water.

Poe glares into Burton's bovine eyes as he slowly removes his
ink-caked apron. Dropping the garment to the ground he numbly
exits the room.

BURTON
Hell man, where do you think you're
off to?
(roars)
...You consider yourself a genius?
Very well, then it should be a simple
task for such a gifted man to solve
his own problems without begging his
employer for
charity! - Poe!

Burton hears the front door slam.

BURTON (cont'd)
(to the harlot)
He'll be back here tomorrow bright
and early -
(to the printers)
You cannot make an omelet without
breaking an egg - In business, someone
always has his feelings assaulted,
yes?
(to the harlot)
Do you believe a woman's work is never
done? Of course you do - Shall we go?

EXT. - POE'S HOUSE - DUSK

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe arrives home. Virginia opens the door and hugs him.

VIRGINIA

Good, you're home early. I have a surprise! Come inside.

INT. - POE'S HOUSE

Muddie's up to her elbows in flour, laboring to prepare a meal. Poe fights to maintain his composure.

MUDDIE

Home so early?

POE

Yes - why isn't she in bed, resting?

A blanket hangs on a cord in the center of the room.

POE (cont'd)

Why aren't you resting?

VIRGINIA

I'm tired of resting - now don't move, Eddie, and if you feel like hissing, please wait until after the show.

POE

Show? What are you talking about?

Virginia steps in front of the hanging blanket and curtsies.

VIRGINIA

I'd like to thank the hundreds of people gathered here tonight - please enjoy the recital.

POE

(to Muddie)

What's going on, Muddie?

MUDDIE

A surprise.

POE

She needs her rest.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIRGINIA

Shhh - The Old Poorhouse Theater presents a collection of original compositions by none other than the meagerly talented Virginia Poe, on flute. This is where you're supposed to give gracious applause.

Virginia bows and steps behind the curtain. She picks up A FLUTE and puts on Poe's old hat. Thoroughly confused, Poe absently applauds.

VIRGINIA (cont'd)

(O.S.)

There, that was not so hard was it?

Behind the curtain she feels A COUGH rising in her chest and strains to muffle the sound. Succeeding in doing such, with great flare, steps in front of the curtain BLANKET and curtsies.

Muddie applauds. CLOUDS OF FLOUR billow from her hands and drift in front of Poe's face.

Virginia begins playing the flute.

POE

(startled)

Where did she learn this?

MUDDIE

While you were at work.

Poe allows himself a moment to disregard her problems and lovingly gazes at Virginia.

VIRGINIA

(singing sweetly)

"The moon was full when he touched her hand - his eyes were true, their love was grand - words of beauty painted the nights -"

Virginia coughs. Poe becomes alerted.

POE

It's the dust from the flour. Wait till the dust clears.

VIRGINIA

It's nothing. Really, "Words of beauty painted..." Sorry...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIRGINIA (cont'd)
 (attempting to clear her
 throat)
 Once again "Words of...
 (swallows hard)
 "Words of - of -

Virginia's body is racked with heavy coughing... Poe rushes to her side.

VIRGINIA (cont'd)
 No! I can finish this! - please let
 me. Please!

POE
 No.

VIRGINIA
 Please -

Virginia is suddenly bent in half as the pain in her chest drives her to the floor.

POE
 Get some water! Quickly!

VIRGINIA
 (gasping)
 I'm so sorry - I'm so sorry.

Poe scoops her into his arms and rushes into the bedroom.

EXT. - POE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Several hours later the LOCAL PHYSICIAN steps outdoors with Poe. Through a window situated directly behind them we see the vague outline of Virginia being tended to by her mother.

DOCTOR
 Your wife's consumptive - appears to
 have been ill for quite a spell, and
 the best I can tell she's ruptured
 vessels in her neck and that never
 quite fully heals.

POE
 So what can you do?

DOCTOR
 In what manner?

POE
 What can we do to help her get past
 this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR

Mr. Poe -

POE

Science - medicine, there must be something that can be done.

DOCTOR

(compassionately)

...Just make her comfortable.

POE

Of course. Now what can be done?

DOCTOR

It's advanced, Mr. Poe.

POE

If you knew her strong spirit - She can recover, I know it.

DOCTOR

Mr. Poe - The best advice I can offer is try to make her comfortable.

POE

If I had money.

DOCTOR

Excuse me? I don't understand - money?

POE

If I had money I'm sure you'd find a cure.

DOCTOR

There is no cure. I'm sorry.

The doctor moves off as Poe absently faces the window. In the background he sees the GHOSTLY IMAGE of his despised step-father John Allen sitting vigil over ailing Virginia. John Allen's hollow eye sockets move from Virginia and mockingly stares at Poe.

INT. - POE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Poe sits at his wife's bedside.

VIRGINIA

(barely audible)

Do you know what I wish?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

...What?

VIRGINIA

To go back home - to start over -
I'd like that.

POE

And we'll do that soon - until then
I'll be staying here all the time now.

VIRGINIA

You need to work.

POE

The doctor said it's just a matter of
rest so I'll stay here and work.

(smiles)

Unless you prefer to spend time with
someone else.

VIRGINIA

(smiles)

No - you'll do.

EXT. - POE'S HOUSE - MIDNIGHT

Poe goes to a small structure resembling A WOODSHED.
Throwing open the rickety door, he removes a concealed small
BROWN BOTTLE OF LAUDIUM (opium derivative) and a BOTTLE OF
WHISKEY. Swilling down both, he stares forlornly at
Virginia's bedroom window.

EXT. - BURTON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Through a curved by window we see a harassed "Bully" Burton.

He is being confronted by a MR. GRAHAM, AN ASTUTE LOOKING
GENTLEMAN who possesses a severe countenance. Beside him is
a thirty-five year old, large framed, bewhiskered writer
named Rufus Griswald.

BURTON

(flustered)

Nothing was mentioned of this before!
Not a thing! Not one bloody iota of a
mention!

GRAHAM

Without Poe I wouldn't consider
purchasing this otherwise mediocre
magazine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BURTON

A circulation of 25,000 is mediocre?!
I think not!

GRAHAM

Keep in mind you barely managed 2,000
subscribers during the best years.

Stepping forward, Rufus assumes a body stance of
righteousness in an effort to impress Mr. Graham.

GRISWALD

Did you think Mr. Graham would be so
shortsighted? You couldn't be so naive
at such a mature age.

BURTON

Who the bloody hell are you?

GRISWALD

I'm Mr. Graham's assistant editor,
and if you've ventured to read
anything other than your own
publication you might have noted that
I am, let me repeat my name again so
it becomes lodged in your memory,
Rufus Griswald, and am by many
accounts considered to be an
accomplished author, and highly
respected in the literary circles that
matter.

BURTON

You are offensive -

GRAHAM

Reinstate Poe immediately.

BURTON

He's a drunkard and vicious critic.

GRAHAM

Perhaps he is but we should also add
one of the most original writers in
America today. Certainly no offense
meant, Rufus.

GRISWALD

Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BURTON

I can never make amends - he loathes me.

GRISWALD

Imagine that.

BURTON

(glares at Griswald)
He's pushing my civility.

GRAHAM

You fancy yourself a showman with actual stage experience, then I suggest you use your talent to get him back.

BURTON

The uppity scribbler actually desired to own part of this magazine outright! That's his reason for leaving!

This piece of information causes Griswald a look of consternation.

GRISWALD

You're not serious. Ownership?

GRAHAM

To have him "scribbling" for me, I'd entertain the possibility.

GRISWALD

Are you serious?

GRAHAM

Gentlemen, I'm serious about wanting him back.

INT. - POE'S HOME - EVENING

Well into the night Poe writes by the FLICKERING LIGHT emanating from a single candle. Only the dying ruby-hued coals in the fireplace stand out in the otherwise gloomy room. Deep under the influence of the OPIUM-WHISKEY combination, Poe pushes his quill pen with urgency.

POE IS COMPOSING "A DECENT INTO THE MAELSTROM." FROM THE SILENT LITTLE HOUSE ON LOCUST STREET WE ARE SUDDENLY TRANSPORTED INTO THE THUNDEROUS ROAR OF AN IMPOSSIBLY LARGE WHIROOL CENTERED IN THE BLACKNESS OF A NAMELESS OCEAN. POE AND HIS DECEASED BROTHER ARE ON A BADLY DAMAGED SAILING CRAFT THAT IS PRESENTLY CAUGHT NEAR THE LIP OF THE HELLISH WHIRLPOOL AS IT PREPARES ITS FATAL SLIDE DOWN THE TREACHEROUS MONSTROSITY.

POE

(V.O.)

"Our first slide into the abyss carried us a great distance down the slope. Around and around we swept in dizzying swings and jerks. Looking about the wide waste of liquid ebony, I perceived that our boat was not the only object in the embrace of the whirl. Both above and below us were visible fragments of vessels, large masses of building timber and trunks of trees -

FROM HIS VANTAGE POINT IN THE BOAT, POE'S CHARACTER SEES OTHER OBJECTS SUCH AS TREES, BARRELS AND OTHER MEN PLUNGING TO THE BOTTOMLESS SHAFT OF THE GARGANTUAN WHIRLPOOL.

POE (cont'd)

(V.O.)

"I no longer hesitated do and I lashed myself to a barrel and prepared to throw myself with it into the water. I attracted my brother's attention by pointing to the floating barrel that came near us and I did everything in my power to make him understand what I was about to do. I thought at length that he had comprehended my design - but he shook his head despairingly, and refused to move from his station by the ring bolt. It was impossible to reach him and so, with a bitter struggle, I resigned him to his fate, and fastened myself to the cask and threw myself into the sea without another moment's hesitation."

POE LEAPS INTO THE SWIRLING BLACKNESS AND SLOWS HIS DESCENT BY HANGING ONTO THE BARREL.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MEANWHILE THE LARGER BOAT UPON WHICH HIS BROTHER STILL CLINGS FOR DEAR LIFE, IS PULLED QUICKLY DOWN THE SHEER SIDES OF THE VORTEX.

POE (cont'd)

(V.O.)

"As I anticipated the larger ship having descended for a vast distance beneath me made three or four wild gyrations and bearing my loved brother with it, plunged headlong and forever into the chaos of the foam below."

POE'S SCREAMS ARE SILENCED AS HE REACHES IN VAIN FOR HIS DOOMED BROTHER WHO DISAPPEARS DOWN THE THROAT OF THE GIGANTIC FUNNEL.

Cutting through the whirlpool's thunderous cacophony is the COUGHING of Poe's wife. The visual fades once again to the dismal confines of the little home. Poe's sore eyes turn toward the coughing and dropping of his quill pen, slumps forward. Suddenly he explodes, SMASHING HIS FISTS UPON THE TABLE, he heaves THE BRITTLE CHAIR across the room which collides savagely with the wall. Like a man completely possessed he flings open the front door and runs outside.

POE (cont'd)

(softly)

Goddamn you! Goddamn me!

Muddie rushes out of the house and up to Poe.

MUDDIE

Eddie! Eddie!

POE

(disoriented and leaping
back)

No! Stay away from me! You want the disease?! Do you want the sickness I have all over me, all over you!!!

MUDDIE

Eddie, please, you're not sick! Come inside, please!

POE

Everything I touch dies, doesn't it?

MUDDIE

That's not true.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

What happened? When we were born
we were wrapped in hope! Pure
innocence!

MUDDIE

Please I don't want to see you like
this, no one does.

POE

(in his own world)
But time has changed all that, hasn't
it!? Now we're victims of life! Life
is a liar.

MUDDIE

You'll catch your chill out here

POE

Life is a liar!!

MUDDIE

Where are you going?

EXT. - WATERFRONT - NIGHT

Poe is in a DERELICT WATERFRONT area in front of a
dilapidated SEAMAN'S SALOON.

He enters and scans the sleazy interior. As Poe enters he
passes a tall SUSPICIOUS LOOKING CHARACTER just inside the
doorway and his DRUNK PARTNER.

DEALER #1

(cockney)

Evenin' to you, Mr. Poe. Why might
you be wanderin' 'bout so late? Back
fer more?...

(Poe nods)

DEALER #2

All the way from China, it is - may me
bloody eyes drop out if I'm lying.

The dealer smiles at the desperate man and reaches into his
pocket and moves off with Poe who follows closely behind.

DEALER #1

...This way mate.

INT. - SEAMAN'S TAVERN

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A supremely intoxicated Poe stands in front of a group comprised of WHORES, MUGGERS THIEVES, AND ASSORTED NE'ER DO WELLS. They observe the hypnotic writer as he paces near a glowing fire, rendering an excerpt from "The Premature Burial."

POE

"I had been buried alive! Alive!! My lips and parched tongue moved convulsively together in an attempt to speak but no voice issued from my lungs, which were oppressed in me as if by the weight of some incumbent mountain, I gasped! I palpitated --"

The tavern door opens and MR. GRAHAM, followed by the assistant publisher RUFUS GRISWALD, inconspicuously enter.

POE (cont'd)

"As this awful realization forced itself, into the innermost chambers of my soul, I once again struggled to cry aloud! In this second endeavor I succeeded! My long, wild, and continuous yell of agony, resounded through the realms of the subterranean night! Yet no one heard sound - alone, forever."

Poe's passion cannot be understated, even these diehard dregs of society are taken by the writer's vocal dramatics. All this is not lost on Mr. Graham nor Griswald.

POE (cont'd)

Even to you, to those who believe they are free and alive there are moments, when the world and all of our sad humanity will assume the semblance of a hell - an imagined premature burial that we our daily lives will be. But do not accept this as your reality. These thoughts must be banished, or they will devour you and steal away what little beauty you may have in your lives - and without beauty, without a faint hope of love, life will be a fate worse than death.

Swallowing his pride, Poe removes A CRUSHED HAT from his cloak pocket and sets it upon a table where A FEW SPARE COINS are tossed. Gathering the coins, he prepares to exit. At the entranceway he's confronted by Mr. Graham and Griswald.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRAHAM

Do you know who I am?

POE

(softly)

...Solve that mystery yourself.

GRISWALD

This Mr. Graham, is the new owner of
Burton's Magazine.

POE

...My compliments.

GRISWALD

Mr. Graham would like to have you
back at the magazine even though we
know your experiences with its former
owner may have left a sour taste in
your mouth.

GRAHAM

I know he promised you ownership, and
I'm willing to make the same offer.

POE

In writing?

GRAHAM

My word is my bond.

POE

"Words" gets slurred.

GRISWALD

That's insulting.

POE

In writing?

GRAHAM

Write what you like - I'll honor it.
'Hopefully' you'll be happier with us
then you've ever been - Can we give
you a ride home?

POE

...My feet thank you.

(exits)

INT. - POE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

As silently as possible, Poe enters his home and stops before the bed of his ailing wife. The FAINT MOONLIGHT barely emits enough illumination to reveal her delicate outline. He silently sits at the foot of her bed and rests his head in his hands. The scene fades.

INT. - GRAHAM'S MAGAZINE - DAY

Poe appears to have aged and strain has caused permanent creases around his eyes as he manically edits a story that lays strewn on his desk. Mr. Graham enters.

GRAHAM

May I see you? -

POE

Certainly. -

GRAHAM

Being the "fearless critic" that you are, you've become rather contemptuous of certain writers of late.

POE

I've heard this before.

GRAHAM

From your last employer, to be precise - He warned us.

POE

I say what I believe is the truth; what's fair.

GRAHAM

Wouldn't your fairness extend to showing a bit of mercy for your co-workers?

POE glances behind GRAHAM who nearly shields the square-jawed assistant editor, RUFUS GRISWALD.

POE

You mean the review and Rufus's book of poetry?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRISWALD

(rushing forward)

You know exactly what he means!

POE

The work was ambitious but poor.

GRISWALD

Because you say so?

POE

Would you rather I print a lie?

GRISWALD

The work has merit! The poems are as fine as any being written today.

POE

Where do you get the conceit to call yourself a poet and place yourself next to America's finest? A minor writer you may be, but a poet you're not.

GRISWALD

You don't even attempt to hide your jealousy, you wear it on your sleeve.

POE

I have work to do.

GRISWALD

(to Graham)

Charles Dickens claimed Poe must be the devil after the scathing critique he gave to his last novel. How dare you demean Dickens?

POE

His skin's too thin.

GRAHAM

Rufus may I have a moment? -

GRISWALD

(unable to contain his rage)

You may at one time have had a flash of brilliance, but that light has dulled and as of late, the only thing that comes out of your pen is not ink, but acid.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

(to Graham)

That's humorous, coming from a man who I tried to help and who behind my back and now to my face attacks my work at every opportunity!

GRISWALD

(to Graham)

The man's delusional! And as for your work, it's

(to Poe)

morbid and repetitive, stories about the dead and grotesque! But perhaps you only write about what you fear! Is that the truth, Poe?

POE

I'm sure his work will improve.

Griswald contemptuously exits.

Poe hears some POUNDING coming from behind the adjoining wall.

POE (cont'd)

What's that?

GRAHAM

I've acquired the wine merchant's store. We're expanding.

POE

I'm guessing expanding means we're prospering, so our agreement is soon to be honored.

GRAHAM

Perhaps.

POE

Perhaps? - Our subscriptions have climbed monthly. That must please you.

GRAHAM

Certainly, but there are considerations. Expansion does not come cheaply.

Griswald re-enters the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

But poverty does! - Even Rufus will agree with that.

GRISWALD

There's nothing on this planet we would agree on -

(to Graham)

And for the record I'm grateful for my position on this publication -
I have no complaints -

POE

Your salary has been increased by \$200 per year. Of course you would be complaintless, Rufus.

GRISWALD

We get what we're worth.

POE

(to Graham)

This magazine's readership has increased tenfold and I was promised compensation, a reasonable sum that I would apply to start my own publication. I'm only asking you to keep your word.

GRAHAM

I don't like what I see in your eyes.

POE

My eyes? What do you see in my eyes?

GRAHAM

Betrayal - yes, you have worked very hard, but likewise you've also done more to undermine the stature and reputation of this publication by openly waging war on every successful writer who has dared to make the unforgivable transgression of being more successful than you.

POE

I've only done what I thought would be respected by readers who wanted the truth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRAHAM

How people become what they are is a mystery, but you've been damaged, to such a degree that your view of life has become distorted, and all your truths are false. Griswald will now fill the editor's chair.

POE

...I've worked sixteen hours a day without complaint.

GRAHAM

You're not well, Edgar.

POE

A lie to heal your conscience? A lie wrapped in more lies.

GRAHAM

You're not well!

GRISWALD

Closer to insane.

POE

(exploding)

Insane! Yes! That must be it - I'm insane, with long horrible fits of sanity!! And man would have to be truly insane to subject himself to this treachery any longer!!

Griswald now steps forward.

GRISWALD

Perhaps because his wife ails, he believes everyone should share his feelings.

POE

Don't you bring up my wife!
...you've taken my career and my ability to earn a living so you both can stop now.

Poe glares at Rufus, then GRABBING HIS CAPE exits into the night.

EXT. - STREET - NIGHT

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

As though being magnetically drawn to a man he worships yet abhors, Griswald follows him outside.

GRISWALD

(bellowing)

I feel guilty, but I shouldn't, but losing a good enemy is almost as bad as losing a good friend. But it wasn't me who lost you your position, it was your own intemperance; you chose to wear the crown of Drunk.

POE

Acknowledge this - you are not a gifted writer, accept that and move on.

GRISWALD

And in your work all the characters are cold, dead, and beyond reach, like yourself, 'accept' that.

Poe keeps up a brisk pace, letting Griswald walk behind like a jackal hell-bent on emotionally hamstringing his prey.

GRISWALD (cont'd)

Your subconscious fantasies are now your domain! Your thoughts are beyond your control any longer!

Poe continues to stride in a strained silence.

GRISWALD (cont'd)

Your work is distorted by dark forces and horror you choose to call entertainment But these dark forces that can make ones life a living hell are usually the origins of ones creativity - Is that true? Do you reside in a hell of your own making?

Poe removes A FLASK from inside his jacket and drinks deeply.

GRISWALD (cont'd)

All you wanted is fame at any cost, but you know you shall never have.

Poe takes another swig.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRISWALD (cont'd)

Drink, that's what's been the source of your undoing - a lack of backbone and temperance. You've left your best work in the bottom of a bottle.

POE

...Rufus, I never wanted to hurt you - I believe deep down you always knew that.

Draining the whiskey, Poe moves on into the night.

EXT. - POE'S STREET - NIGHT

Griswald continues to follow Poe home. The chilly night air blows Poe's overcoat in an animated fashion.

Griswald observes the writer conversing with some unseen being.

GRISWALD

(V.O.)

...He walks the streets in madness and melancholy with his lips moving in indistinct curses while with his eyes upturned like in a passionate prayer - but the prayer is never for himself because he feels damned already.

Poe is seen gesturing into the star-laced black sky.

GRISWALD (cont'd)

(V.O.)

...It goes without saying that harsh experiences have deprived him of all faith in man and woman and he has no wish for the love of his species especially myself.

Griswald glances up at the window where BY CANDLELIGHT he sees the frail outline of Virginia.

GRISWALD (cont'd)

...His wife is his foundation that is crumbling daily. ...She is like his exaggerated belief in himself a necessary part of the fiction of his life. When the hour comes for her to go, he shall soon follow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Standing in the doorway is Muddie. She waves Poe in and Griswald blends into the night.

INT. - POE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Virginia is in bed as Poe enters with her breakfast. Food consists of porridge and tea. The CAT LAYS AT HER SIDE providing warmth.

POE
Good morning.

VIRGINIA
Oh - I've been awake for a while.
I can eat at the table.

POE
Of course you can, but why when you
can have a meal served in bed.

Poe places the tea beside her and pours a cup for himself.

POE (cont'd)
I'd like to make a toast.

Virginia weakly smiles.

POE (cont'd)
(raising his tea)
To a woman who has the hair that poets
rave about.

VIRGINIA
(smiles)
...It's tangled.

POE
It's beautiful - "No man can complain
of his luck no matter how bad while he
still has the love of a good woman."

VIRGINIA
...Eddie -

POE
"The grace of her step - "
"The luster in her eye - "
"The melody of her voice, the
sweetness of her laughter -
in her burning enthusiasm - in her
gentle charities - "

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Virginia is overwhelmed and finds it difficult to hold back the tears.

POE (cont'd)

"In her great endurances and above
all in the kind purity of our love."

Poe crosses to her and strokes her hair.

VIRGINIA

I heard you writing.

POE

You heard me writing?

VIRGINIA

You've been known to talk while you
work. May I hear what you've done?

Poe steps out of the room while Virginia adjusts the heavy scarf that is placed around her neck. Once Poe leaves, her brave front crumbles as her life force are quickly waning.

Poe re-enters and stands before her. The "brave front" is back.

POE

...It's unusual.

VIRGINIA

What a surprise - Do you like it?

POE

(smiles)

I like everything I do - It's your
opinion that matters. Here it is -

(reading)

"The Raven."

"Once upon a midnight dreary, while I
pondered weak and weary over many a
quaint and curious volume of forgotten
lore,

While I nodded, nearly napping,
Suddenly there came a tapping,

As of someone gently rapping
Rapping at my chamber door.

'Tis some visitor' I muttered,
Tapping at my chamber door -

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (cont'd)

Only this and nothing more."

Poe looks at her inquisitively.

VIRGINIA

I like it.

POE

Good -

"Distinctly I remember 'twas
in the bleak December,

On each dying ember wrought
its ghost upon the floor,

Eagerly I wished the morrow
Vainly I had sought to borrow,

From my book surcease of sorrow -
Sorry for the lost Lenore

The rare and radiant maiden,
Whom the angels name Lenore."

Virginia closes her eyes, succumbing to the soothing rhythm
of his voice.

POE (cont'd)

"The rare and radiant maiden whom
the angels name Lenore

Nameless here -"

(distracted)

I'll finish it later.

VIRGINIA

More, please.

POE

It can wait - you should rest.

VIRGINIA

Please - No, I want to hear more.

POE

The sentiment is all wrong. I'm not
certain I'm going to finish it.

VIRGINIA

Don't you do that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

What?

VIRGINIA

(weakly)

You recite two verses that I think are beautiful and then - then you refuse to continue? - Don't doubt yourself.

POE

Sorry...

VIRGINIA

Please - more.

Virginia gently slides her frail hand onto Poe's.

POE

"And the silken, sad, uncertain
rustling of each purple curtain,

Filled me with fantastic
terrors never felt before;

So that now, to still the
beating of my heart I stood,

Repeating.

'Tis some visitor entreating entrance
at my chamber door -

Some late night visitor entreating
entrance at my chamber door -

This it is and nothing more."

Unseen by Poe THE FINAL LUMINOUSNESS goes out in Virginia's hooded eyes and she sighs her final breath.

Poe's reading ceases when HER HAND SLIPS FROM ATOP HIS. Bracing for the worst, he hesitates a moment before glancing at what he knows will be the most powerful vision and memory he will ever have to endure. Unable to contain his grief a heartbeat longer, HIS EYES RAISE SLOWLY TO HIS VIRGINIA, and studies her delicate face, whereupon he folds his body forward placing his face next to hers.

POE (cont'd)

...Oh God.

EXT. VIRGINIA'S GRAVE - NIGHT

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The pale winter sun is setting behind the towering oaks that surround Virginia's final resting place. A SIMPLE WOODEN HEAD MARKER rises from the fresh mound of earth. The camera begins to ascend until the entire visual dissolves.

CUT TO: SUPERIMPOSED over the screen "NEW YORK."

INT. - POE'S BOARDING HOUSE - SUNRISE

Poe and Muddie reside at A DERELICT BOARDING HOUSE at 130 Greenwich Street. Nearing sunrise, Poe sits at a writing table comprised of SEVERAL CRATES. He appears to have aged five years.

As he SWILLS BRANDY straight from the bottle, A FLICKERING CANDLE reflects the dark intensity in his eyes. It is so cold that POE'S BREATH JETS OUT IN DELICATE STREAMS as he continues to write with his frayed gloves on.

In the corner, Muddie sleeps UPON A STRAW MATTRESS. Feed sacks take the place of blankets.

The sun creeps through a cracked and filthy window as Poe finishes, rubbing his aching temples, he rises.

POE (cont'd)
(exhausted)
...Finally.

INT. - BROADWAY JOURNAL

Entering the sleazy offices of a lesser known "penny" newspaper called "THE BROADWAY JOURNAL," Poe appears ragged and nearly frozen as he approaches the editor whose name is BISCO.

POE (cont'd)
Would you direct me to the editor,
please?

BISCO
Your business?

POE
I am a writer. I have a poem.

A heavysset man named BRIGGS takes the poem from Bisco.

BRIGGS
We don't allot space for poetry. --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Yes, but I believe it's a good poem.

BRIGGS

(exits)

We're busy.

POE

I'll read it to you - it won't take long at all.

BISCO

We have a policy Mister -

POE

Poe.

Upon hearing the name, Bisco's eyes widen in astonishment.

BISCO

Poe - not Edgar Allen Poe?

POE

(obliviously)

Yes - May I read? - Won't take long.

Briggs re-enters followed by nearly all the newspaper's employees. Poe finds himself surrounded by DOG-FACED ASSISTANTS AND SOILED TYPESETTERS.

BRIGGS

If they like it, we'll print it.

BISCO

Charles -

BRIGGS

Please! - If it doesn't appeal to them it won't appeal to the public.

Poe scans the motley audience and sways to the center of the room.

POE

(disjointed)

'The Raven' ...Once on a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary, over many a quaint... Nearly - nearly -

Nearly gagging on what remains of his pride, he ceases to read.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIGGS

Back to work.

BISCO

(sympathetically)

Unfortunately we've already printed
this month's publication, so we cannot
print the poem.

Poe nods and prepares to exit.

BISCO (cont'd)

But out of consideration I'm sure we
can pass the hat.

An old printer removes his SOILED HAT AND PLACES SEVERAL
COINS in it then passes it to the next employee who does
likewise. Briggs puts in the final coin.

With his dignity shredded, Poe lets the poem fall from his
grasp and exits.

INT. - BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Poe sits on the floor in a corner of the boardinghouse's
cramped room. Seated in the room's only chair, Muddie stares
at the crestfallen writer.

POE

I miss her. So much.

MUDDIE

Of course you do.

POE

At least she was spared this.

MUDDIE

She would've never complained.

POE

...No, she wouldn't have would she.

MUDDIE

...You should leave.

Poe's eyes raise in exhausted astonishment.

POE

...Leave? Why?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUDDIE

Go some place away from here,
some place new. Go back to Richmond -
go back and see your sister, it's been
so long.

POE

She doesn't need to see me.

MUDDIE

You don't know that - She may miss
you, and you need to change the way
you're going and I'll be fine here.
Please, go back to where you grew up,
go back to some place that didn't
break your heart. Try to start over.

POE

You have no friends here.

MUDDIE

Go, Eddie. You're slowly dying in
this city, it's not the place for you
now. When the time is right I know
you'll be back for me.
Who else'll darn your clothes the way
you like them.

Poe embraces Muddie and gently kisses her forehead.

SUPERIMPOSE on the screen "RICHMOND."

EXT. - RICHMOND STREET

In Richmond, Poe passes his old home on TOBACCO ALLEY and
pauses to OBSERVE CHILDREN ROMPING ON THE FRONT LAWN.

Forlorn and embarrassingly poor, Poe's terribly frayed
clothing cause several passersby to stare. [Feeling the
pitiful scrutiny] he tries to maintain a prideful posture.

EXT. - MACKENZIE'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Poe arrives at MACKENZIE'S BOARDING SCHOOL FOR GIRLS.
Knocking on the front door, he hears a woman's voice from
within.

VOICE

All right - Just a moment.

(knocking)

Patience - Hold your horses!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The door flings open and Poe finds himself face to face with his impaired sister, Rosalee, who is now thirty-seven years old.

POE

I wish I had horses to hold, yes I do.

Staring at a face she cannot place, Rosalee's doleful eyes trace over her brother's haggard features, a glimmer acknowledgement.

ROSALEE

Are you - you are -?

POE

- I was -

ROSALEE

Aren't you? Eddie? - Oh my gosh.
You're back!

She warmly embraces Poe who stiffens at first -

ROSALEE (cont'd)

Eddie! Oh Eddie! I thought you'd never
come back.

Poe's hands now SLOWLY EMBRACE HIS SISTER'S SHOULDERS.

POE

I gave you my word, didn't I? You look
very well, Rosalee.

ROSALEE

Nobody ever says that.

POE

They should and you do.

ROSALEE

Oh, my gosh, I thought you were gone
forever.

POE

Not yet. So you've made this your
home.

ROSALEE

Mrs. MacKenzie died and the new
owners let me stay on, I don't teach
or anything like that, but I help out
here and there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Well, they're lucky to have you, and
I'm lucky to have you.

ROSALEE

Really?

POE

Yes, really -

ROSALEE

I missed you Eddie.

EXT. - MACKENZIE'S - DAY

Poe and his sister sit on a PAIR OF WOODEN SWINGS behind the boarding school. Rosalee gently swings as Poe tries to get his bearings.

ROSALEE (cont'd)

Where're you going to live Eddie?

POE

Here and there.

ROSALEE

Any man who's swum seven miles up the
James River in that race can live
wherever he wants.

POE

(smile)

No do you really remember that?

ROSALEE

'Course I do! - You were so strong on
that day, I remember like yesterday.
Do you remember Sarah? The one you
were sweet on?

POE

Yes, Sarah - What became of her?

ROSALEE

She's here - never left - her husband
died years ago.

POE

She's a widow?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSALEE

She's a widow, and she never forgot you. No, she didn't.

POE

And how do you know that?

ROSALEE

She comes by ever so often, and when she comes by she asks if I'd heard from you, but you never wrote.

POE

I didn't do many things I should've.

Lost in thought, Poe looks skyward.

ROSALEE

Want to go see her?

Poe gestures towards his clothes.

ROSALEE (cont'd)

You don't want to see her?

POE

Not like this.

ROSALEE

...You look fine.

POE

...No.

ROSALEE

You look fine and handsome.

POE

This was not the way I planned to return. Rosalee, does Miss Yorington's Boarding House still exist?

ROSALEE

Right where it always was.

POE

I'll get settled then if you haven't made other social plans I'd like to come calling on my favorite sister this evening.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROSALEE

Thank you - I'll be here. I'm always here.

EXT. - MISS YORINGTON'S BOARDING HOUSE - EARLY EVENING

Seated on a PLAIN-BACK PINE BENCH are a pair of (male/female) ELDERLY LODGERS. They stare straight ahead, no energy in their expressions.

LODGER #1

My friend Anne's hat kept blowin' off today.

LODGER #2

So.

LODGER #1

On and off all day - So for the life of me we couldn't figure a way to keep it on her head.

LODGER #2

Imagine.

At this moment a CARRIAGE PULLS UP and a lovely mature woman steps out.

INT. - YORINGTON'S BOARDING HOUSE -- EARLY EVENING

Poe stares vacantly from the room's only tiny window.

A knock, faint at first, then more forceful shakes him from his stupor. Opening the door, he nearly recoils at the sight of his very stately and attractive former fiancée, SARAH ROYSTER.

SARAH

Richmond's a very small city.

POE

Yes, it is.

SARAH

So here you are.

POE

(almost trembling)
In the decaying flesh. And how have you been Sarah?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARAH
Fine - my life's been fine.

POE
You deserved your fortune.

Sarah's expression becomes one of concern and compassion as she observes this once vibrant man who now teeters on the verge of an emotional and physical collapse.

SARAH
I'm widowed.

POE
So I've heard - I'm sorry.

SARAH
...Thank you.

POE
Well, I'm at a loss for words - That's never happened.

SARAH
It's fine.

POE
Sarah, I should close this door now.

SARAH
Why?

POE
It's very hard to see you like this.

SARAH
Eddie.

POE
...You certainly made the right choice in your life.

SARAH
Fortunes change.

POE
Fortunately - Do you have children?

SARAH
Yes, a son.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

A son...So nice to hear.

SARAH

Come visit my home and tell me about what has happened these past years.

POE

(withdrawing)

...I don't think that would make a good appearance for the neighbors - but thank you anyway.

SARAH

I don't live for my neighbors.

POE

I cannot. Thank you for the offer.

SARAH

Why?

POE

Do I need to explain?

SARAH

I missed you.

POE

Sarah -

SARAH

(beat)

I've thought about you often.

POE

You remember someone who resembled me.

SARAH

I know more about you than you think - you deserved better.

POE

We reap what we sow.

SARAH

Why did you come back?

POE

When one wants to make the world feel smaller, you go back home.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARAH

If you felt strongly enough to come home; to find some comfort, at least let me help.

POE

My problems are mine.

SARAH

They don't have to be.

POE

I drink to excess - I drink until I fall.

SARAH

That can be changed.

POE

I can't control myself, Sarah.

SARAH

You need help.

POE

Help? - Look in my eyes.

Sarah moves closer.

POE (cont'd)

They're dark and everyday they get darker - I'm going into a place that has no light.

SARAH

Maybe I can help - I'm offering you the chance, at a second chance.

POE

...Why?

SARAH

Because I never should have left you.

She reaches out and touches his hand. They slowly embrace.

EXT. - SANITARIUM - DAY

Poe and Sarah are in a buggy heading up a path leading to A FORBIDDING STONE BUILDING on the outskirts of Richmond.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARAH (cont'd)

There must be other ways. I have the means to have the finest doctors in Richmond attend to you. -

Sarah glances at the building in the distance.

POE

(touches his chest)

It's not about doctors, it's about what's in here - it'll be fine.

(touches his temple)

SARAH

Let's turn around now - If we need the help of a sanitarium, there must be others better staffed than this.

POE

I just need to be completely alone - it'll be fine.

EXT. - SANITARIUM - DAY

Poe and Sarah arrive in front of the sanitarium. A WELL-DRESSED BESPECTACLED MAN of fifty steps outside.

SUPERVISOR

Very punctual, Mr. Poe.

Poe gets down and Sarah takes the reins.

SUPERVISOR (cont'd)

We'll notify you when the time is right.

SARAH

What does that mean?

SUPERVISOR

There's no set time for a recovery - Only time will tell.

POE

Who knows, I might enjoy myself so much, we'll make this a yearly event, like Christmas.

(holding her)

It'll be all right. I need to do this.

Poe kisses her and turns to the supervisor...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INT. - SANITARIUM

Poe and the supervisor walk down a hallway. SEVERAL HEAVYSET ATTENDANTS pass in the opposite direction. Every now and then a periodic scream from the imprisoned lunatics echoes down the hall.

SUPERVISOR

You may experience convulsions so it stands that you won't want to eat; therefore only water will be provided until you ask for food. And when your appetite returns it's a good indication you are nearing full recovery.

Poe nods as he glances at the TORTURED FACES of the inmates as he passes.

EXT. - SANITARIUM - NIGHT

In the moonlight, the sanitarium stands out like a massive tombstone.

INT. - POE'S CELL - NIGHT

Poe's pacing and nervous agitation mounts as his body craves alcohol.

EXT. - SANITARIUM - DAY

The sun rises from the rear of the sanitarium.

INT. - SANITARIUM - POE'S CELL - DAY

Pacing madly, Poe holds his stomach as though trying in vain to smother a fire burning from within. He finally collapses into a corner as cold sweat streams down his forehead. His BREATHING is labored.

Peering through a NARROW CELL WINDOW, the supervisor dispassionately studies Poe knotted in pain upon a straw mattress.

SUPERVISOR (cont'd)

You want out, Mr. Poe?

POE

- No! Let me be!

INT. - POE'S CELL -- NIGHT

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Curled into a ball of pain Poe rolls from side to side. SUDDENLY HE IS STARTLED BY SICKENING SOUNDS unlike any he has ever heard before. Opening his eyes, he recoils in horror when he sees his MATTRESS AWKWARDLY UNDULATING AS WAVES OF WORMS OOZE FROM OPENINGS WITHIN THE CELL WALL.

The worms swell into A REPUGNANT WAVE and lap against Poe's bed. They are about to engulf him, WHEN A MASSIVE BLADE comes swinging, SEVERING THE FRONT OF THE WAVE IN HALF.

VOICE
(deadly echo)
...Edgar.

With great dread, he can barely open his eyes.

VOICE (cont'd)
...Edgar.

Poe glances down and sees a SHADOW SLITHERING ALONG THE FLOOR. Squeezing the sides of his temples he attempts to seek some relief from the dire delusions.

POE
...No more - no more.

Opening his eyes, all seems at peace. His panic fades. Suddenly, A PAIR OF HIDEOUSLY DECAYING HANDS tear through the wall and seize Poe's throat with terrifying strength. Ripping the murderous fingers from his neck, he recoils across the room.

VOICE
(mockingly)
Die with us - Die with us.

Poe staggers across the room and HURLS A STOOL at the vision of JOHN ALLEN.

ALLEN
A whore in hell. Son of a whore..

Poe whips around and sees the vision of his mother withdrawing into the opposite corner of the cell. Dressed LIKE A STROLLING DANCER and tart, her exposed skin is wretched.

MOTHER
Come to mother - Come home.

Poe sinks to his knees clutching his stomach in pain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER (cont'd)

Come to mother - Come to mother.

His mother's contorted face SUDDENLY DISSOLVES into the head of his dead brother William.

WILLIAM

...Beyond.

POE

No...

WILLIAM

(deadly echo)

Beyond.

Poe rolls on his back and looks up at THE TOWERING STONE CEILING and sees THE VISION OF HIS WIFE hovering high above him. She beckons with a frail hand.

THE ARM BEGINS TO ELONGATE and stretch from the ceiling to within inches from POE'S FACE.

POE

(low)

...Virginia.

VIRGINIA

Come with me...I love you... I died for you.

POE

No.

VIRGINIA

I died for you.

Outside the cell the supervisor looks in and sees Poe painfully living through his personal nightmares. The supervisor moves on.

An unearthly chanting from a DRONING CHOIR OF DEAD SPIRITS permeates the cell. Poe frantically covers his eyes while withdrawing into the corner.

The droning sound now dissolves into the faint but increasingly DISTURBING GNAWING SOUNDS OF TEETH AGAINST STONE until wet MANGY RATS pour out of the CRACKS IN THE CELL WALL.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Like a diseased gray blanket, THE VERMIN CRAWL towards Poe until the floor trembles and with A THUNDEROUS ROAR the stone surface cracks as THE CENTER OF THE CELL COLLAPSES INTO A CHILLING VOID. Poe balances precariously on A JAGGED LEDGE, which is all that remains of the stone cell floor.

...Suddenly, a huge WALL OF FLAMES explodes from the gaping hole and THE RATS ARE INSTANTLY IMMOLATED.

Hypnotized by the crimson fire, Poe moves closer to the flames until he is nearly engulfed.

Without warning his lower legs are seized by THE SMOLDERING SKELETAL HANDS and he is pulled nearly to the edge.

Horrible WAILING OF LOST SOULS pour forth from the molten pit, as Poe stares into THE BOTTOMLESS INFERNO.

Poe stares into HELL.

An army of horrible eyeless HELL CREATURES crawl up the sheer wall of the flaming crevice as once again HIDEOUSLY CHARRED HANDS seize Poe's legs.

At the bottom, the hell creatures wait with outstretched arms, beckoning to Poe.

With almost a sense of calm and resolve, Poe ceases to struggle and staggers forward, a man willing to accept his fate. OPENING HIS ARMS he goes to the EDGE OF HELL and with total abandon, soars headlong into the ETERNAL FIERY WHIRLPOOL.

EXT. - JAMES RIVER - TWILIGHT

The sun is setting as Poe and Sarah are seen romantically GLIDING IN A ROWBOAT along the reflective water. From the expressions on their faces it's quite apparent they are in love. Poe has never looked more at peace.

EXT. - JAMES RIVER - DAY

Poe and Sarah's twelve year old son, John, are fishing together. Sarah is nearby, SETTING A PICNIC. John CATCHES A FISH as Poe congratulates him.

INT. - TAILOR SHOP

Poe slips into A HAT AND TOP COAT as Sarah nods her approval. Placing a new top hat upon his groomed hair Poe graciously bows and Sarah curtseys.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INT. - SARAH'S HOME

Poe and Sarah are presently DINING BY CANDLELIGHT which reflects her warm smile also catching Poe's eyes which now glow with an inner peace that has not been seen for many years.

EXT. - SARAH'S HOME - DAY

Armed with a pair of broom handles Poe and John fence playfully. Sarah from indoors, looks on.

EXT. - RICHMOND PLAYHOUSE - MORNING

Way in the distance we see Poe and Sarah entering the columned playhouse.

INT. - PLAYHOUSE - DAY

The camera is situated in the balcony and peers down on Poe and Sarah as they stand on the APRON OF THE STAGE. Their voices echo throughout the high-ceilinged hall.

SARAH

I believe you'll be welcomed with open arms.

POE

I'm not exactly sure of that.

SARAH

I want you to do it, if not for yourself, for me. We'll invite the cream of Richmond, the ones who do remember you and the reputation, and you will for once let them see the man I know.

POE

I'd feel more comfortable reciting in a tavern to people who don't care.

SARAH

I rented the hall, to do with what you like.

POE

...Sarah...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARAH

We'll make it an event that will be talked about for some time. This city should hear their favorite son once and for all.

POE

(laughs)

Favorite son?

SARAH

Not yet, but soon.

POE

Maybe we should keep it a secret.

Poe paces up stage, loving the feeling.

SARAH

My life has been good; yours has been hard. It's too late to do anything about yesterday, but today, here and now, you could begin anew. It's more than possible I believe it's fated. I believe in you and now you have to believe like you did back then when you were willing to challenge anything that stood in your way, and willing to be called a fool for believing in things others thought to be meaningless dreams. Now, I want you to show everyone who has the good sense to watch and listen to you, that here stands a man before them, who rose from the ashes to be stronger and wiser than before.

POE

(beat)

Were you always this nice?

SARAH

Yes - you were just too busy talking about yourself to ever notice.

Poe and Sarah embrace as the FAINT WAILING OF A STEAMBOAT WHISTLE is heard.

EXT. - STEAMBOAT - DAY

Poe stands on THE GANGPLANK preparing to board the vessel. Sarah is at his side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARAH (cont'd)
Hurry back.

POE
Of that you can be certain.

SARAH
Good, I'm getting lonely already.
(laughs)
And next trip we go together. Once you
bring back your aunt we can have the
pleasure of more recitals. We'll have
everyone come to you. We make hearing
Edgar Poe a must for all visiting
Richmond.

POE
I don't know if I can go through
that again.

SARAH
You were brilliant.

Poe embraces her.

POE
I'm sure you'll like Muddie -
I'm all she has. How unfortunate is
that?

SARAH
(smiles)
She's very lucky - She's more than
welcome to be with us.

FIRST MATE
...Last call for boarding - all
ashore that's going ashore!

SARAH
(passionately kisses him)
Return home soon. I don't like having
you out of my life for a moment.

Poe hugs her and gazes lovingly into her eyes.

FIRST MATE
All ashore that's going ashore!

EXT. - SIDE SHOT - RIVERBOAT - NIGHT

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The sturdy Richmond Steamboat's PORT AND AFT LIGHTS float dramatically along the James River.

EXT. - BALTIMORE - NIGHT

It is evening and THE GANGPLANK is being lowered in the hazy port. Poe approaches the boat's captain.

POE

Why're we docking in Baltimore?

CAPTAIN

Strong tide - we'll need more fuel to reach New York - Be about four hours, Sir. Passengers may go ashore. We'll cast off in four hours.

Captain sternly faces [several deck hands.]

CAPTAIN (cont'd)

Fasten the bow!

EXT. - MUDDIE'S OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Arriving by CARRIAGE Poe glances up at the window that fronted his deceased brother's bedroom. Memories rush over him.

POE

I'll walk from here.

Poe disembarks the carriage and studies the modest boarded up home as the DEPARTING HORSES HOOVES RESOUND off the moist cobblestone.

EXT. - CHEMIST SHOP - NIGHT

Poe stands before the OLD CHEMIST SHOP which is in terrible disrepair. Through the murky windows he hears himself pleading with the old chemist... Returning to reality, he departs.

EXT. - WIDOW MEAGLE'S OYSTER PARLOR - NIGHT

Poe stands before the parlor. Seen out front of the establishment are A PAIR OF AGING WASTRELS who swill rum and converse in almost INCOHERENT BABBLE. As Poe rounds the corner he spies a woman that stops him dead in his tracks. Her face is shadowed by a HEAVY SHAWL. Viewing her from the side all Poe can see is A THIN PIPE which glows red as the woman inhales deeply.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

Care to get your tail up, Friend?

Poe continues to move past.

WOMAN (cont'd)

Help a working lass out on such a
chilly evening - Or maybe you have
better at home, my love.

Poe is drawn to the SOUND OF HER VOICE and pauses.
Curiosity compels him to retrace his steps.

WOMAN (cont'd)

Staring ain't never polite - See
something you want to buy, Eddie?

The woman pulls back the shawl just enough to reveal her once
attractive but now worn face.

WOMAN (cont'd)

So does the gent remember me?

POE

..Mary?

MARY

Yes, 'Easy Mary' from across the
street - the one your departed brother
used to fancy - Now aren't we the
portrait of success?

POE

Why're you still here?

MARY

(laughs)

Some of us are where we deserve to be.
Hey, would you happen to have any
loose coins in that vest pocket? Love
to see it if you do.

Poe reaches in his pocket and removes a ten dollar piece.

MARY (cont'd)

A tenner - Hell, nice wages for not
sinnin'.

POE

Where do you live?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARY

Poor Eddie - Look how he stares,
 what's that, contempt or pity? Don't
 think so hard 'cause we're not so
 different, all of us whores in one
 fashion or another.

Mary pulls the hood back over her face and draws deeply on
 her pipe and moves off.

MARY (cont'd)

(calling after)

I'm just the obvious kind.

Unbeknownst to Poe, TWO DISREPUTABLE LOOKING CHARACTERS
 observe him from across the RUTTED STREET.

EXT. -- ALLEYWAY

Returning to the dock area, Poe passes the mouth of a
 DESERTED ALLEYWAY, striding across the opening he is suddenly
 accosted by a pair of rowdies who place A KNIFE to his neck.

ROWDY #2

Move an' ya gutted!

Poe is roughly shoved around the corner as it begins to rain.

EXT. - FIREHOUSE - NIGHT

A large, DESERTED FIRE HOUSE opens and Poe is heaved inside.
 Glancing around he sees FIFTY OTHER MEN, mostly subdued,
 mostly drunk, ~~due to~~ the fact they are being FORCE FED bottle
 after bottle of alcohol. They are being watched over by a
 gang of TWENTY ARMED ROWDIES.

ROWDY #1

Got another one.

ROWDY #2

Ain't we got enough already?

POE

What is this? What do you want! Get
 off me!

ROWDY #2

Oh, a fire-breather!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rowdy #1 shoves Poe and pulls a knife on him. Another Rowdy shoves Poe hard and he is tripped up and falls roughly to the ground. Poe angrily rises to his feet.

ROWDY #2 (cont'd)
(brandishing a club)
Say another word and I will be
crushing your fuckin' skull!

POE
I have no reason to be here!

ROWDY #2
Shut up -

POE
You made a mistake -

ROWDY #2
Last warnin'!

POE
You made the mistake! I don't even
belong in this city!!

Poe is hit in the lower back by another rowdy.

In great pain, Poe turns to a taciturn, timid man who cowers at his side.

POE (cont'd)
...What is this place?

MAN
"Ryan's 4th Ward Coop" - election
night.

POE
Elections?!

MAN
Politicians got these hoodlums
grabbin' folks off the street -

POE
Why?

MAN
To vote. 'Ya vote all night long.

A rowdy comes over and hands Poe A CUP OF WHISKEY.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROWDY #1

Down this shit, Game Cock.

Poe pushes it away.

ROWDY #2

You want us to make you finish it?

POE

I can't - I'll cooperate - I don't need to drink.

ROWDY #1

Do what you been told.

POE

No drink -

ROWDY #1

Too much of a goddamn gentleman to be drinkin' good whiskey with our type!? Too fucking uppity, is ya!? That it, Game Cock?!

The rowdy brings over TWO COMRADES.

ROWDY #1 (cont'd)

Down it or I'll carve a hole in yer throat an' pour this shit in yer myself.

With a trembling hand, Poe grabs the cup and brings it to his lips at the last second and glancing down into the cup, SEES HIS OWN REFLECTION and makes a life-altering decision. He HEAVES THE WHISKEY AWAY.

Without hesitation, the rowdies converge on Poe, grabbing his hair, they yank his head back and using a knife point, pry open his mouth and pour the whiskey down his throat.

ROWDY #1 (cont'd)

Pin this son of a bitch down. Pin 'im down! Down it! You uppity fucker! Drown in it!

EXT. - FIREHOUSE - NIGHT

A SLIGHT RAIN begins to muddy up the street near the DILAPIDATED FIREHOUSE. Outside, two rowdies managed to CUP THEIR CIGARETTES and huddle beneath AN OVERHANG as they keep a watchful eye for police.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INT. -- FIREHOUSE - NIGHT

The voters have been loaded onto A WELL-WORN WAGON. Poe is one of the last to be loaded. Shoved to the street, he pauses to catch his balance. With BLURRED VISION, beholds a sight that makes his BLOOD RUN COLD. In front of him is the accursed wagon that he had seen so many times in his nightmares. A DILAPIDATED, EVIL-LOOKING ROUGH HEWN STRUCTURE WITH LARGE IRON-RIMMED WHEELS AND A CHAIN SLACK PANEL THAT HANGS HALFWAY TO THE GROUND. Poe recoils, but is heaved onto the wagon.

EXT. - VOTING STATION - NIGHT

This voting station is situated beneath a SLANTED PIECE OF GRAY CANVAS that is fastened to the exterior of a tavern. ...Drunken men approach the stand in the rain awaiting their moment to vote. Poe, disoriented, stands among them and stares transfixed as the rain STREAMS DOWN HIS FACE.

EXT. - VOTING STATION - NIGHT

The wagon rolls on to another station just as THE SECOND WAGON is leaving.

A rowdy circulates among the men in the wagon POURING WHISKEY down their throats if they show a moment's hesitation. Poe, at this point is far too weak to resist and more of the contemptuous alcohol flows down his raw throat.

ROWDY

Get out ya fuckin' loafer an' vote
like yer told!

(pointing at Poe)

An you, Game Cock take off that
fuckin' vest an jacket - Pull them
rags off, they's mine now!

The rowdy yanks off POE'S COAT. Poe STRIKES HIM but is thumped from behind and shoved into line.

ROWDY #2

...This one needs a hidin'!

EXT. - VOTING STATION - NIGHT

ROWDY #1

Next!

At the next voting station Poe is force fed more whiskey. Poe is on the verge of blacking out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He now wears the majority of the rowdy's filthy clothing and the rowdy is garbed like a gentleman. Poe is unable to sign his name, so Rowdy #2 does it for him and shoves Poe aside.

INT. - MUDDIE'S HOME (BOARDING HOUSE) - NEW YORK - NIGHT

Illuminated by the flicker of several candles, we see Muddie just completing PACKING HER MEAGER BELONGINGS into a carpetbag. Wrapping the handle with twine to secure its closing, she sighs and sits STARING OUT INTO THE NIGHT.

INT. - SARAH'S HOME - NIGHT

Back in Richmond, Sarah lies IN HER BED attempting to ward off a fitful slumber. The moon light that delicately filters into her bedroom creates a surreal atmosphere. Tossing from side to side, Sarah finally settles into a peaceful repose until her eyes snap open with a start. SHE SITS UPRIGHT.

EXT. - WATERFRONT - NIGHT

The steamboat has finally secured most of its passengers except one.

STEWARD

(to Captain)

All aboard that's coming aboard, Sir.

CAPTAIN

Cast off.

STEWARD

(bellowing)

...Cast off!

And without further ado, the heavy lines are heaved onto the rain-soaked pier.

EXT. - DESERTED STREET - NIGHT

The accursed wagon rolls through the abandoned streets. Poe struggles to maintain consciousness. With his remaining strength he claws his way along the FLOOR OF THE WAGON. Angling past other semi and unconscious men, Poe arrives at the rear of the wagon. A Rowdy who has OBSERVED THIS nudges Rowdy #1 with sadistic satisfaction, he watches Poe inch towards freedom, and as Poe is about to slide off he is seized by the collar.

ROWDY #1

Goin' home so early? All right,
gamecock

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

 ROWDY #1 (cont'd)
 (glaring into Poe's face)
 Let me help you.

Poe is shoved roughly off the back.

...His body lands heavily in a WATER-FILLED DEPRESSION in the muddy road.

The team of horses tugs under the lash as the wagon creeps away.

Poe's motionless form begins to shrink into the darkness.

Water washes over Poe's legs as he looks up into the downpour. His eyes are glazed dreamy, his life force is ebbing away. Rather than a look of anguish, Poe's expression becomes almost serene, like his earthly chores are finally over.

 POE
 (whispers)
 ...Wasted soul.

CUT TO: INT. - CHARITY WARD

In the CHARITY WARD of the Washington College Hospital in Baltimore, two weary nurses push a table with small wooden wheels upon which rests the sheet-covered body of Poe.

 NURSE #1
 Who was he?

 NURSE #2
 Name is Poe.

 NURSE #1
 Believe I've heard the name.

They round the corner and disappear from view.

INT. - SARAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sarah now reclines in a tranquil repose. She gently pulls the covers around her shoulders and closes her eyes.

INT. - MUDDIE'S BOARDINGHOUSE - DAWN

The old woman has not moved the entire night and stares transfixed out the window. Her eyes glisten in grief and heartbreak. The CAMERA MOVES forward and starts its ASCENT out the window as the scene dissolves into a bright reflective stage light.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We are now back in RICHMOND. The CONCERT HALL is filled to capacity with five hundred of Richmond's finest.

The production design on the stage is quite effective. Behind Poe, who stands center stage in CROSSED SPOTLIGHTS, are four large fluted columns. Stage left, there is the illusion of a framed doorway above which is a MARBLE BUST OF PALLAS. (Greek God - Brother of Theseus, Son of Poseidon)

Sarah is seated among a grouping of her friends in the first row. Her son is at her side. Her eyes register pride and affection for Poe as she hangs onto the poet's every word.

POE

"Deep into that darkness peering, long
I stood wondering fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal
ever dared to dream before.
But the silence was unbroken, and the
stillness stayed no token
And the only word there was spoken was
the whispered word,
"Lenore."
This I whispered, and an echo murmured
back the word,
"Lenore!"
Merely this and nothing more.

The crowd is riveted as CANDLES APPEAR BACKSTAGE illuminating a cheesecloth scrim that has been painted black. Upon each scrim is the OUTLINE OF A SPECTER.

POE (cont'd)

"Open here I fling to shutter, when,
with many a flirt and flutter,
In stepped a stately raven of saintly
days of yore;
Not the least obeisance may heed; not
a minute stop or
Stayed he;

Behind the oversized marble head of the ancient Greek God, Pallas, the ENLARGED FIGURE of an ominous RAVEN is raised into view. A light directed from the rear of the stationary Raven causes it to be surrounded by A HALO OF LIGHT, GIVING IT A MENACING POWER.

POE (cont'd)

"...Ghastly grim and ancient raven
wandering from the nightly shore -

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (cont'd)

Tell me what they lordly name is on
the night's plutonian shore!

Quoth the raven, "Nevermore."

As Poe continued to RECITE THE POEM dissolves into A MONTAGE depicting the trials and tribulations of Poe throughout his short life. Once done WE FADE BACK into Richmond, Virginia. The camera comes to rest on Sarah's entranced expression as she places her arm around Poe's sister.

POE (cont'd)

..Quoth the raven "Nevermore."

Poe approaches THE TOWERING RAVEN. The stage hands have devised an ingenious method to direct more light into the raven's glowing red eyes. Backstage the sound of a MOUNTING HEARTBEAT is heard. In the pit area, just beyond the few footlights, A TEN-PIECE ENSEMBLE of musicians heightened the dramatic effect.

POE (cont'd)

"Be thy word our sign of parting, bird
of fiend!" I shriek, upstarting -

"Get thee back into the tempest and
the nights plutonian shore!!

Leave no black plume as a token of the
life I so hath spoken!

Leave my loneliness unbroken! - quit
the bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and
take thy form from off my door!!!"

Quoth the raven,
"Nevermore."

Poe reaches the summit of his ability. He has COMPLETELY BARED HIS SOUL and stands center stage exhausted, and engulfed in the MASSIVE SILHOUETTE OF THE RAVEN which casts its form across the entire stage.

POE (cont'd)

(gently)

"And the raven, never flitting, still
a sitting

And the lamplight over him streaming
throws his shadow on the floor;"

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe drifts forward until he stands above THE FOOTLIGHTS.

POE (cont'd)

"And my soul from out of that shadow
that lies floating on the floor,

Shall be lifted,
Nevermore!"

Poe raises his eyes toward the mysterious Raven as THE AUDIENCE ignites with UNANIMOUS APPROVAL and Poe's spirits are elevated to perhaps the highest they will ever know. With his eyes glistening with boundless emotion Poe bows appreciatively at Sarah and Rosalee.

With great humility Poe now bows to the audience and retreats step by step into the RECESSES OF THE STAGE, until disappearing fully into the darkness until all that remains on stage is the majestic image of the Raven and the resounding applause that echoes to the rafters and into the night for one of the world's great artists.

EXT. - BALTIMORE - PRESENT - NIGHT

The faint SOUND OF THE WIND is heard as the scene DRIFTS BACK TO THE TINY GRAVEYARD IN PRESENT DAY BALTIMORE where THE HOODED STRANGER still stands before the HEADSTONE OF POE. Barely moving a muscle, he removes THREE SMALL DELICATE RED ROSES and places them gently on the GRAVE MARKER, and with solemn dignity, silently slips away into the shadows. As the mysterious stranger fades into the night, the wind blows the three roses from the TOP OF THE STONE and THEY LAND TOGETHER on the ground directly above where the poet finally rests in peace.