

THE RAVEN

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLACKNESS. Over which we hear:

(V.O.)
God help my wretched soul!

SUPERIMPOSE: BALTIMORE. 1849.

INT. HALLWAY -NIGHT

DARKNESS, broken only by a faint hue of light, far off. Then a SCREAM, violent and agonized. This is the sound of death and all who hear it shudder.

The light intensifies as seven BALTIMORE POLICE OFFICERS charge around the corner of a narrow, wooden stairwell, waistcoats and lanterns flying through the cold Chesapeake night.

They reach the final landing just in time to hear the sound of a SKELETON KEY. The door they now face has been locked from the INSIDE.

CONSTABLE
He's there! Give us room!

CONSTABLE ELDERIDGE, 50 and weighty, heaves himself against the tiny door and crashes it down in a flurry of splinters. The officers race past their leader, pistols cocked.

But as the lanterns spill light over the shadows, they find...NO KILLER, just an overturned table, a BLOODY RAZOR and part of a SCALP.

ELDERIDGE
It's impossible! He's here!

The Constable flings open a closet door. FIRES on instinct. Fires on nothing.

ELDERIDGE (CONT'D)
Damn it. The window.

Two officers check the encasing. Intact.

OFFICER
Nailed shut.

ELDERIDGE
But...

There is a stunned silence as each man ponders the impossible. Then...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CONSTABLE

Dear Christ.

...we follow his gaze to the FIREPLACE. A single lock of blond HAIR dangles from the chimney.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -NIGHT

Through DENSE FOG we barely see a TALL FIGURE, obscured by a WIDE-BRIMMED HAT, running down a cobblestone alley. The tails of the man's TOP COAT flutter like the wings of some giant bird.

INT. TAVERN -NIGHT

EDGAR ALLAN POE, 40, teeters on a stool in the corner of a rowdy, harbor side ale house. He looks worn out physically, but his soul, too profound and sincere to be dulled by booze, is revealed in his strength of voice.

POE

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

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -NIGHT

POE'S VOICE OVER IS HEARD DURING THE FOLLOWING SEQUENCES:

A carriage races over rain-lashed cobblestone streets.

POE(V.O.)

And the stars never rise, but I feel the
bright eyes of the beautiful Annabel Lee.

INT. BEDROOM -NIGHT

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

POE(V.O.)

And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by
the side...

BACK TO:

EXT. STREET -NIGHT

The carriage stops in front of a townhouse now surrounded by police. DETECTIVE EMMETT FIELDS, 37, a meticulous and intense man, exits the coach and checks his pocket watch against the bells which toll the THREE AM hour. His handsomeness is belied by a frigid and abstract exterior.

POE (V.O.)
 ...of my darling, my darling, my life and
 my bride...

BACK TO:

INT. TAVERN -NIGHT

Poe steadies himself for the ending of what clearly is a painful piece for him.

POE
 ...In the sepulchre there by the sea, in
 her tomb by the sounding sea.

Poe hesitates before looking up to the obviously indifferent crowd of DRUNKEN SAILORS.

POE (CONT'D)
 Well done, Edgar. Nobody cares.

He drains the last of his drink.

POE (CONT'D)
 I wrote that for my wife. She died
 twenty years ago, today.

Poe raises his glass.

POE (CONT'D)
 Barkeep, another port s'il vous plait.
 Some fool drank the last of mine.

BARKEEP
 Sorry. You still owe me two week's
 worth.

POE
 How much was that?

BARKEEP
 Two dollars and change.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

And that's exactly what was in my pocket
when I left home this morning.

BARKEEP

So where's it now, Poe?

POE

With the Temperance League. A harpy
assaulted me on the way here, and I was
compelled to offer a donation toward the
salvation of my soul.

BARKEEP

Church?

POE

Yes, God damn it, CHURCH! Now give me a
drink. I'm poor in coin but rich in
creation. I'll trade my poem...

Holding up the drained glass.

POE (CONT'D)

...for a very reasonable price.

Barkeep snatches Poe's glass and returns to the kitchen. Poe
stands, urged on by drunken valor.

POE (CONT'D)

Good men of Baltimore. For sale: a love
poem. A story of death, and a man
haunted by the memory of it. Anyone?

SAILOR

Shut it!

POE

Signed, no less, by the once great, Edgar
Allen Poe. And yours, for a...

DOWN POE GOES, grasping, head on the table and finally
unconscious. A moment passes before a gloved hand takes the
POEM and replaces it with...a PORT.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM -NIGHT

Detective Fields kneels beside the DEAD GIRL as Constable
Elderidge keenly watches the investigator. An officer
carefully wraps several STRANDS OF HAIR and a portion of a
SCALP in a handkerchief as evidence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELDERIDGE

Katherine LaForte. Twenty Two.

Fields retrieves a pocket knife from his vest and uses it to pull back the locks of blood soaked hair which conceal STRANGULATION MARKS around the dead girl's neck. Fields ignores the Constable's chatter as he works.

ELDERIDGE (CONT'D)

Such a young woman. So lovely. It gets to you, doesn't it, Inspector Fields?

FIELDS

I'm quite certain she'll be missed.

Meticulously measuring the dead woman's neck circumference and the killer's grip, Fields places his own hands over the bruises left by the murderer.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

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

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

FIELDS (CONT'D)

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

ELDERIDGE

Absolutely, sir. It was almost as if he was waiting for us to arrive.

FIELDS

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

ELDERIDGE

Not a trace.

Fields studies the perimeter of the window frame.

FIELDS

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

ELDERIDGE

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

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FIELDS

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

ELDERIDGE

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

FIELDS

Seems impossible, doesn't it?

Leading Elderidge to the window, Fields stands before the structure searching for what the others have missed. His gaze halts at an almost imperceptible indentation in the dust around the casing.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

I can promise you, this is the window through which he escaped.

OFFICER

(smirking)

Must have been a ghost then.

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

FIELDS

...a lock. Triggered by a spring.

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

OFFICER

But the nail.

FIELDS

Broken. Mid shaft.

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

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER -NIGHT

Elderidge is humiliated by his obvious failure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELDERIDGE

I checked that window ten times,
detective. I swear it.

FIELDS

There's some intelligence to this killer,
Constable. He's more clever than most.

ELDERIDGE

I should have found it.

FIELDS

Would you like a ride?

ELDERIDGE

No. Thank you. I'll walk. Give me a
chance to clear my head. That poor girl.

FIELDS

There was something familiar about the
window. The way the nail was concealed.

ELDERIDGE

What do you mean?

FIELDS

I'm not sure. It's just a thought and an
irrational one at that. Good night.

Fields hoists himself into the back of his carriage.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Be careful, Thomas. He's still wandering
these streets.

Elderidge doesn't respond in words, but disappears into the
foggy night, holding aloft his PISTOL.

ELDERIDGE

And I hope to hell I meet him.

As Fields' carriage clip-clops away, we...

REVERSE TO REVEAL: A cloaked figure with the WIDE-BRIMMED
HAT. A beat before he steps out of a doorway and follows in
Elderidge's direction.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE STREET -MORNING

Poe, dressed in a long black cape, charges down a Baltimore street. A GAGGLE OF CHILDREN tail him and toss pebbles as they shout:

CHILDREN

Raven. Raven.

Poe ignores the brats until a stone knocks his hat into the mud. He whirls around, using his cape as wings. Shrieks.

POE

CAAWWWW! CAWWWW!

The children squeal and scatter like a pack of frightened rats. Poe turns to retrieve his hat and rising, discovers a CARRIAGE bearing down on him. Rather than running out of its way, Poe holds up his hand and forces the coach to stop.

POE (CONT'D)

Good morning, Percy.

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

PERCY

(stern)

Step aside, Mister Poe. We've no time this morning.

Poe opens the door to the carriage and steps in anyway, tipping his mud soaked hat to CAPT. CHARLES HAMILTON, a retired US Naval captain who's still used to giving the orders. Seated beside him is his beautiful daughter, EMILY, a bashful, yet radiant youth.

CHARLES

Percy, get this man out of my coach!

POE

Contrary to precedent, Captain Hamilton, I have absolutely no intention of asking for money.

Poe climbs into the seat beside Emily.

POE (CONT'D)

I've come for your daughter, Charles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLES

In polite company, Mr. Poe, we do not address one another by our prenomns.

POE

Good point.

A beat. Poe does not budge.

CHARLES

What the hell are you doing here, Edgar?

Poe drops a scroll onto Emily's lap.

POE

I'm merely here to return some poems.

CHARLES

Poems? Do we fancy ourselves a poetess now, Emily?

EMILY

Father...

POE

With minor revision, Emily might consider forwarding the work to Godey's Ladies Book, a publication singularly devoted to...well..ladies. I myself could be of aid in this matter, for on more than one occasion, I have lent a hand in the development of some of Baltimore's more gifted poetesses.

CHARLES

Your efforts might be better served trying to earn a living.

Hamilton opens the carriage door and points to the exit with his cane.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Let us not detain you. Percy!

POE

I suppose a meager loan would be out of the question then?

Charles lunges for him.

EMILY

Father, don't!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Edgar quickly kisses Emily's cheek just as Percy grabs Poe and with one hand and heaves him from the carriage. As the horses pull away, Poe shouts after the carriage:

POE
 (To Emily)
 Affection, within bounds, is thus, no
 blemish.

INT. BALTIMORE PATRIOT PRINTING ROOM -MORNING

CLOSE ON: The massive fingers of a PRINTING PRESS grinding out the evening edition. PULL BACK TO REVEAL: IVAN REYNOLDS, a 35 year old typesetter. In the midst of setting a block, he is seized by a violent coughing fit. He uses his sleeve to wipe a trace of blood from his lips.

Poe, still covered in mud, enters with bravado, bows deeply and clicks his heels.

POE
 Good morning, my Baltimore Patriot.

IVAN
 What happened to you?

POE
 I've been struck by Cupid, Ivan. Right through the ticker.

IVAN
 You're covered in mud.

POE
 At least this time it was children who flung the muck. Most of the time it's my literary critics.

Poe grabs a current edition from a stack and pages through the freshly printed paper.

POE (CONT'D)
 (beaming)
 Alright then, tell me on which page....

Poe quickly riffles through the rest of the paper. Then stops. He looks at Ivan.

IVAN
 Sir?

POE
 That gunnel whore's bastard!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe rips through the pages once more. With each page his temper mounts.

POE (CONT'D)
He didn't run my review!

IVAN
I'm afraid there was no more space.

POE
No more space?!

IVAN
That's right--

Poe suddenly slams a tray of LETTER BLOCKS onto the floor.

POE
Pray tell, what fine auteur was deemed more worthy than--

Poe's eyes expand in horror.

POE (CONT'D)
Longfellow?

Ivan scurries to pick up the fallen blocks.

IVAN
It's a poem about unrequited love.

POE
Of course. It was either that or kittens. This is beyond contemptuous.

IVAN
Well, Mr. Poe, as the famous writer once said: The miseries of the world are multiform.

POE
What idiot said that?

IVAN
You did.

Off Edgar's self-disgust we...

CUT TO:

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE -MORNING

Poe crashes through the door, searching. Sitting at a large cluttered desk is a large cluttered businessman: HENRY MADDUX. Poe's mere presence sends the editor into instantaneous hypertension.

POE
Where is it?

HENRY
Where is what?

POE
The trash bin. Because-

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

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

HENRY
That's lovely, Eddy. A real show of finesse from one of the South's finest gentlemen. Go home.

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

HENRY
Here's an idea, stop writing criticism of other people's work and write something of your own.

POE
Not until you print my review.

HENRY
Unlike you, people actually LIKE Longfellow.

POE
Don't be ridiculous.

A beat. Finally Poe concedes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (CONT'D)

Henry, where's your charity? I'm flat broke.

HENRY

You're also drunk.

POE

I don't believe that to be the case.

HENRY

Well then it's one hell of a hangover. I can smell you from here.

POE

What about my Emerson piece? Print that. It's got to be worth something.

HENRY

Another Bostonian you've insulted. How did you phrase it: "an old bladder on the sea of glory." Jesus, Edgar, duels have been fought over less.

POE

Excellent idea. Bring him to me. I shall challenge him both on the page and in the street.

HENRY

Give me something people are anxious to read. Not diatribes on intellectualism. Write another *Tell Tale Heart*. Blood and death sell newspapers. I'm in the business of selling violence and you're in the business of writing it. Give me something gruesome.

POE

Yes, well, if I could write another *Tell Tale Heart* and you had a feather up your ass we'd both be tickled pink.

HENRY

You think you're the only one with creditor problems? Have you looked at the circulation numbers?

POE

It all comes back to business with you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HENRY

I'd have published that poem of yours if
you hadn't sold it for a glass of port.

Poe stiffens.

POE

Who told you?

HENRY

Lay off the liquor, Edgar, it rots your
brain.

POE

I drink occasionally because it
is...social. HOWEVER, I never indulge
when I work.

Henry opens the door.

POE (CONT'D)

I am chaste. I get plenty of fresh
air...

HENRY

(Ushering Poe out))
Edgar. You drain me.

POE

I'm being serious.

HENRY

Then write something I can sell. And do
it quickly.

Poe bows sarcastically and Henry slams the door behind him.

CUT TO:

INT. MISS LAFORTE'S BEDROOM -AFTERNOON

Shafts of muted afternoon sunshine slice across the wooden
floor. Fields stands alone in the center of the room in
which Katherine LaForte was murdered. He clutches a small
book and reads aloud to himself...

FIELDS

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Fields closes the book. CLOSE ON: *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by EDGAR ALLAN POE.

CUT TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE -NIGHT

CONSTABLE ELDERIDGE is bound to a table beneath a barbaric contraption of iron gears, pulleys and a massive PENDULUM the end of which is affixed to a GIANT CURVED BLADE. The poor man's arms and legs are bound, and his EYELIDS are pulled open with FISH HOOKS and bailing twine.

ELDERIDGE

God damn filth. Why have you brought me here?

CLOSE ON: A GLOVED HAND as it tightens a bolt.

ELDERIDGE (CONT'D)

You killed that girl, didn't you? Answer me, you son of a bitch. She was just a girl, and you...AHHHHH!

Elderidge struggles violently. The killer stops what he's doing, and with a savage tug retightens the knots.

ELDERIDGE (CONT'D)

SAY SOMETHING before you kill me, you dumb son of a bitch!

CLOSE ON: The killer's back stiffens on the word "dumb." We see his gloved hand take hold of a lever.

REVERSE TO REVEAL: The large iron framework of pulleys and weights slowly comes to life as the massive pendulum sweeps from one side of the room across to the other.

CLOSE ON: Elderidge's bulging eyes. The poor man is forced to watch in horror as another lever is released and the MASSIVE SWINGING BLADE begins to slowly descend toward his chest.

CUT TO:

INT. POE'S HOUSE -NIGHT

Poe kneels beside his latest roommate, CARL, a fluffy RACCOON. He shares a slice of bread with his pet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Carl, you bastard. There was pound cake
in that cupboard when I left this
morning. Now, where is it?

Carl chatters his rebuttal. Poe laughs. There is a knock at
the door.

POE (CONT'D)

My jacket would look better with you on
it for trim.

Poe gets to the door just as it is flung open by an irate
Emily. She reads from a notebook.

EMILY

"Permeated with a pressed rose sadness,
often teaming with unrequited love." Is
that what you think of my work or...

She leaps into his arms.

EMILY (CONT'D)

...my future odds of holding your
affections?

They kiss until the union is broken by Carl's HISSING. Emily
screams and jumps onto the divan.

EMILY (CONT'D)

What is it? Go away. Shoo.

POE

Darling, your heel is putting a hole in
the Chinese chintz.

EMILY

Eddy, get him away. I mean it. Go away,
you rat.

POE

I'm sorry, Carl. Miss Hamilton's circle
doesn't cavort with thieves and
marsupials.

Poe returns Carl to his cage.

EMILY

One of these strays will give you
hydrophobia and I'll be left sad and
alone.

Emily seats herself on the divan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EMILY (CONT'D)

Thank you for asking, a tea would be lovely.

POE

We've tea, but no milk. Carl drank it.

EMILY

You were more aggressive in your criticism of my work this time. Why?

POE

Perhaps because you have talent and I consider it my duty to wrestle it from you.

Poe kisses Emily's neck and delights her though she professes anger.

EMILY

I promised father I would never see you again, and I'm beginning to think it's a wise idea.

POE

Your father's a buffoon.

EMILY

You're too forward, Eddy.

Emily pushes Poe away and he drops to his knees, clutching her hand. She smacks the top of Edgar's head.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Get off your knees unless you intend to use the position for some purpose.

POE

Such as?

EMILY

Marrying me.

POE

My life has been whim, impulse, passion and an intense longing for solitude.

EMILY

Lest we forget a scorn of all things present.

She stares at him for a moment, saddened by the intensity of the barriers that separate them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

EMILY (CONT'D)

I can't do this. I can't.

POE

Emily, I love you.

EMILY

But you force me to be playful when I'm not anymore. We're past those days. You look at me like a rare flower that is supposed to bring you youthful pleasure.

POE

I condone pleasure. I find it, enjoyable.

EMILY

Damn you. Don't quip this away. You are not fair to me.

POE

You bring me happiness. Why does that make you angry?

EMILY

Edgar, you live most of your life in memory. I fill the few minutes when you walk in the present. But after that. I don't exist and I hate it.

POE

I can't simply choose not to remember. Annabel still inspires me.

And the unspeakable has been spoken. It breaks Emily's heart.

EMILY

I'm in love with you and I want your love back.

The young woman's eyes fill with tears.

EMILY (CONT'D)

But I am thwarted by a memory, twenty years old, that ceases to lose its grip over you. You hold onto it, for safety. How can I ever compete with that? How?

Poe watches the love of his life weep and it breaks his heart. He drops to one knee, spontaneously and sincerely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

POE

Emily, I have grieved with an intensity
that has broken a great deal of my
spirit.

Poe takes Emily's hand.

POE (CONT'D)

But if you'll have what's left of me, I
would like to marry you. Emily, will you
be my wife?

Emily gasps. She leaps into his arms and kisses him.

EMILY

I love you, Edgar. You ridiculous man.
I love you.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE CRIME SCENE -MORNING

The aftermath of Elderidge's evisceration has transformed the
brick warehouse into a SLAUGHTERHOUSE. The floor is awash in
BLOOD and INTESTINES. A cadre of officers troll for clues.
Many clutch handkerchiefs over their noses.

Overhead, the MASSIVE PENDULUM blade is stuck high in the air
and frozen in time at the top of its arc. A sophisticated
mechanism of levers and weights holds the pendulum in place.
The contraption is complex.

Inspector Fields sits on a wooden barrel and calmly reads the
Baltimore Patriot. CLOSE ON the headline: *Baltimore Butcher
Strikes Again: Second Murder in Week.*

FIELDS

Whoever he is, the killer possesses
mechanical ability.

OFFICER

Inspector. Mr. Maddux is here.

Fields lowers the paper to find Henry ashen-faced as he
stares at Elderidge's disemboweled corpse.

HENRY

Oh. God.

The editor gags slightly at the grisly site.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HENRY (CONT'D)

Who is--

FIELDS

The Constable. Elderidge.

Henry turns away as men lift what is left of the dead man into wooden crates.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Were you not aware of the circumstances surrounding his death?

HENRY

We heard he was butchered with a knife.

FIELDS

He was sliced in half by that.

Fields points to the pendulum.

HENRY

Good God.

FIELDS

The blade was specially designed to lower three quarters of an inch each time it swung back and forth. So the blade would have first tickled the Constable's skin only to swing backwards to slice open his abdomen, then his intestines, and of course the rest of his internal organs.

HENRY

Who could have done such a thing?

FIELDS

My friend's eyes were forced open so he could experience the horror of his own death.

Henry is on the verge of vomiting.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

He may well have seen his own bowels spill onto the floor a second before all life left his body.

HENRY

The Pit and the Pendulum.

FIELDS

You know the story?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HENRY
Occupational hazard.

FIELDS
How long have you known Mr. Poe?

HENRY
Edgar? Well past ten years. You don't think he's somehow connected--

FIELDS
You published another one of his stories - Murders of the Rue Morgue?

HENRY
He wrote that one several years back for Graham's magazine when he was in Philadelphia. I reprinted it a couple of times here - a real good seller.

FIELDS
So, Murders of the Rue Morgue was read by many people?

HENRY
IN the Rue Morgue. Murders IN the Rue Morgue, and yes, it was very widely read.

FIELDS
As was Pit and the Pendulum, I suppose.

HENRY
Extremely, but... Inspector, forgive me. There's a darkness to Edgar, but this? (Re: the carnage) He's not a kill--

Without warning, Fields grabs Henry by the lapels and throws him like a rag doll to the ground just as...

SWOOOOSH. The giant pendulum blade speeds past the two men, inches above their heads. Officers dive out of the way until a lever re-engages and the blade stops, as suddenly as it was released. The apparatus seems to have a life of its own.

Fields brushes himself off, stands and calmly eyes the MECHANISM. Henry, however, lies in a pool of blood for a beat and then tries not vomit as he stands. A second passes before the bile is released.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH LIBRARY -MORNING

A meeting of the CHESAPEAKE BAY LADIES' POETRY SOCIETY. The room is atwitter with ELDERLY WOMEN nibbling finger sandwiches and anxiously gripping their poems. Poe sits at the front, slumped into an almost life-threatening hangover.

POE

Who's next?

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

MRS. BRADLEY

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

POE

Please, stop.

Mrs. Bradley stops mid-stanza, embarrassed.

MRS. BRADLEY

I'm sorry. It's not very good, is it?

Poe struggles to sit up. He recites her last line.

POE

"Thou honey-making thing." Thou honey-making THING?

MRS. BRADLEY

It's not good.

POE

No. It's not good.

The room turns tense. Mrs. Bradley nearly cries.

POE (CONT'D)

It is NOT GOOD. It. Is. BRILLIANT!

A collective exhalation of relief. Mrs. Bradley beams with pride.

POE (CONT'D)

The juxtaposition of the beauty in nature with the horrors of our recent industrialization, i.e. reducing the brother bee into nothing more than a honey-making THING.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (CONT'D)

A meaningless cog, bound for destruction
within the machine of nature.

Poe wipes a bead of sweat from his brow. Mrs. Bradley, along
with the other ladies look bewildered.

POE (CONT'D)

Brilliant, Mrs. Bradley. Terrifying.
But brilliant.

MRS. BRADLEY

Well...thank you, Mr. Poe.

The meeting is abruptly interrupted by a knock at the door.
The CHURCH SECRETARY enters.

SECRETARY

Mr. Poe, I'm sorry to interrupt. There's
someone here to see you.

POE

Later.

MAN'S VOICE

I'm afraid it can't wait.

REVERSE ANGLE TO: Fields stands in the doorway. His eyes
lock with Poe's as he holds up his BADGE.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH GARDEN -MINUTES LATER

Poe faces the Inspector. Fields studies notes he has
scribbled on a note pad.

FIELDS

According to various witnesses, two
nights ago you were inebriated in a
tavern, to the point of blacking out.

POE

May I ask the purpose of your visit?

FIELDS

What time did you leave the tavern?

POE

Unfortunately, I don't remember. My
leaving was...involuntary.

Poe retrieves a FLASK from his front pocket and fumbles to
open it. He takes a stiff drink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIELDS

I remind you, we are on church grounds.

POE

Then my plea for absolution will be heard more quickly.

Poe takes another swig and Fields' mood shifts. To anger.

POE (CONT'D)

Why are you here, Inspector? Am I being arrested for public inebriation? Because at the moment I am dreadfully sober.

FIELDS

Mr. Poe, I suggest, given recent events, that you temper your behavior.

Fields thrusts the morning paper into Poe's hands and points to the HEADLINE. Poe reads. And as he does, his face darkens and his entire body begins to tremble.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

You hadn't seen it?

Poe shakes his head. Fields watches him like a hawk.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Whoever is murdering these innocent people seems to have an intimate knowledge of your work.

POE

Then I am a suspect?

FIELDS

As well as others. The murders--

POE

Are you assuming there will be more?

FIELDS

My analysis suggests the killer derives great pleasure from death and will be unable to stop himself from killing again. You teach, do you not?

POE

Yes, a women's poetry class.

FIELDS

But you have read your stories in other venues. 'Performing' them, so to speak.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE

Up and down the coast. Mostly in salons when I was more popular with the literati.

Fields consults his notes.

FIELDS

"The Pit and The Pendulum". When was it published?

POE

In '42, "Tales of Ratiocination."

FIELDS

Sorry?

POE

Detective stories, detective. Ironically, mostly taken from newspaper accounts. We've become a murderous lot in our modern cities.

FIELDS

And (reading from his notes) "Tales of the Arabesque and Grotesque?"

POE

Romance poetry. Those didn't sell at all.

FIELDS

Has anyone threatened you of late?

POE

Not of note.

FIELDS

Any ardent fans?

POE

Less of note.

FIELDS

Angry relatives?

POE

My step father, but he's decaying in Richmond. My sister is feeble minded and living in a charity home. My brother died some time ago, as did my parents.

Fields considers this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

FIELDS

Thank you, Mr. Poe. I am not all that familiar with your writing, and so, I hope you will avail yourself to me and my officers in an effort to find a methodology to these deaths.

POE

You deem your killer a logical man despite the difference in the gender and age of the victims?

FIELDS

Connections exist, Mr. Poe, even when they elude us.

POE

You won't find this man through logic, Inspector Fields. You'll find him through the cold sweat of nightmares.

FIELDS

I've little time for whimsy.

POE

Only when you come to understand the demon's mind will you be able to apprehend him.

FIELDS

If you have any more...insights, please contact me.

POE

I'm very sorry about your friend.

FIELDS

Excuse me?

POE

I suspect by your tenacity, you were quite close to Constable Elderidge.

FIELDS

My tenacity, like my faith, is constant. Regardless of outside events.

Fields extends his right hand. Poe shakes it while the Inspector secretly lifts one of the WRITER'S GLOVES from his coat pocket.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Good day, Mr. Poe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

As Fields walks away, Poe's face turns to fright as the endless ROWS OF GRAVES that surround him seem to undulate on an invisible sea of death.

CUT TO:

INT. POE'S BEDROOM -AFTERNOON

Poe paces like a caged animal in the dimly lit, cluttered room. His brain is on fire as he frantically rummages through piles of books littered across the floor. Finally, Poe stops before a massive leather-bound tome. He opens the book to *The Pit and the Pendulum* and from memory the words echo in his mind.

POE (V.O.)
Down, unceasingly, down.

Poe recoils against the wall as grotesque images float into his consciousness and match the text. CLOSE ON: A large hand that clutches a LEVER. The iron mechanism, gears, weights and pulleys, groans and clangs as the lever releases setting the KILLING MACHINE into motion.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In the path of the destroying crescent.

PULL BACK SLIGHTLY TO: The giant blade of a PENDULUM as it makes a sweeping pass before our eyes. A cloaked figure stands watching in the shadows.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Death, I said, any death but that of the
pit.

MASTER SHOT OF: A figure strapped to a rack in the center of a large room. In slow motion, the bladed pendulum poises at the top of its arc, then hurtles toward the terrified victim. Poe SCREAMS as the young woman's face becomes evident; it is EMILY.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOK SHOP -NIGHT

The SHOP'S OWNER stands on a ladder holding a LANTERN in front of the title: TALES OF RATIOCINATION written in gold leaf on the jacket of a book.

OWNER
It's awful late for police work isn't it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Fields stands in the center of the room. He doesn't answer. He is intent on the books.

FIELDS

Do you remember anyone of late, perhaps strikingly large, who bought some of Poe's work?

OWNER

Can't say I do.

The book seller coughs. A dot of blood splatters onto the floor. Another victim to CONSUMPTION.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Here's another. Forgot I had it. *Tales of the Arabesque and Grotesque*.

The owner blows the dust from the stack.

OWNER (CONT'D)

Arabesque? I don't get that bit.

The owner drops the tomes from the shelf onto the floor as he descends the ladder.

OWNER (CONT'D)

People say he's not right in the head.

FIELDS

Who's that?

OWNER

Poe.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMILTON PARLOR -NIGHT

Emily, a vision of exuberance, plays the piano at a party for the well to do. The guests pleasure themselves on ample food and spirits. Her father looks on adoringly before being interrupted by MRS. BUCKLEY, a rotund woman with Basset hounds for breasts..

HAMILTON

Have you picked a costume for the ball tomorrow night, Mrs. Buckley?

MRS. BUCKELY

I'll give you a clue. She played a significant role in our great country's history.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HAMILTON
Pocahontas?

Emily finishes the etude and the crowd applauds her ability. She jumps with excitement to thank everyone.

EMILY
Thank you. That's very kind.

Emily sits again to play the opening cords to a Chopin etude.

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

HAMILTON
(Wistful) Her mother was the same way.

MRS. BUCKLEY
Who is going to escort her to your gala tomorrow?

HAMILTON
I am.

MRS. BUCKLEY
Charles, let the poor girl have some fun.

HAMILTON
If you'll excuse me. All this talk of suitors is giving me indigestion. I need a bourbon.

Hamilton exits and Emily is suddenly startled by...Poe. The writer, clearly unraveled, stands in the entrance to the room.

EMILY
My God, Eddie, what's the matter? What's happened?

POE
Emily.

Emily races to Poe and wraps her shawl around him. Poe takes Emily's hands, clutches them.

EMILY
What is it?

POE
You must leave here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EMILY

Eddy, please. You're frightening me.

Poe shouts. Guests react with shock and back away. A butler hurries off to find Captain Hamilton.

POE

Two people were murdered this week. One was a young girl, your age.

EMILY

I know, Edgar. I read the paper. Why are you telling me this?

POE

The murders were based on my stories.

EMILY

Edgar, calm down.

POE

No. You're in danger. Two people are dead because of me.

EMILY

Stop this rant.

POE

We cannot be together. I cannot marry you.

EMILY

Edgar. You can't mean that.

POE

It will end in your death. Just like it did for Annabel.

EMILY

No. Don't say another word, you'll go too far and there won't be any going back.

Poe grabs Emily's arms. Shakes her.

POE

We cannot be together!

Emily's eyes well with tears. She is a fragile creature whose heart is exposed to the one person who can crush it.

EMILY

Please...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

POE
I don't love you.

EMILY
That's not true. I don't believe--

But before Poe can answer, a woman screams from the foyer.
REVERSE ANGLE TO: Hamilton stands in the middle of the party with a LOADED PISTOL aimed at Poe. Percy, the driver, stands stoically by his side.

HAMILTON
You are trespassing, Mr. Poe. I have every legal right to shoot you dead.

EMILY
Stop!

HAMILTON
I've warned you with words. For a man of letters, you seem painfully obtuse. Perhaps a gun will be more effective.

Emily steps in front of Poe as Hamilton approaches.

EMILY
Put that awful thing away!

HAMILTON
Get out of this house, Poe, or so help me God, I'll kill you.

With sudden and Herculean strength, Poe heaves himself into Hamilton. Clutching the old man with wet trembling hands, Poe pleads:

POE
Take Emily away from Baltimore, tonight!
Her relation to me has put her in danger.
She can't stay here.

Hamilton slams Poe against the wall.

HAMILTON
You are a miserable man. And you make other people miserable.

POE
Captain, YOU MUST DO AS I SAY!

The Captain pushes the muzzle of his pistol into Poe's temple.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

HAMILTON

No, God damnit! You'll do as I say!

Hamilton nods to Percy who manhandles Poe out the door and into the rain. Still holding the gun, Hamilton turns to his daughter.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

If you see him again, I'll kill him.

CUT TO:

INT. FIELDS' OFFICE -NIGHT

Fields adjusts a kerosine lantern over his desk. He carefully smudges CHARCOAL over a PLASTER CAST of Katherine LaForte's neck. The charcoal is a mock up of the strangulation marks Fields measured at the crime scene.

Certain the finger marks are exact to his notes, Fields spreads Poe's glove over the plaster cast. Indeed, the author's glove is a full two inches smaller than the killer's grip.

Ever careful, Fields opens his NOTE BOOK and marks the time. 9:14 P.M. He dips his QUILL into ink and begins to write...*Poe's glove appears too small for that of the killer...*

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY -NIGHT

Poe, emotionally and physically exhausted, arrives at the door to his apartment. As he reaches for the knob, he stops in his tracks.

CLOSE ON: A papier-mâché MASK hanging by a nail on the door. The mask is ornately painted scarlet red and crafted in the shape of a GRINNING SKULL. Poe carefully unhooks it, turns it over in his hands, revealing a hand-written SCRIPT...

POE

"But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious."

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE POLICE PRECINCT -NIGHT

Poe clutches the MASK in one hand and bangs on the heavy oak divide to the police barracks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE
Open the damned door! Open it.

INT. FIELDS' OFFICE -NIGHT

CLOSE ON: A strand of BLONDE HAIR stained BLACK. PULL BACK TO REVEAL: Fields at his desk, examining the hair. He has pulled it taught between his white gloved fingers and is holding it up to the light. Winded, Poe suddenly barges into the inspector's office.

POE
He's going to kill again.

Fields doesn't look up. He pulls his RIGHT fingers across one half of the hair strand.

POE (CONT'D)
You were right.

Unmoved, Fields repeats the process, sliding his LEFT hand across the other half.

POE (CONT'D)
Mask of the Red Death.

Fields reveals both hands. The fingers of the right glove are stained black. Those of the left are not.

POE (CONT'D)
Damn it. Listen to me. It's another one of my stories--

FIELDS
Perhaps you can explain why some of this chimney soot rubs off in my hand, and some does not.

POE
You asked for my help. Here, damn it!

Poe tosses THE MASK onto Fields' desk.

FIELDS
Because the stain on one end is chimney soot, however, the blackness on the other end is not. What is it, Mr. Poe?

POE
I have no idea.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

 FIELDS
 (Holding up the mask)
No, what is this?

 POE
The quote from the story mentions
Prospero, a character I created
to...to... symbolize man's arrogance.
Even when confronted with certain death.

Fields is seemingly still absorbed with the hair strand.

 POE (CONT'D)
Prospero hosts a costume ball to which
death comes in disguise. Charles
Hamilton is hosting a costume ball at the
new railway station. Tomorrow night.

Poe studies Fields, who as of yet has not reacted.

 POE (CONT'D)
Have you heard me, man?

Ever calm, Fields stands. He grabs his overcoat and hat as
he checks his pocket watch.

 FIELDS
Then it is time we warn Mr. Hamilton.

CUT TO:

INT. DOWNTOWN OFFICE BUILDING -MORNING

The offices of HAMILTON RAILWAY AND HOLDING COMPANY. Charles
Hamilton sits behind his desk on which lie the MASK and
INVITATION that were delivered to Poe. Fields stands in
front of him.

 FIELDS (O.S.)
 (reading)
"And the revel went whirlingly on, until
at length there commenced the sounding of
midnight upon the clock."

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

 FIELDS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
If indeed "The Mask of the Red Death" is
his next intended story, you must
consider postponing tonight's costume
ball.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hamilton spits the brandy into a SPITTOON.

HAMILTON

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

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

FIELDS

(reading)

"And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel..."

As Fields reads, we hear the words playing over...

CUT TO:

EXT. CHURCHYARD -MORNING

Church bells toll the hour as gloved hands synchronize a POCKET WATCH to the tower clock.

FIELDS (V.O.)

"...and died each in the despairing posture of his fall."

BACK TO:

INT. HAMILTON'S OFFICE -MORNING

Hamilton regards the papier-mâché mask.

HAMILTON

Who the hell is Prospero?

CUT TO:

INT. DARK ROOM -DAY

LARGE HANDS, obscured by a polishing cloth, move quickly across a pair of BLACK PATENT LEATHER boots.

FIELDS (V.O.)

"And darkness and decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all. The figure was tall and gaunt and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave."

BACK TO:

INT. HAMILTON'S OFFICE -DAY

Hamilton stands. He is barrel chested and...ARROGANT.

HAMILTON

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

FIELDS

Skeleton.

HAMILTON

Dresses up like a skeleton and comes in at the stroke of midnight and kills everyone? Poe's a damned madman. I ordered him away from Emily and now he's trying to...this is ridiculous.

FIELDS

Sir, the similarities here are too coincidental. I'm asking you again, postpone.

HAMILTON

I'll hire extra security but I'm not postponing.

FIELDS

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

HAMILTON

I said, no. You will not change my mind, Inspector.

FIELDS

Then I insist my officers be present.

HAMILTON

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

Fields crosses to the door.

FIELDS

In answer to your question, he was the host.

HAMILTON

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIELDS

You asked me who Prospero was. He was
the host of the ball.

Fields tips his hat.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

And the first to die.

CUT TO:

INT. BALTIMORE RAILWAY STATION, BALLROOM -NIGHT

A MASQUERADE BALL in full swing. Revelers in all manner of costume celebrate a perfectly enchanted evening as they dance to the spirited melodies of a STRING QUARTET. Giant crystal chandeliers refract rainbows of light throughout the great hall to create an intoxicating dance of light and joy.

Henry Maddux, Poe's editor, stands by the bar. He raises his glass and finishes off the last sip of champagne.

REVELER

Things are well at the paper?

HENRY

Hell no. I should burn the damned place
down and collect insurance. Nothing
sells.

Henry checks his gold pocket watch.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Ah. Time for a piss.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILWAY STATION ENTRANCE -NIGHT

Nervous but practiced, Fields goes over last minute instructions with a large group of UNIFORMED DEPUTIES and SECURITY GUARDS.

SECURITY GUARD

Death? We're supposed to look for death?

Some of the younger guards chortle. Fields has no time for humor.

FIELDS

In some shape, yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SECURITY GUARD
You mean the grim reaper?

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

Fields motions to one of his older and more trusted officers,
JOHN CANTRELL, 38.

FIELDS
John, take some of these men and patrol
the back.

JOHN
Yes, sir.

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

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS -NIGHT

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

BACK TO:

EXT. BALCONY -NIGHT

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

CONQUISTADOR
May I have this dance?

The conquistador removes his mask. It is Captain Hamilton.

HAMILTON
Where's your mask?

EMILY
Go away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Emily turns back to the moon.

HAMILTON

Emily. My darling. I'm an ass. I always have been. But your happiness, your future happiness, is more important to me than what you think of me at this moment.

EMILY

I wasn't thinking of you.

HAMILTON

So this is the new Gothic style, is it? Pining under a full moon? I miss my daughter's smile. Everyone's wondering--

EMILY

Let them wonder, damn you! It's your problem. Your little music box doll isn't performing tonight.

HAMILTON

Don't speak to me that way.

Hamilton's eyes turn stern.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

The world is watching you. Therefore, you are to behave appropriately. Do you understand?

EMILY

Your self importance has turned you into a monster. Can't you see that I love him?

HAMILTON

Yes. I see. And it sickens me.

Emily's eyes flood with tears and she runs inside. Hamilton watches her disappear into the crowd then pounds the railing in frustration. His cheeks are flush with anger. Below, the slaves continue to shovel coal.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAILWAY STATION -NIGHT

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

INT. BALLROOM -NIGHT

Fields studies the crowd from a remote corner. Every face is MASKED and many are drunk and grotesque in the gaslight. The Inspector sees a UNIFORMED GUARD across the room who is likewise scanning for the killer. They briefly acknowledge each another and keep moving through the crowd.

Fields' gaze suddenly fixes on the back of a LARGE MAN dressed in flowing RED ROBES and a wide brimmed hat. Fields' heart races. The costume is exactly that of Prospero's described in Poe's short story. Desperate, Fields pushes his way through the crowd and people push back in anger.

FIELDS
Please. Step aside.

Fields grabs a PISTOL from his waistband and searches for the 'Catholic cardinal' in vain. The cloaked man has disappeared into the crowd. Now near panic, Fields spins in all directions. CLOSE ON: A COURT JESTER. He turns again...MARIE ANTOINETTE. Again...JOHN CANTRELL. The Cardinal has disappeared.

Fields stops. Panicked as the guests continue to party. A beat before...There he is! The man in the RED CLOAK lifts his mask. He is almost SEVENTY YEARS OLD and laughs drunkenly as his wife swipes CAKE FROSTING off his nose. Not our killer.

Fields exhales as he tries to quell his worry. Instinct insists something terrible is about to happen. Something Fields suspects he cannot prevent.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLROOM -NIGHT

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

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

PERCY
No, sir.

HAMILTON
What about Poe? Any sign of him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PERCY

Not so far.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLROOM -NIGHT

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

Poe pulls a MASK from his pocket and slips it over his face. Knowing she will not recognize him and that this may be his last chance to be near her, Poe crosses the room and extends his hand for a dance. Emily smiles politely, but..

EMILY

No. Thank you.

Poe slips his hand into hers and gently pulls her toward him. Despite her sadness, the intensity of the reveler's gaze compels her, and Emily accepts the stranger's offer. The two dance uninterrupted for a moment, transported in each other's arms. Poe can hardly endure the moment.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You dance passionately. Sir.

Over Emily's shoulder, Poe sees HAMILTON AND PERCY making their way toward Emily. As much as he wants to stay with Emily, Edgar knows he must leave her. The station clock begins to toll MIDNIGHT and Poe bows deeply as his heart breaks.

Emily stares in confusion as the CLOAKED DANCER disappears into the crowd. Her mind wrestles with the familiarity of the man's touch and at last she realizes...

EMILY (CONT'D)

Edgar?!

Emily runs toward POE just as...SCREAMS echo across the chamber.

CUT TO:

INT. BALLROOM, CENTER -NIGHT

The thunder of a HORSE'S HOOVES echoes across the marble floor as a MASSIVE STEED leaps through the doors and gallops into the center of the hall.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The rider, cloaked in a SKELETON COSTUME, beats the animal forward against the throngs of panicked guests racing for the doors.

INT. BALLROOM, RESTING AREA -NIGHT

ANGLE ON: Emily, confused and frightened like everyone else. A tall, UNIFORMED GUARD appears from the shadows and takes her by the arm.

MAN

You're in danger, Miss Hamilton. Come with me.

Before she can respond we cut...

BACK TO:

INT. BALLROOM, CENTER -NIGHT

Fields and his men converge upon the horseman with their PISTOLS drawn. The officers violently pull the RIDER off his horse and pin him to the floor. Fields snatches the skeleton hood from the man's head and reveals...a very frightened YOUNG MAN.

YOUNG MAN

Please don't hurt me. He told me you'd ordered it for the party. He said--

FIELDS

Who?! Who ordered it?!

YOUNG MAN

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

He holds AN ENVELOPE in his quivering hand. Before Fields can reach it, Poe claws through the crowd and grabs the letter from the messenger. The STATION CLOCK begins to toll the hour as Poe's cheeks flush with terror. He reads the letter then:

POE

It's not. Possible.

FIELDS

What is it? For God sake.

POE

She's gone.

FIELDS

Seal off this building. NOW!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Guards move toward every exit but it is too late. As chaos abounds, Poe's vision begins to blur. The world spins out of control but the sound of the BELLS remains steady. Ten...then another, and finally the midnight hour.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM -NIGHT

CLOSE ON: Emily, dimly lit by a narrow shaft of light. Her eyes are wild with fear and exhaustion. Arms pinned to her side, she is crammed into a tightly confined space, but it is hard to see exactly where she is.

Between Emily's muffled sobs, we hear a strange scraping noise of metal on brick. Then we hear short gentle swooshes of air, and see it blow through Emily's blond hair.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: Emily is in the inner space of a large brick wall. The killer methodically scoops fresh mortar with his trowel, scrapes an even layer across the last brick, and carefully places it into the wall. Poe's love is now entombed. Alive.

The killer dusts himself, steps back to admire his handiwork, then kneels down to work a small fireplace billows, pumping air into the base of the wall.

KILLER

Don't be afraid, Miss Hamilton. You're
in the house of the Lord.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE PRECINCT -MORNING

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

FIELDS

The following was delivered during the masquerade ball at the B and O railroad station last night. (reading)
"I challenge the brilliant detective mind of Edgar Allan Poe. You and I will play a game of wits and Emily's life will depend on its outcome. The two of us share a fascination with the perverse. But like the visions in Plato's cave, your stories are only shadows of reality. I commit the murders about which you can only dream.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIELDS (CONT'D)

In order to get beyond the shadows, you must steep yourself in death."

OFFICER

How does a mind become so distorted?

JOHN CANTRELL answers as best he can.

JOHN

Only God knows that.

OFFICER

(Pointing)

Ask him? You've got him to blame.

REVERSE ANGLE TO: Poe as he compulsively rocks in his chair.

FIELDS

(reading)

"You will immortalize me in a new story you draft based on my murders. This frightful detective tale will appear in serial form in the Baltimore Patriot. Within twenty fours hours I will kill again and on that new corpse, I will leave you clues that lead to Emily. I challenge you to find her before she dies. Investigate the deaths, draft each chapter, and give Baltimore an accurate and most compelling account of a madman. Find the words and find them quickly, Mr. Poe. I fear for Emily's life."

Fields folds the letter.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

It is signed, "The Raven."

Fields tucks it into his jacket pocket while addressing the officers.

OFFICER

That's Poe.

FIELDS

There are a few things we know. From the description given to us by last night's messenger, we know he is tall - at least six feet. He is of substantial build. I found traces of a black substance on the young girl's hair. Part was soot, the other I have not been able to identify. He is also very mechanically--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE
I've killed her.

And the room goes silent. Is this a confession?

FIELDS
We must assume Miss Hamilton is still
alive.

POE
I am to blame. Just like Annabel. I was
unable to afford the wood to heat our
house. In the last moments of her life,
she was as cold as the corpse she soon
became. I held her hand. That's how I
know that. Consumption.

The room is visibly uncomfortable with the intimacy of Poe's
confession.

POE (CONT'D)
Emily will die in even greater pain.

FIELDS
Not if I can help it. This killer is
superstitious. He will keep her alive to
keep you involved. It's part of his
game.

POE
He's not following my stories anymore.
He's making up his own.

FIELDS
He wants you to chronicle the behavior of
a brilliant murderer. That's the logic
that will betray him.

POE
Logic? It's a chaotic mind. It's ruled
by it's passions.

FIELDS
We have an advantage, Mr. Poe. If you
cannot see it, don't waste my time.

Poe stands.

POE
How many murders have you prevented?

Charles Hamilton charges through the door followed by Percy
and a substantial posse.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HAMILTON

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

FIELDS

Captain Hamilton. I am very sorry.

HAMILTON

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

FIELDS

If you would please be silent for a moment. I need to get these men onto the streets in an organized way as soon as possible.

HAMILTON

You have no authority over me.

FIELDS

I'm not ordering you, I'm asking you.

HAMILTON

I've decided to hire my own people. And a reward. \$10,000 to find my daughter.

FIELDS

May I continue?

Hamilton charges up to Poe.

HAMILTON

What's he doing here?

Hamilton suddenly punches Poe in the face. Poe does not flinch, but rather wipes the blood from his mouth onto his sleeve. Hamilton reaches back to punch Poe again but is stopped by John. The room quiets.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

Arrest him. This is his fault.

FIELDS

I'm not arresting him because your feelings and mine aside, he is our only connection to the man who has your daughter. I suggest you remember that.

Fields grabs his coat and moves to the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

FIELDS (CONT'D)

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

CUT TO:

INT. WASHINGTON COLLEGE HOSPITAL -NIGHT

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

PROFESSOR

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

The students draw closer in anticipation as the professor inserts a key into the PADLOCK of the metal casket. Just before he turns the key, he stops dead in his tracks.

STUDENT

What is it?

The professor raises a hand, asking for quiet as he bends over the casket. We hear a very faint sound...of SCRATCHING coming from the casket. Then silence. A few of the students step closer. Others step away. Then out of the silence...

FRENZIED SCRAPING, like fingernails on metal.

PROFESSOR

Dear God!

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

Finally, we see the bird's casket companion, a YOUNG WOMAN with brunette hair. She wears a chiffon dress. Her body is swollen and blue from suffocation. One of the medical students wretches. It is a grotesque sight.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BALTIMORE HOSPITAL -LATER

POLICEMEN gather about the victim. Fields inspects the padlock of the steel case while Poe remains transfixed on the dead girl's eyes. John Cantrell eagerly volunteers his help.

JOHN

It looks to me like consumption. Not murder.

FIELDS

Why so?

JOHN

There's a small bit of blood about the victim's lips and on her dress as if she'd been coughing blood.

Fields says nothing as he circles the gurney.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Also, there isn't any sign of a struggle. The dress is intact. Hair presentable.

Fields says nothing. He is more interested in the steel case.

JOHN(CONT'D)

She even looks like she's been dressed for burial. I hate to think it, but she could have been stolen and then brought here for our benefit. There's been a lot of grave robbing lately.

PROFESSOR

I can assure you this institution doesn't acquire cadavers by such means.

Poe stands almost motionless. His eyes never leave the dead girl's and the lack of color in his face is emblematic of the fear in his soul.

FIELDS

Mr. Poe, you must write about everything we find here. His instructions were clear, and we must follow them to the letter.

Fields turns back to the professor.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

You possess the only key to this case?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PROFESSOR

Yes.

Fields bends closely over the case and wipes a small BLACK SMUDGE with his handkerchief. He brings it close to his face, precisely noting the color.

FIELDS

Perhaps consumption?

Poe suddenly wakes to action.

POE

She didn't die of consumption.

JOHN

Why do you say that?

POE

Her eyes. There's fear in them.

JOHN

There's no way to tell that.

POE

She was murdered.

JOHN

How--

FIELDS

By careful examination.

Fields wipes the RED SPOT from beside the dead girl's lips onto a handkerchief. He smells the cloth, then licks it.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Poe is correct. The red substance isn't blood. It's wine.

Next, the detective carefully rolls back the high lace collar of the victim's dress then pulls taught the folds of her skin to reveal a THIN CORD.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

She was strangled...

Fields clips the cord with his knife.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

...by what appears to be some sort of fishing line.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE
"The Mystery of Marie Roget."

Poe examines the girl's neck.

POE (CONT'D)
It was another one of my Detective Dupin
tales.

Poe begins to untie the ribbon at the top of dead woman's
dress. John steps in and grabs Poe's arm.

JOHN
My God, show some respect.

POE
She didn't dress herself. He killed her
with the thin cord and then put on the
garment specifically to his liking.

Poe points to the knot at the top of the woman's dress.

POE (CONT'D)
How many young ladies tie their dresses
with mast rigging knots?

Poe, having gently folded the ribbon into the palm of his
hand, smells it deeply then offers it to Fields.

POE (CONT'D)
Recognize it?

FIELDS
The ribbon?

POE
The smell.

Fields inhales deeply, but...

FIELDS
Nothing. I don't smell anything really.

POE
My Aunt Clem used to grow it. Lavender.

Fields checks his watch.

FIELDS
You must write it now, Mr. Poe.

CUT TO:

INT. POE'S APARTMENT -NIGHT

Poe sits at his desk writing at a feverish pace. He smokes a CIGAR which is burnt almost down to his finger. A TREE BRANCH scratches against his window as it must have when Poe wrote "The Raven". One gets the sense of witches lurking. Carl chatters on the chair as Poe's voice plays over the scene.

POE (V.O.)

Her coquettish smile, dangerously
inviting, portended nothing of her coming
fate...

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. CAFE -NIGHT

A young woman, the face of whom we recognize to be the face of the CORPSE at the physician's college, smiles at someone as she lifts a WINE GLASS to her lips. She finishes the wine, exits the cafe, and walks into the street, unaware of a FIGURE moving toward her from behind.

POE (V.O.)

I found her innocence sickening and
determined she would be the next to die.
I wanted to watch the metamorphosis which
occurs when life is traded for death.

The figure grabs the woman. A small, almost imperceptible CORD is wrapped around her neck and the woman struggles in vain to free herself. The figure quickly increases the tension on the garret. The night conceals his identity as he leans in closely to the woman's mouth to listen as she struggles for the breath that will be her last. We hear the choking, sucking and it is horrifying.

CLOSE ON: The killer's face. IT IS POE'S.

VOICE (V.O.)

Hello.

Someone pounds on a door. Poe's hallucination ends, and for a moment he is confused. The man at the door knocks again.

SMASH BACK TO:

INT. POE'S HOUSE -NIGHT

Poe, drenched in sweat, wipes his brow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE
Who's there?

FIELDS (O.S.)
It's Fields, damnit. Open up.

Poe crosses to the door. Fields straightens his hat that has gone askew leaping up the stairs two at a time.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Is it finished?

POE
It is a difficult task, Inspector.

FIELDS
I would not withhold any evidence. It could anger him and endanger Emily more.

POE
Yes. It's a question of honor on our part as well as his.

Fields pushes past Poe and removes his hat. It is the first time we have seen the inspector even slightly agitated.

FIELDS
I will have to read it. When you're finished.

Poe shoots him a weary look.

FIELDS (CONT'D)
Perhaps we should stop conversing.

POE
Indeed.

FIELDS
How did you know about the knot? At the top of the girl's dress.

POE
It was a feeling.

FIELDS
That makes no sense. You must have seen it more closely at some point or other.

POE
No.

Poe crosses back to his desk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE (CONT'D)

When you came in, your hat wasn't straight.

FIELDS

What does that have to do with anything?

POE

Your level of investment. It's comforting. You think Emily's still alive.

FIELDS

I'm sure of it. You must keep in mind, this "Raven" needs you to tell his story. To glorify him.

POE

We have no choice but to trust so.

FIELDS

I cannot bring myself to say he is a man of honor, yet I must believe he is keeping her alive if for no other purpose than to make his perverse deeds known.

POE

Thank you, Inspector Fields. I am hopeful for the first time.

FIELDS

You needn't be optimistic. You must be effective. Finish the piece. I shall deliver it to the paper.

Fields studies the writer. Poe's intensity of intuition is matched only by Fields' intensity of reason.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSY STREET -MORNING

Two well dressed MIDDLE AGED MEN read Poe's story in the paper. We can see the title: "My Exquisite Cadaver" by E.A. Poe.

FIRST MAN

(reading newspaper)

"The dear woman's body twitched once and then again as she passed from this world into the next." I don't understand. Is it supposed to be fiction?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIRST MAN (CONT'D)

I heard they found a body last night at the college, and now he's written this thing?

SECOND MAN

He's like the hangman, making money off the dead.

Poe and Fields approach on the sidewalk.

FIRST MAN

By God, that's him.

The second man SPITS on Poe as he passes. The first man, ready for a fight, snarls:

FIRST MAN (CONT'D)

You sorry son of a bitch. They should hang YOU.

The man lunges at Poe but is restrained by his friend. Fields grabs Poe by the arm and leads him away down the street.

POE

They're right. He's made me an accomplice, Fields.

FIELDS

I've no concern for that. You must think again. Anything with a young woman drinking wine? She could have worked in a tavern. She could have been a prostitute.

POE

Dozens of my stories include women drinking wine.

As a couple approaches on the sidewalk, they notice Poe and cross to the other side in disgust.

POE (CONT'D)

My head is a cauldron of images, Mr. Fields. Horrifying and precise images--

FIELDS

He has left us three deliberate clues. The wine, the sailor's knot, and the perfume. He's demanding that we proceed as your fictional detective, Dupin. Just like one of your stories. What was it, The Stolen Letter?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE
The Purloined Letter.

Fields and Poe walk in silence for a beat.

POE (CONT'D)
You've done your research, Fields. I'm
sorry it involved having to read my work.

CUT TO:

INT. PERFUMERY -MORNING

Poe enters the small perfume shop and is staggered by both
the smells and the beautiful young woman behind the counter.
She is Emily's age. Fields remains at the doorway.

COUNTER GIRL
It's overwhelming isn't it?

POE
I beg your pardon?

COUNTER GIRL
I suppose I'm used to it by now. So many
smells. I forget how powerful it is
sometimes.

POE
Yes. I should think so. Yes... If I
could trouble you?

COUNTER GIRL
Of course. Oh, good heavens. You're
Mister Poe, are you not?

POE
Yes.

Poe tries to undercut the moment, but the salesgirl does not
read his not-so-subtle signals.

COUNTER GIRL
I'm a great fan of yours.

POE
Then I've finally met one.

COUNTER GIRL
Tell Tale Heart. That's my favorite.

POE
May I--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COUNTER GIRL
 (conspiratorially)
 They say what's happening is because of
 you. They say you're making money off
 death. But I don't believe it. You were
 writing about dead people long before all
 this...

Poe produces the RIBBON from the dead woman.

POE
 Could I ask you to smell this?

An odd request but she does it.

COUNTER GIRL
 Mmmmm. It's wonderful isn't it? Your
 wife has very good taste.

POE
 Oh, it's not...

The sales girl gives Poe a coy, knowing smile, then retreats
 up a ladder to retrieve a delicate HAND-BLOWN BOTTLE.

COUNTER GIRL
 Lavande. We just got it in from Paris
 two days ago.

She places a tiny drop on her wrist and offers her hand to
 Poe.

COUNTER GIRL (CONT'D)
 (clearly flirting)
 Is this what you're looking for?

POE
 Yes. That's it.

Fields interrupts the awkward moment by COUGHING as he enters
 the store.

FIELDS
 Lavender then. The same scent that was
 on the ribbon?

Poe grabs the woman's arm, intent on the scent and oblivious
 to his manner...

POE
 Indeed, smell--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FIELDS

I'll trust your certainty, Mr. Poe.

Cynthia lowers her arm.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

It's from Paris?

CYNTHIA

Just off the ship.

FIELDS

And have you sold much of it?

CYNTHIA

Actually, you're the first.

FIELDS

Do you have an invoice from the distributor? Or perhaps...

Cynthia smiles, hurries toward the back room and quickly returns.

CYNTHIA

Yes, I believe so. I just paid the man who delivered it yesterday. Here.

Fields examines the DELIVERY INVOICE.

FIELDS

Jeanne D'Arc. It's a ship.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CARRIAGE -DAY

Fields speaks quickly as the horses gallop through downtown Baltimore toward the WATERFRONT. Cobblestones splinter under the horse's iron shoes; there is no time to waste.

FIELDS

I've informed the officers to surround the ship before we board. If indeed the killer is a sailor, we need to ensure no one leaves the vessel.

POE

It's getting dark.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIELDS

By the knot around the dead girl's neck
and the lavender, our killer may well be
a sailor. This is a lead, Poe. It makes
sense.

Poe stares blankly out the window into the middle distance.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

We may well be close.

POE

And he may well be waiting.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE HARBOR -NIGHT

Gas lanterns illuminate a debauched landscape. Fires burn in
steel drums around which the poor huddle to keep warm. Ship
masts ascend toward a cloudy night sky and somewhere beyond
the eye's reach, a BUOY BELL echoes across the tar black
water.

Five carriages draw to a stop in front of a gangway to
the...Jeanne D'Arc. The massive boat barely reacts as the
wake from another ship beats against its stern. A beat and
then...the carriage doors fly open and officers pour onto the
wet cobblestone streets. Fields hurries before the officers.

FIELDS

No one boards or exits the vessel. Those
who are armed proceed with me.

Fields leads twenty or so officers on board. Poe and John
Cantrell follow close behind and almost reach the deck before
the men are stopped by a hefty FIRST MATE. The man is
humorless and speaks in a thick French accent.

FIRST MATE

This vessel is the private property of
the French governme--

FIELDS

By order of the Port Marshal and the
Baltimore Police Commissioner, we have a
warrant to board this ship.

FIRST MATE

I say you cannot.

FIELDS

Please step aside.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Excusez nous. S'il vous plait.

Poe pushes past the First Mate. An irate CAPTAIN emerges from below brandishing a PISTOL.

CAPTAIN

Merde! Qu'est que c'est? Qu'est qui ce passe?

FIELDS

Do you speak English?

CAPTAIN

Who the hell are you and what the hell is going on?

FIELDS

Sir, we are seizing this vessel. I am from the Baltimore police department, and we have reason to believe one of your crew is responsible for several recent murders. Will you muster your men, please? Now.

CAPTAIN

I don't care if you have a letter from President Zachary Taylor, this is a sovereign vessel of France.

Overhead in the mast a sailor coughs violently. Fields takes note.

FIELDS

Perhaps this ship should be quarantined. For say...six months to avoid the spread of consumption?

The French captain swallows hard at the obvious threat.

CAPTAIN

(Shouts)

TOUTES LES MAINS SUR LE PONT!

SAILORS of all size and shape come running into formation onto the deck. Fields studies each man intently as he walks up and down the line. Finally, he stops in front of a large crewman, CLAUDE.

FIELDS

Stick out your hands. Like this.

No response. The sailor is a pillar of defiance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

 FIELDS (CONT'D)
 (To the captain))
 Should I unload your entire cargo and
 hold it as evidence, Captain?

 CAPTAIN
 (in French)
 Damn your eyes, Claude! Do as he says!

Fields pulls a TAPE MEASURE from his breast pocket.

 FIELDS
 Your hands.

Claude puts his hands out for inspection. His attitude is still less than cooperative. Fields uses the tape to measure the sailor's grip. Large, but still smaller than that of the killer. Fields calls to a nearby officer.

 FIELDS (CONT'D)
 You.

The officer approaches.

 FIELDS (CONT'D)
 Measure each man's hand. Thirteen and
 one half inches from little finger to
 thumb.

The officer starts at the front of the line. Fields and Poe eye the crew of mostly average-sized sailors.

 FIELDS (CONT'D)
 Small.

Poe considers the situation. His gaze moves over the men until he notices an ever so slight space in the habitual line. Poe motions to Fields.

 POE
 One is missing.

 FIELDS
 (To Captain)
 Is this your entire crew?

The First Mate whispers into the Captain's ear. A beat and the Captain announces...

 CAPTAIN
 One man is missing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

FIELDS

And where might he be?

FIRST MATE

He must be on board. No one is allowed to leave the ship.

Fields draws his pistol, grabs a lantern off of a hook and turns to his officers.

FIELDS

Make sure these men remain under guard. If anyone moves...

Fields raises his voice for affect.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Shoot them.

Poe and John draw their weapons and follow Fields below deck. Though their expressions remain resolute, clearly each man knows he is about to descend to a place where the killer may lay in wait.

CUT TO:

INT. SHIP -NIGHT

Lantern in hand, Fields creeps through the dank quarters of the ship. The faint sound of water lapping against the hull echoes in dull thuds. From above, we hear the French sailors murmuring their disapproval. The ship is poorly maintained and each deck plank groans beneath their boots.

INT. BELOW DECK -NIGHT

As John descends a narrow staircase, a low grunting sound sends him spinning around to find...a PAIR OF EYES in the darkness. John raises the pistol.

JOHN

Who's there? Come out of there!

Suddenly, the shrieking squeal of a PIG comes from a tiny livestock pen. John lumbers backwards. Everything about the ship is creepy and the stench of caged animals only heightens the hellish effect.

INT. SAILOR CABIN -NIGHT

Poe stands alone in a dark compartment that is packed to the ceiling with WOODEN CRATES.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Charcoal text is etched across the cases. "Fragile", "Du Vin." Wine. The wine perhaps from the dead woman's mouth.

Poe draws a deep breath in an effort to quell his claustrophobia. A woman's voice calls to him through the darkness.

WOMAN

Eddy...

IN AN INSTANT...Emily's beaming smile clouds Poe's mind until...something SCURRIES BEHIND HIM. Poe frantically whips his torch toward the sound to find a MASSIVE RAT snarling at him from a rafter. Poe startles and drops his torch. When he reaches to grab it from the floor, he knocks his head against a crate. Poe touches his forehead with his hand and in the glow of the torch we see BLOOD across his fingertips.

POE

Bastard...

Suddenly, a BOY screams on deck.

BOY (O.S.)

Mr. Poe?

CUT TO:

EXT. SHIP'S DECK -NIGHT

The boy, no more than twelve, struggles to board the ship. The officers point their GUNS at the child and fidget nervously in the chaos. They are uncertain how to respond and err on the side of caution. While the boy creates a commotion, the sailors remain still as the tension on deck increases. Any wrong move could trigger a shot.

OFFICER

Stand back. Now I say.

BOY

(Out of breath)

I'm here to find Poe.

Fields races onto the deck.

OFFICER

No one boards this--

FIELDS

It's alright. Let him on.

The boy is afraid and steps cautiously toward Fields.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIELDS (CONT'D)

What is it?

BOY

They told me to run as fast as I--

FIELDS

What's happened?

BOY

Are you Mr. Poe?

POE

I am Poe.

REVERSE ANGLE TO...Edgar. A thin stream of blood drains from the gash on his forehead and in the night he looks like a GHOUL. The child's eyes expand in fear but steadies himself to deliver the news.

BOY

I'm sorry sir, there's been a terrible accident.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. STREET -NIGHT

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

FIRE MARSHAL

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

Poe notices two men watching the blaze. They are the same men who threatened him in the street that morning.

POE

I'm certain you're correct.

Poe takes a CIGAR from his pocket, crosses to a smoldering beam and lights his smoke. He backs away, accepting the loss as if he deserved it.

FIRE MARSHAL

Sir, we did find...I'd be glad to take him if he's not yours. But he's been sticking with us since we got here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

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

POE

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

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

CUT TO:

INT FIELDS' HOUSE -NIGHT

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

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

CUT TO:

EXT. DOORWAY -NIGHT

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

FIELDS

Mr. Poe.

POE

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

FIELDS

Yes. I heard.

An awkward beat passes.

POE

I don't mean to impose.

FIELDS

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

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

 FIELDS (CONT'D)
Not the animal.

 POE
He's very well mannered.

Fields takes the cage from Poe's trembling hand.

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

Fields sets the cage on the porch and Poe puts his coat over it to cover Carl from the night's chill. For some people, Carl wouldn't mean much, but for Poe, the animal is all he has left.

CUT TO:

INT. FIELDS' HOUSE -NIGHT

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

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

 POE
It appears to Baltimore I've become the
very demon I conceived. The fire was
started intentionally.

 FIELDS
It was merely a house and can be rebuilt.

 POE
The sailor?

 FIELDS
I was wrong.

 POE
And what if you weren't?

 FIELDS
We searched the entire ship and by all
accounts the missing sailor is a boy, no
more than nineteen. And petite. I fear
he is the victim, not the perpetrator.

Fields hurries to the desk and retrieves the INVOICES.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Which is why we must review these at once.

POE

What are they?

FIELDS

The ship's cargo invoices. With proper analysis, we may well...

POE

Papers? She's dying for Christ sake. We need to be looking for Emily. Not doing clerical work.

FIELDS

Where the pieces have different and bizarre motions, with various and variable values, what is only complex, is mistaken for profound. Now--

Poe SNATCHES the papers out of Fields' hand.

POE

Damn you!

Fields stares at Poe with disdain.

POE (CONT'D)

Your analytic mind has lead us to more dead bodies! That's all.

FIELDS

And your hysteria has set us back. I will not tolerate it and if you cannot be of help please leave this house.

Fields stoops to pick up the papers. The action is as methodical as the detective. In Fields' precision, Poe suddenly understands the man's extreme commitment.

POE

I am sorry. I had thought we might have been upon him.

Poe stoops to help his only ally.

FIELDS

The clues at the medical college weren't left by mistake. The killer's not a sailor; he wanted us on that ship for a reason.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Poe knows it's true. He thinks.

POE

The invoices. They're for wine are they not?

FIELDS

Yes. The lavender led to the ship. The wine might perhaps--

POE

Lead us to Emily.

Fields sits himself at a desk. Poe does not. His mind is racing and so he must pace.

POE (CONT'D)

The Raven. He's crafting a story in flesh, Fields. He's laid clues on the bodies to prove his intellect.

FIELDS

That may well be the case.

POE

He feels inconsequential. He's a worker. A butler. A street cleaner. Someone who must obey orders. But each time he is forced to do something he deems beneath him, the killer's rage intensifies. He's killing to prove his worth. The victims mean nothing to him personally. They merely represent his oppressor.

Poe stops. He is certain he has come to deeply understand the killer's mind.

FIELDS

You are an ingenious man, Mr. Poe. I have frequently marveled at your perspective on the world. It is dark, but uncharacteristically fanciful for a man your age.

Fields crosses to a cabinet and retrieves one glass and a bottle of BRANDY. He sets down both in front of Poe.

POE

Fanciful. Were you attempting to compliment me, Inspector?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

FIELDS

Not at all. Ingenious men often overlook detail.

KABOOM. Outside, THUNDER rattles the windows and both men startle. A second later, a brief but intense flash of LIGHTENING illuminates the sky just long enough to reveal...A MAN. An enormous cloaked FIGURE watches motionless by an ancient tree that sways in the storm.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Shall we?

As Poe pours himself a drink, Fields gets back to the task of finding a needle in a haystack.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

I believe one of these invoices will be related either directly or in suggestion to one of your stories.

POE

Go on then.

FIELDS

First. Three cases, French wine: Coteaux Du Layon, Cotes du Frontonnais, Chateauneuf Du Pape.

POE

No.

Fields picks up another invoice.

FIELDS

Fifteen cases of wine. Loire Valley.

POE

I'm sorry. It means nothing.

FIELDS

Four cases Italian wine: Boscaini Valpolicella, Villa d'Amantillado, Rosso di Montalcino.

POE

What did you say?

FIELDS

Boscaini Valpolicella. Villa d'Amantillado.

Poe stumbles to his feet. He gasps for air.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

POE
Dear God, what have I done?

FIELDS
What is it?

POE
No. Please, God, no.

Fields grabs him.

FIELDS
Edgar. Tell me.

POE
"The Cask of Amantillado." It's a story
I wrote about revenge.

FIELDS
And someone dies?

POE
In a most heinous fashion.

Poe paces the room, his mind spinning.

POE (CONT'D)
A man kills his rival by walling him up;
the victim is entombed alive.

FIELDS
Where?

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

FIELDS
There are no catacombs in Baltimore.

Poe stops in his tracks as his mind pieces it all together.

POE
The waterworks.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BALTIMORE WATERWORKS TUNNELS -NIGHT

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A very tired, very gruff CUSTODIAN gives Fields some last minute instructions.

CUSTODIAN

I wouldn't stay down here too long if I was you. The fumes from the sewage can eat at your brain and before you know it you can't find your way back.

FIELDS

Thank you. We'll take that into account.

The custodian disappears up an iron LADDER as Fields leads his men deeper into the stone maze.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

You are looking for anything that would indicate recently laid stonework. Check the mortar for discrepancies in color.

POE

EMILY!

FIELDS

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

He blows it.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

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

The officers nod.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Then move out.

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

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

INT. TUNNELS -LATER

Several areas of wall have been excavated to yield nothing. Poe is caked with dust and sweat. He is exhausted and disoriented. The blackness of the tunnels seems eternal. Then...

A WHISTLE! From a distant tunnel, again, and again.

POE

Emily!

Poe runs toward the sound with all his strength.

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNELS -CONTINUOUS

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

OFFICER

The mortar is a different color. Look.

FIELDS

(Ripping off his coat)

Step back.

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

POE

What is it?

Poe claws at the bricks with his bare hands. Fields picks up a lantern to look through the small hole the officers have created.

CLOSE ON: a woman's lace DRESS SLEEVE.

POE (CONT'D)

And?

FIELDS

Keep digging.

CUT TO:

INT. TUNNELS -SIMULTANEOUS

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

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS -NIGHT

Poe grabs a PICK AX from an officer and hammers against the brick. He is obsessed.

Bit by bit the facade begins to tumble. As it does, Fields holds his LANTERN close. The flame FLICKERS ever so slightly, as if blown by a breeze.

 FIELDS
Hold up. Wait.

The men obey.

 POE
Why are you stopping?

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

 OFFICER
Detective?

 FIELDS
Stay on the wall.

Fields suddenly sprints down the tunnel.

BACK TO:

INT. ADJACENT TUNNEL -CONTINUOUS

The cloaked figure flees.

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS -CONTINUOUS

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

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS -CONTINUOUS

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

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS -CONTINUOUS

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

BACK TO:

INT. TUNNELS -CONTINUOUS

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

Fields follows. He hurries up the shaft to the street and as the detective raises his head from the hole he is nearly decapitated by....A HORSE DRAWN MILK WAGON. Fields loses his grip and plummets the ten feet back into the tunnel.

By the time he reaches the top again and safely climbs up into the street...THE KILLER IS GONE.

CUT TO:

INT. FIELDS' OFFICE -NIGHT

The DEAD MAN from the catacombs lies on a cold metal table that has been rolled into the center of the room.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A LARGE HOLE is evident in the deceased's skull where the killer struck. Fields, his sleeves rolled up past his elbows, examines the victim's legs.

FIELDS

I suspect we have found his missing sailor.

John Cantrell holds the lantern over the man's shin.

JOHN

How so?

FIELDS

(pointing to small pox marks on the sailor's legs)
Scurvy.

Poe stands shell shocked in the corner.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

And what of the letter you found?

POE

I have come to understand the desire to kill someone. This man cannot be past eighteen.

FIELDS

The letter, Mr. Poe. We, and by that I mean Emily, have limited time. Read it.

Poe forces his gaze from the sailor to the scroll in his hand.

POE

(reading)

"Do not bemoan the poor man's death. Like most sailors his life would surely be shortened by some disease or another. I have left more clues, some of which are obvious, some of which I do hope you find in time to write about before the paper sets this evening. She weakens Poe, in body and in soul. When you close your eyes try to imagine the sound of Emily's death rattle as the very essence of life drains from her now...quickly. As ever, your most faithful servant and devoted creation, The Raven."

Poe crumples the letter.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FIELDS

How much time is there before the press closes?

POE

We have an hour.

FIELDS

Then we must use it. Now please, your note pad.

Fields takes a POCKET KNIFE out of his desk drawer and begins to cut through the LACE PETTICOAT in which the sailor is dressed.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

By the head wound, the man was struck with great force by a large object. The killer struck down when he initiated the blow and I do not believe it took two to kill the sailor.

JOHN

Why would the killer dress him up like a woman?

POE

To taunt me. He risked getting caught simply for the thrill of watching me suffer.

FIELDS

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

CLOSE ON: A JAGGED BRASS SEXTANT plunged into the sailor's chest. With some difficulty, Fields pulls the instrument loose and the dead man's chest cavity DEFLATES as the air in the pneumothorax escapes through the puncture wound.

JOHN

What is it?

FIELDS

A sextant.

John covers his nose and mouth. The smell of death is pervasive. Both Poe and Fields are too focused to notice.

POE

It's used to navigate at sea but it's useless without a chronograph.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

FIELDS

You have a background in navigation as well as ratiocination?

POE

Even in the army, they taught us basic navigation.

Fields and John stare at Poe, incredulous.

POE (CONT'D)

I attended West Point. And was expelled.

Poe and Fields suddenly FREEZE.

POE (CONT'D)

Do you hear it then?

FIELDS

Indeed.

Fields takes the POCKET WATCH from his pocket. He holds it to his ear and listens. Tick-Tock. The detective crosses the room and sets the watch OUTSIDE the doorway. Poe motions for Fields to stop walking.

POE

Sssh.

Poe leans into the corpse. Another faint TICK TOCK can be heard...IN THE DEAD SAILOR'S STOMACH.

POE (CONT'D)

Christ, it's inside his belly.

Fields grabs the POCKET KNIFE from the table and carves into the cadaver's distended flesh. Without hesitation he forces his right hand into the bloody crevice and retrieves...a WATCH covered in the liquefied remains of the dead man's last supper.

FIELDS

What's it for?

POE

To plot a location.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HAMILTON'S HOUSE -NIGHT

Fields POUNDS on the front door to the mansion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Perhaps it would be better if I waited
outside.

FIELDS

It is time your emotions were set aside.

Fields bangs the door once more.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Open up. Open the damned--

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

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Where's Hamilton?

HAMILTON

(re: Poe)

What's he doing here?

REVERSE ANGLE TO...a robed Hamilton on the stairs.

FIELDS

We need your navigational maps.

Poe steps forth.

POE

Celestial almanacs to be precise.

CUT TO:

INT. HAMILTON HOUSE -NIGHT

CLOSE ON: TWO SMALL SCRATCHES deliberately carved into the
CRYSTAL WATCH FACE. PULL BACK TO...Hamilton searching the
chronometer through a magnifying glass. He steps back.

HAMILTON

He left these? The killer did?

FIELDS

On the dead sailor.

POE

In to be more exact.

HAMILTON

Incredible.

Hamilton quickly crosses to the wall sized BOOKSHELF.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FIELDS

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

HAMILTON

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

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

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

....a celestial almanac.

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

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

A celestial almanac helps us calculate the position of known objects in the heavens on a given date.

POE

Usually Polaris.

Poe scans the map intently. A maid enters and reaches for the teapot.

MAID

Shall I bring some more, sir?

Poe grabs her hand.

POE

Leave it.

HAMILTON

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

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

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

If we know the exact time...

Poe studies the watch under the MAGNIFYING GLASS.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE

Eight, seventeen. Rather sixteen.

HAMILTON

Which one, damnit?

POE

Sixteen.

Hamilton opens a book and scans it quickly.

HAMILTON

Eight sixteen then?

POE

Yes. Where's a real sextant?

HAMILTON

(pointing to shelf, while still
scanning book)

There. Used in conjunction with time,
this book should find a fix on position
of a celestial body. Using that fix as
an azimuth for longitude - how far east
or west. We can then use a sextant...

Poe hands Hamilton the SEXTANT. Despite their history, the
two men work together.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

...to calculate our north/south
relationship to that point in space.
Latitude.

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

POE

West Indies? It can't be.

Hamilton points to an exact location.

HAMILTON

Here.

CLOSE ON: The ISLAND OF ST. CROIX.

FIELDS

He couldn't have transported her.

HAMILTON

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

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

POE

It's not an island.

Poe grabs his coat and flees for the door.

POE (CONT'D)

St. Croix. Holy Cross.

HAMILTON

By God, Holy Cross Episcopal Church.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. HOLY CROSS CHURCH -PREDAWN

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

FIELDS

John, you and the others-around back.

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

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Fan out. If need be, break a window. We must get inside. NOW!

Poe and Fields spring to the SOUTHEAST side of the church. Hamilton continues to work the door while John moves stealthily along the back of the rectory. He clutches his pistol and moves silently until...a pebble rolls down the TILE ROOF. The killer is there.

Every muscle in John's body stiffens as he looks up. In the heart of the morning sun, a CAPE SILHOUETTE stands atop the roof. John shields his eyes, raises his pistol and fires. The BULLET misses and in a flash, the cloaked figure descends from the sky, his coat tails fluttering like the WINGS of a giant bird. He knocks John to the ground and forces a MASSIVE BLADE against the officer's throat. John screams...

JOHN

OVER HER--

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

FIELDS (O.S.)

The shot...northwest corner!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Despite the approaching officers, the madman is calm. He watches John convulse for several seconds before he escapes into a nearby grove of maple trees.

Fields rounds the corner just as the madman morphs into shadow. Already, the ground is soaked with John's blood. Fields yanks off his overcoat and presses the garment against his friend's neck.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Don't move. John. Listen to me...

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

FIELDS (CONT'D)

HELP! Someone. We need help!

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

FIELDS (CONT'D)

He's over here.

Fields is defeated.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

He's over here.

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

FIELDS (CONT'D)

That way. He's on a black horse. There.

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

POE

Fields.

FIELDS

Get him. Get him and kill him, Edgar.

POE

But...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FIELDS

GO!

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE HILLSIDE -MORNING

A cadre of officers gallop down a steep hill that is littered with BLACKSMITH SHOPS and PRODUCE STANDS.

OFFICER

Clear the way.

People leap for cover as the chase continues. Poe rides in a reckless fever. Jumping a hedgerow, he gains enough ground on the killer to take aim for a shot.

He drops the reins, levels his pistol, and while still galloping at breakneck speed, FIRES. But, the musket ball sails wide and Poe immediately reaches for his GUNPOWDER POUCH. Myopic, he begins reloading his flintlock PISTOL, an arduous task standing still, a near impossibility riding a horse.

A half dozen or so officers suddenly appear in the opposite direction. In conjunction with the group that rides with Poe, the men have successfully run the killer down a narrow street that appears to be a CUL-DE-SAC.

The killer, with no other option, gallops through a half open WAREHOUSE DOOR. Inside, men stand around huge bails of RAW TOBACCO leaves. They leap out of the way as the killer explodes through the bails and crashes through the back door into a busy DOWNTOWN STREET.

Poe and the men fall behind as people scurry out of their way. Two officers race along opposing sidewalks and narrowly miss SCHOOL CHILDREN, CARTS and SCREAMING WOMEN. The horses' hooves thunder against the wooden planks. Too weak to support the weight, a beam gives way and one of the officers pitches forward with his horse, slamming into the ground.

Poe passes the wounded man and rounds a corner just as the killer escapes around another. Poe presses on but is suddenly blocked by a team of DRAFT HORSES that pulls a large lumber wagon through the INTERSECTION. The road is clogged and impassable and the killer has escaped past the wagon.

POE

Damnit. Move them! MOVE.

Poe dismounts and tugs on the reins to help the draft horses move through the intersection.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

His effort is suddenly distracted as...BLACK PATENT LEATHER BOOTS approach the draft horse team from the other side. The killer is coming back. For Poe.

Caught without his pistol, Poe runs back to his horse just as...CRACK...the killer fires. Poe turns around in slow motion to find...the LEAD DRAFT HORSE, shot, buckling to the ground. As the horse falls, the weight of the harness is strained by the remaining five horses. The leather rips into their backs, they rear and tip the wagon, sending hundreds of planks onto the street. Poe is blocked. He watches helplessly as the killer, remounts and ESCAPES. Once more.

EXT. CHURCHYARD -DAY

Three men kneel beside John's now lifeless body. One struggles to remove the wedding band off the dead officer's finger. The officer wipes the blood clean, then puts John's wedding ring in his coat pocket.

An grey-haired man, DOC CLEMENTS, 60's, gives instructions.

DOC CLEMENTS

One. Two. Three. Lift.

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

DOC CLEMENTS (CONT'D)

Bind it nice and tight - three times around ought to do it. What was your friend's name?

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

DOC CLEMENTS (CONT'D)

I'm guessing about thirty.

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

FIELDS

John Cantrell. He was thirty-six, Doctor.

DOC CLEMENTS

He bled out real fast, didn't feel much for what it's worth.

FIELDS

Which is nothing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Fields heads back toward the church.

DOC CLEMENTS

You can't blame yourself detective.

But Fields is already gone.

CUT TO:

EXT. INTERSECTION -AFTERNOON

Charles Hamilton works with a team of men to clear the street. The DEAD DRAFT HORSE is dragged away by two mules. An officer whips the mules forward as they strain under the weight of their fallen comrade.

KABOOM. Thunder echoes in the tumultuous sky.

OFFICER

Get these planks up. Now.

POE

Have you seen Fields?

OFFICER

No, sir.

Bystanders hurry to clear lumber that has spilled off the upended wagon.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

On three then...ONE, TWO, THREE.

A dozen men right the wagon to free a DRIVER who is pinned under it. Hamilton leads the rescue team; he pulls the man free.

DRIVER

AHHHHHHH! Christ.

The driver's shoulder is dislocated and his right arm dangles uselessly. Hamilton grabs the limp arm.

HAMILTON

My name is Charles Hamilton, what's yours?

Before the man can answer...CRACK, Hamilton forces the shoulder back into its socket. Our driver immediately faints from the pain. Poe is there to help Hamilton set the man gently onto the ground.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE
Fields was shot.

HAMILTON
What?

POE
There was a second gunshot fired. He
tried to cover...

HAMILTON
Jesus, where was he hit?

POE
I don't know. But you must find him.

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

HAMILTON
And what of you?

POE
The paper goes to press in three hours.

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

HAMILTON
We have to believe she is still alive,
Edgar.

Poe notes the use of the prenom for the first time. Hamilton extends his hand.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
Much of this is my fault, if not all of
it. I should never have proceeded with
the ball.

Hamilton's eyes fill with tears.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)
She would still be with us.

POE
They are my stories, Mr. Hamilton, and
your daughter's love for me is the very
reason another man died today. Find
Fields. I have yet another massacre to
report.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Poe disappears into the crowd.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE PATRIOT -NIGHT

A large crowd has gathered outside the newspaper building. People pound on the doors and throw rocks at the facade. Poe's words swell above the sound of the angry mob.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"Like the crashing of a wave upon the shore, the man clawed and tore at my sleeve with strained and desperate spasms, pleading for his very life."

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. HARBOR -NIGHT

Fog hovers over the Baltimore harbor. The sailor clutches a street lamp. He coughs. Blood spatters his handkerchief.

POE (V.O.)

"...I approached him congenially and for a moment we spoke of his visit and desire to return to his new wife..."

The hammer flashes.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And as his eyes locked on the weapon a single thought pervaded his mind. He would never see his bride again. Or anyone else."

We now see the young sailor's face locked in a terrifying grimace.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"...my hammer's blow o'erwhelmed him so, and still the man clawed and tore at my sleeve."

Blood and bone splatter against the cobblestone. The sailor claws at the black coat sleeves then loses his battle with gravity.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

"Until the will to live was finally abandoned."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The victim's last sight is of a man as he escapes into the night. BLACK COAT TAILS rise and flutter in the fog.

BACK TO:

INT. BALTIMORE PATRIOT -EVENING

After a moment, Ivan sets down his pencil. Poe looks like half of his soul and most of his physical strength have been drained. He wipes his brow with a dirty handkerchief.

IVAN

It's horrible.

POE

Please set the print, Ivan.

IVAN

Oh, NO, sir. I would never criticize. I only meant...so he was bludgeoned?

Poe nods.

IVAN (CONT'D)

God bless him.

Poe stares off through the window. The fury of the crowd outside seems to swell, as Ivan begins to lay the printing blocks that will articulate to Baltimore the specific nature of the crimes.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE STREET -NIGHT

CLOSE ON: The fierce black eye of a horse. PULL BACK TO REVEAL: The bay gelding's steamy exhalations billowing in the cold night air. FIELDS DRIVES THE CARRIAGE. He clutches the reins with one hand and grips his wounded shoulder with his other. The skies have opened and icy rain pelts against the weary detective as he forces the horse forward down a narrow street.

FIELDS

HUP!

Fields slaps the reins against the horse's back and the animal presses on.

EXT. PORCH -NIGHT

Poe feeds Carl a small piece of egg. As the animal feeds from his hand, Poe weeps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Once again the killer has outwitted Poe and every hour lost is one in which Emily might die. Poe finally pitches forward in full on sobs.

POE
I'm so sorry.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHIP'S DECK -NIGHT

Fields struggles with his one good arm to help two sailors carry a WOODEN CASKET onto the Jeanne D'Arc. The Captain watches in disgust as one of his men is returned to him in a wooden crate. Fields removes his hat.

FIELDS
He was found last night. If you would like I can arrange for a burial here in Baltimore. At my own expense.

CAPTAIN
I do not think Maurice would enjoy spending eternity in your city. We will say our good-byes at sea.

FIELDS
Of course. You set sail in the morning?

CAPTAIN
Have you decided against the quarantine you so bitterly promised, detective?

FIELDS
It was merely an attempt to prevent another crime.

CAPTAIN
Yes. So it was.

The irony in the man's voice is not lost on Fields.

FIELDS
My condolences, Captain. I pray Maurice rests in peace.

Fields crosses himself and turns toward the gangway. As he does, a TRICKLE OF BLOOD splatters on the wooden deck. Fields clutches his shoulder as another BLOOD DROP falls. He wills himself two more steps toward the gangway and then...FALLS.

CAPTAIN
VITE. AIDEZ-MOI...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Captain hurries to Fields. Fields studies the man's face for a beat before the world goes blank. The Captain clutches the detective.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Il est mort. Je crois. Il est mort!

CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE -DAWN

The rain has stopped but Baltimore is blanketed in a thin layer of ice. It sparkles and yet the landscape is bleak as the sun makes little progress to warm the world. A church bell tolls SIX TIMES.

CLOSE ON: A RAVEN, perched on an icy branch. He chatters once, as if to mock the cold, then flies off.

CUT TO:

INT. FACELESS ROOM -MORNING

Emily's face is covered by a fine layer of white dust. Her eyes are closed and for a moment we think she is dead until her eyes suddenly open as we hear a pump: once, twice and again.

Air rushes up from below and the dust on Emily's eyelashes is blown off; small bits of it fall into her eyes. Tears begin to stream down her face as she deliberately and painfully draws air through her nose.

KILLER (O.S.)

Your dear Eddy thought he had found you.
It must have been devastating for him.

The killer rustles the morning newspaper and reads.

KILLER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

"Thus the sailor, long terrified of drowning, did so in a swelling tide of his own blood". Ah, here it is: a gold watch. Very good, Mister Poe. And what of the sextant?

INT. FIELDS' HOUSE -NIGHT

Poe is asleep on a chair in front of a fire that has long since died. A MAID, 23 and shy, taps on Poe's shoulder. The writer jolts awake in a panic, searching for his gun.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAID

Sorry, sir.

POE

What is it?

MAID

The paper.

Poe takes a second to wake up. An empty bottle of brandy lies next to the chair and the shy woman irritates him.

POE

Where's Fields?

MAID

I don't know sir, he hasn't come home yet.

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

MAID (CONT'D)

Something else, Mr. Poe.

POE

Yes?

The maid reaches into her apron and retrieves a note. Poe snatches it from her hand and reads. The Maid nervously watches as Poe's face darkens. She begins to leave.

POE (CONT'D)

Stay here.

She obeys.

POE (CONT'D)

When did this come?

MAID

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

POE

Why do you say that?

MAID

It was underneath the paper.

POE

Impossible. Look at the streaks of ink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MAID

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

POE

The note's been rained on.

MAID

Yes, Mr. Poe. It rained last night.
Before dawn.

Poe holds up the newspaper which is dry and smooth.

POE

But the newspaper is bone dry.

MAID

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

POE

(Raising his voice)

No! That's impossible. This note is in
response to what I wrote - in THIS paper.

Frantic with frustration, Poe grabs the maid by her
shoulders.

POE (CONT'D)

Don't you understand? He couldn't have
known what I had written. Not before the
paper came off the press.

The maid begins to cry.

MAID

Have I done something?

Edgar freezes, his mind is on fire.

POE

(Sotto)

Before it came off the press...

MAID

Sir?

POE

My, God.

Poe grabs his pistol and bolts out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. BALTIMORE PATRIOT -NIGHT

From behind, we watch as Ivan works the great iron PRINTING PRESS under the light of a single lantern. Clank. Clank. Metal crushes paper. The room is cold and the typesetter reaches into his apron to retrieve a FLASK. He sucks down the liquor and then coughs. Violently. BLOOD spatters down the front of his apron and he moves back to the press.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL: POE. He forces the barrel of a gun against the back of Ivan's skull. Ivan smiles but does not turn around.

IVAN

At last, the great Edgar Allan Poe here at *my* beckoning.

POE

Where is she?

Poe cocks the gun and Ivan turns around.

IVAN

Dying.

Ivan stares Poe down.

IVAN (CONT'D)

I wondered how long it would take you.

Poe pulls out the rain streaked note.

POE

Your response was written and delivered before the paper came out. Who else could have known what had yet to be published?

IVAN

Have you written the last installment?

POE

I won't do it. Not until I know Emily is safe.

IVAN

If you don't, your inaction will incite the final murder. You will kill your fiance. She is your fiance, is she not, Mr. Poe?

Poe charges Ivan.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

I'll kill you. I swear to God, I'll kill you.

IVAN

You'll kill me?

Without warning, Ivan backhands Poe. The blow sends Poe reeling across the room, pistol flying against a wall. Ivan picks him off the floor only to unleash a hurricane of violent blows.

IVAN (CONT'D)

You won't do ANYTHING unless I tell you to!

Ivan grabs the pistol from the floor. He aims it at Poe.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Emily lives because I say so!

Ivan pistol-whips Poe, once and then again. He is a madman gone rabid.

IVAN (CONT'D)

You live because I say so!

POE

Ivan--

IVAN

I stood outside and watched you and Fields last night. Two disgustingly well-heeled gentlemen sipping brandy while Emily dies. (mocking Poe) "The killer is someone who sees his life as utterly inconsequential."

Ivan slams Poe against the wall.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Inconsequential? Who is inconsequential now?

POE

Do whatever you want with me, but please, let her live. She's an innocent, Ivan.

IVAN

"The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge." Do you recognize the text?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE

Cask of Amontillado.

IVAN

You ventured upon insult every time I printed your inferior work. And then you had to bring Mr. Fields into this. This was OUR story, Mr. Poe. You were to immortalize ME. And now Emily feels the full weight of my revenge.

POE

How do I know she isn't already dead?

IVAN

The same way I know you didn't tell Fields you came to see me. We have a symbiotic need for one another. You need me to find Emily and I need you to finish my work.

POE

I wouldn't be so certain, Ivan. I may well have already told the detective.

IVAN

I doubt it. Such stupidity would ensure Emily's death and though you've spent your life imagining death...

Ivan presses the pistol against Poe's left eye

IVAN (CONT'D)

...we both know you are not man enough to perpetrate it.

Poe closes his eyes and Ivan...PULLS THE TRIGGER. The pistol does not fire. It is empty. Poe opens his eyes. He is still alive, but then...a HORRIFYING PAIN.

He looks down to see that Ivan has STABBED him in the stomach with a MASSIVE SYRINGE. He looks up at Ivan who simply smiles as he empties the syringe into Edgar's abdomen.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Now you're dying too. Just like Emily.
(coughs violently) Just like me.

Ivan holds up the empty syringe.

IVAN (CONT'D)

The proper name is Belladonna. However, most people know it as Deadly Nightshade.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

IVAN (CONT'D)

With the dose I gave you, you should have an hour left, maybe less. That gives you enough time to do one of two things, Mr. Poe. You can find your friend Fields and turn me in, or you can find your precious Emily.

Edgar staggers as the poison starts to work.

IVAN (CONT'D)

You are the famous writer, Mr. Poe. You tell me how our story should end.

POE

Ivan, please. Where is she?

IVAN

Every good story ends where it began. Even I know that, Mr. Poe.

"Where it began". And like a purloined letter, Emily was always in view. Poe's eyes flash with sudden recognition.

POE

I have your word she is alive?

Ivan hands the empty pistol back to Poe and coughs violently.

IVAN

It's all either of us has left.

Poe struggles for the door. The poison has begun to take hold of his entire body.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALTIMORE RAILROAD STATION -PREDAWN

Edgar bangs furiously on the front doors of the TRAIN STATION. Indeed, it is the same entrance through which the revelers passed for the MASQUERADE BALL.

POE

PLEASE! SOMEONE!

Desperate, Poe takes off his overcoat, wraps it around his elbow and shatters the HEAVY GLASS with an adrenaline fueled blow. He searches the massive foyer. A staircase ascends toward a tower from which arriving trains are visible. Conversely, another stairwell descends toward the basement. Poe considers, and for no reason other than instinct, he charges toward the stairs that lead UPWARD.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe's boots echo through the empty hall as he races for the circular stairwell. As the poison circulates through his body, Poe's vision begins to blur.

POE (CONT'D)

EMILY!!

Up a FLIGHT and then another. Finally, Poe reaches a landing from which another small staircase ascends to a lookout tower. Poe grabs the METAL GATE but it is locked. The bolt is shut and yet, ONE CLUE gives the killer away. Below the lock, small particles of RUST cover the marble floor. The metal door has been opened. Recently.

POE (CONT'D)

EMILY!!!

Poe searches for a way to break the lock. A wall mounted AX near a fire hose is his only help. Poe uses the weapon to wail against the bolt and three strikes in, the bolt yields. It collapses open on the floor and Poe pushes back the metal grate and charges upstairs. His breath is limited but his love is not. He summons all his strength to survive a few minutes longer as he screams:

POE (CONT'D)

EM-IL-Y!!

Nothing. Poe shouts again. He holds his breath to listen and still there is no answer. Too weak to stand, Poe drops to his knees in defeat as his heart begins to accelerate. The great writer's life begins to drain away exponentially now. Heartbeat. By fading heartbeat.

POE (CONT'D)

NOOOOOO! No.

A faint whisper suddenly floats into his consciousness.

VOICE

Edgar?

Poe spins around. He is still uncertain whether to trust it.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Edgar.

This time the voice is louder. More certain. At last Poe hears Emily's muffled cry and staggers headlong toward it, scrambling across the floor toward the far wall.

POE

EMILY!!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

But the sound has stopped. Poe cups his ear to the wall and moves along the facade but there is no answer until...a KNOCK. This time almost imperceptible. Like Poe, Emily is dying.

Frantic, Poe uses the ax to pound against the bricks. He swings with all his might, scraping, clawing at the bricks.

EMILY

Eddy...

His heart almost bursting, Edgar tears at the wall like a wild animal. The bricks fall away in large chunks until at last, Emily, is released from her tomb. Unconscious, she falls into Edgar's arms. She is covered in white plaster and the dust creates the illusion that she is an angel.

POE

Emily, please, open your eyes.

Poe clutches her face.

POE (CONT'D)

OPEN YOUR EYES.

There is no response, so Edgar lowers his lips to hers and forces the last bit of breath he still possesses into her lungs. A beat and then...A COUGH. Emily opens her eyes to find, Poe, staring back at her. He gently wipes the plaster off her face and Emily begins to weep.

POE (CONT'D)

It's alright, it's alright.

EMILY

Is it really you?

Poe strokes a thin strand of blond hair away from Emily's eyes. He studies her face, knowing that in a short time he will never see her again.

POE

Yes, Emily. It's me.

Emily clutches Poe's hand as she closes her eyes.

EMILY

I love you, Eddy. I love you.

Poe fights the torrent of emotion that wells inside him. His entire body trembles as he lifts Emily off the ground and stumbles toward the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

EMILY (CONT'D)

Promise you'll never leave me, Edgar.

With each descending stair-step, Edgar can feel the life draining away from him.

POE

I promise. I will stay with you. I'll be right here.

EMILY

Forever?

POE

Eternally.

Emily starts to drift in and out of consciousness.

POE (CONT'D)

Emily, stay awake. We're almost there.

She rouses some and wraps her arms around his neck.

EMILY

You didn't mean it, Edgar.

POE

Mean what?

EMILY

When you said you didn't love me.

They've reached the great hall and through the massive windows we see thick snow falling outside. Though every muscle in his body burns with poison, Poe struggles on.

POE

No. I could never not love you.

Poe now races for the entrance, reciting to keep Emily awake.

POE (CONT'D)

"And this maiden she lived with no other thought than to love and be loved by me."

Emily weakly smiles up at Edgar.

EMILY

That's beautiful. Who wrote it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

They reach the doors and exit into a blinding white light of snow. The entire screen goes white as we:

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAIN STATION -DAY

Chaos. Officers secure Emily on a stretcher. Hamilton grips his daughter's hand as they head toward a carriage.

HAMILTON

You're going to be fine. I'm here.

Hamilton is back to his old self.

HAMILTON (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you fools, clear the street. NOW.

The officers section off the route as Emily is loaded into a carriage with her father and whisked away. A lone figure, pale as a ghost, watches from a PARK BENCH across the street. It is Poe.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK -DAY

Snow falls in graceful clumps. Poe's eyes are nearly closed now. But he is not alone. Fields is beside him.

FIELDS

Please, Edgar. Come to the hospital.

Fields begins to rise. Edgar seizes his arm.

POE

Too late.

The two friends lock eyes. Fields can see in Edgar's face that these moments are indeed the author's last.

POE (CONT'D)

Reynolds and I had a deal. My life for hers.

FIELDS

I will not rest until I find him. You have my word. But I must say I am deeply bothered by your cavalier attitude in the face of grave illness--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Allow a man his death rattle.

A smile forms on Fields' lips as he struggles not to weep.

FIELDS

What can I do, Edgar?

Poe reaches into his pocket and retrieves a small VELVET BOX. Inside is a ring.

POE

Make sure she gets it. It's modest but...

Poe gasps for air. He is nearly gone.

POE (CONT'D)

Make sure Emily knows I intended to indulge her everyday of my life.

Fields stares at the ring. Inside is an inscription:

FIELDS

(reading)

"*The angels not half so happy, went envying her and me.*" You carried this with you all this time?

POE

I was a whimsical man, detective.

Poe leans back against the bench and closes his eyes in finality.

FIELDS

Edgar.

The author does not answer.

FIELDS (CONT'D)

Edgar!

POE

(a whisper)

It's not horrible, Fields.

FIELDS

What's that?

POE

The metamorphosis.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

And with one final and yet determined breath, Edgar Allan Poe...DIES.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL CEMETERY, BALTIMORE -DUSK

It's a cold, dark day. A penetrating wind sweeps over the bell towers of Baltimore. The world is blanketed with ice.

POE (V.O.)

Take this kiss upon the brow!

Emily sits in a wheelchair beside an open grave. Her father stands beside her and watches silently as a COFFIN is lowered into the ground.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And in parting from you now, Thus much
let me avow-

A lone RAVEN rests on the chapel spire and watches as Emily tosses a handful of DIRT into her lover's grave. As the gravel splatters across the coffin we PULL UP AND OUT.

Just beyond the cementary walls, a large CROWD has gathered. The very people who had once despised and chastised the great writer, have now come to pay their final respects.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You are not wrong who deem that my days
have been a dream;

As the sky darkens, we follow the giant bird as it lifts from the spire and circles the cementary once before soaring into the vast unknown.

As we come down from the cold gray sky, black coal SOOT billows up into frame, and we:

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN STATION -DAY

A passenger train's locomotive smokestack. An overhead station sign announces: CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA. A man sits on a bench. We cannot see his face because he is reading a NEWSPAPER while the train lumbers into the station.

POE (V.O.)

Yet if hope had flown away in a night, or
in a day, in a vision or in none, is it
therefore the less gone?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A WHISTLE BLOWS and for a second the world stands still. Then...the train doors open and people step off onto the platform. The CROWD increases as luggage is unloaded and children leap into their parent's arms.

CLOSE ON: a pair of meticulously shined black BOOTS stepping onto the platform.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL: a TALL MAN in a WIDE-BRIMMED HAT. As he picks up a SUITCASE and heads away from the train, a blast of STEAM from the locomotive causes the tails of his TOP COAT to billow and flap like the wings of a giant bird.

The man on the bench lowers his newspaper. It is Fields.

POE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

All that we see or seem is but a dream
within a dream.

The detective smiles confidently as he clutches his PISTOL and stands. Up ahead, the CLOAKED FIGURE, Ivan Reynolds, tosses a coin into a pauper's purse and heads out of the station, utterly unaware...he is being FOLLOWED.

FADE TO BLACK. ROLL END CREDITS.