NEVERMORE

A play by

Anthony Lawrence

ACT ONE

AT RISE: The stage is in darkness.

LIGHTS COME UP to reveal EDGAR ALLEN POE dressed in frock coat, dark eyes piercing, wavy black hair and thick moustache. He is standing at SR and facing the audience. Behind him US is a large SCREEN on which we can see silhouetted images of a shadowy Malenstrausser prison in New York circa winter of 1842. The impressions are of a massive castellated building of brick, stone and barred windows. On stage, different environments will consist of pools of light and some pieces of furniture to give impressions. We can HEAR the winter wind whistling and sighing. Poe speaks directly to the audience, softly southern, glancing upward.

POE: “The skies they were ashen and sober, the leaves they were crisped and sere – the leaves they were withering and sere – “

(On the SCREEN US behind Poe, beyond a barred window, we can see a shadow high on one of the cell walls, human-shaped, thrashing. It is a man struggling as he hangs by his neck from the skylight’s bars, a frock coat’s inner lining having served as the rope. The figure begins to spin as the man thrashes. Poe continues speaking to the audience)

POE: “ -It was night in the lonesome October of my most immemorial year.”

(On the SCREEN behind Poe we can see shadows of guards move into the cell to cut the figure down, HEAR THEIR VOICES)
GUARD: Captain! We need a hand down here!

(On SCREEN a large shadow figure bursts into the cell, CAPTAIN TOLLIVER, yells at the men)

TOLLIVER: What in God’s name happened?

GUARD: Tried to hang himself, sir.

TOLLIVER: Get him to the infirmary. Now!

POE: (Poe continues, moving closer to the audience) “Men had called me mad – the question was not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence – whether much that is glorious – whether all that is profound – does not spring from disease of thought – They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night – We will say, then, that I was mad. I grant, at least, that there were two distinct conditions of my mental existence – the condition of a lucid reason, belonging to the memory of events forming the earlier part of my life - “

(On the SCREEN US behind Poe we can see the shadow of Captain Tolliver and the guards leaning over a crumpled shadow-figure on the floor. We HEAR the Captain’s VOICE)

TOLLIVER: Good try, Poe, but not good enough. Oh yes, you’ll hang – but from my rope – not yours –

POE: (to the audience)”- and a condition of shadow and doubt, relating to the recollection of what constituted the second and most terrifying era of my being – “

(On SCREEN US, the shadow of a DOCTOR joins with the others over the crumpled figure)

TOLLIVER: How long until it wears off?

DOCTOR: An hour, maybe more.
TOLLIVER: Well, I want him alive and well when he goes on trial tomorrow for the murder of Mary Rogers.

POE: (to the audience) “-- So... now, what I shall tell you of the earlier period, believe -- and to what I may relate of the later time, give only such credit as may seem due-- or doubt it altogether—“

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SL that represents a tiny boarding house living room where a modest marriage ceremony is just ending, conducted by AMASA CONVERSE, a Presbyterian minister. Poe, younger now, is the groom, grinning happily at his bride, Sissy (VIRGINIA) CLEMM, his cousin, dark-haired teenager, with a fleshy prettiness. Close by is her mother, MUDDY (MARIA) CLEMM, a stocky, witty and energetic woman of fifty in widow's cap and long housedress. There are a few friends gathered for the ceremony, including DR. CHARLES LELAND REYNOLDS, a handsome man in his late forties. A table is laden with food and a white wedding cake. There is a trio of other boarders, prepared for the revelry to follow with harp, violin and bass.

REV. CONVERSE: (to Poe) You may now kiss the missus, sir...
   (balefully)
... and pray God approves and interprets this union favorably...

   (Poe and Sissy face each other as the room hushes. He cups her tiny face with his hands and kisses her gently on the forehead)

SISSY: (whispers) No, Eddie, on my lips, dearest...

   (Sissy pouts her young lips into a rosebud)

POE: Of course, Sissy, my sweet... straight away...

   (Kisses her softly on the lips and the room breaks into cheers, whistles, MUSIC. People begin to dance; Charlie Reynolds grabs a quick peck of a kiss from the bride. Others move to the table and dive into food and drink. Poe and Sissy join hands and ‘Ring
around the Rosie’, stomping occasionally into a Celtic jig. Muddy joins them, Reynolds grabbing Sissy for a dance while Poe swings into a romp with Muddy. Poe pinches her cheek, whirls her off

POE: Where’s my mandolin?

(He grabs the mandolin from a chair and begins to play it with gusto and dances around the room, others making way for him and clapping in time. Sissy dances by and Poe takes a fresh daisy from her bridal headpiece. Places it behind his ear, laughing, plucking at the mandolin and singing gaily)

POE : (sings and dances)

“There is a stone there,
    That whoever kisses,
Oh! He never misses
to grow eloquent
‘Tis he may clamber
To a lady’s chamber,
Or become a member
Of Parliament.”

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR ON THE SCREEN US where we can see a beach, the summer sun overhead. Sissy, in a bathing suit, lies on a blanket under a beach umbrella, drawing LETTERS in the damp sand with her forefinger. Looks up and sees Poe, also in bathing suit, moving to lie down beside her.

POE: What do you think, my little wifey? Am I not an excellent swimmer?

(He plops down beside her and she towels his back)

SISSY: Don't care much for your bathing suit, dearest. Looks very old, Eddie--
POE: No older than I am.

SISSY: But it's all stretched out--

POE: It only gets stretched out-- when I'm near you--

(He starts to nuzzle her neck. She pushes him back-)

SISSY: Careful-- you'll mess up my poem. You see, it's for you-- right here in the sand. The first letter of each line is a letter of your name-- (beat) “E”.

POE: (lies on his back) “Egocentric!”

(She gives him a wry look, continues)

SISSY: (reads) “Ever with thee I wish to roam--” (beat) “D”.

POE: (makes a long face) “Depressive.”

SISSY: Shut up, Eddie-- (reads) “Dearest my life is thine--” (beat) “G”.

POE: (belches loudly) “Gaseous.”

(She just shakes her head wearily, continues)

SISSY: (reads) “Give me a cottage for my home--” (beat) “A”.

POE: (squiggles in the sand) “Animated!”

SISSY: (reads) “And a rich old cypress vine--” (beat) “R”.

POE: “Romantic!”

(He grabs her, kisses her neck as she struggles to read the final line)

SISSY: “Removed from... the world ... with its... sin... and care”... stop it, Eddie!
POE: Well, now, who's the reigning poet in this family?

SISSY: Don't make fun of me now.

POE: *(kissing her)* I love your poem-- and I love you--

SISSY: Eddie... Eddie... it seems like a dream come true...

POE: I'm going to make all your dreams come true, wifey. I'll give you everything. You'll see. Everything! A carriage, a cottage and new clothes-- and for Muddy, our dear mother... a grandchild... starting now...

*(He kisses her deeply, begins to make passionate love to her, then stops suddenly, disturbed, gets up and moves off away from her. She watches him, her tiny face reflecting some inner dismay)*

**BLACKOUT**

**LIGHTS COMES UP** on SL. Poe stands in front of a long, beveled mirror in his and Sissy's bedroom, a modest and Spartan affair. Muddy hovers in back of him, brushing his pants and shoulders, adjusting suspenders, etc.

POE: Well, Muddy, I shall return in a few days with my pockets stuffed with money.

MUDDY: Are you so certain you'll win both prizes?

POE: My dear girl, many aspire to be, and even copy me, but they are not Poe.

**BLACKOUT**

**LIGHTS COME UP** on SR that is simply a lighted area with a small dais where two judges sit, one of the judges being JOHN PENDERELTON KENNEDY. He is a novelist and is holding the contest results and grinning down at Poe, surrounded by admirers who are congratulating him. There is a small banner on the dais that
announces: THE SATURDAY VISITER – Poetry and Short Story Contest.

FIRST ADMIRER: Congratulations, my dear Poe!

POE: *(glowing)* Thank you, thank you --

SECOND ADMIRER: -- I must say, *Manuscript found in a Bottle* is a magnificent story!

POE: Well, I am getting better, and may add-- if it be any comfort to my enemies-- that I have little fear of getting worse--

*(The men roar with laughter and applaud with appreciation)*

FIRST ADMIRER: Any new work coming out, Poe?

POE: Oh, I have a great deal to do-- and I have made up my mind not to die till it is done.

*(More laughter and applause)*

SECOND ADMIRER: Well, you've won the short story fifty dollars. How about a clean sweep with the poetry prize now?

POE: Well, that of course is up to the committee.

KENNEDY: *(somewhat uncomfortably)* I-- We-- had some difficulty in choosing the winning story-- they were all so new and engrossing-- *(opening an envelope)*

-- And now-- the winner of the Saturday Visiter Poetry Prize is-- Henry Wilton!

*(There is stunned silence. Poe's face goes from great expectation to disbelieving indignation)*

POE: Henry Wilton? WHO THE FUCK IS HENRY WILTON?
(There is some rustle of discomfort and embarrassment among the committee members. One of them, the Editor of the Visiter, JOHN HILL HEWITT, a large, imperious man, gets up and comes to the dais, accepting the poetry award and cash from Kennedy)

HEWITT: Thank you, Mr. Kennedy --(to audience, and Poe) Henry Wilton is my pseudonym--

POE: You-- Hewitt! You're the fucking editor of the Visiter!

HEWITT: Your language is quite revolting, Poe.

POE: I won the short story prize because of my fucking language, Hewitt! You've awarded the poetry prize to yourself!

HEWITT: I am a writer and composer, sir. The committee awarded me the prize quite fairly.

(Poe leaps forward like a charging tiger, knocking some of the audience members aside, confronting Hewitt in a fury)

POE: You-- a writer? You're a fucking teapot! You don't have the talent in your entire body that I have in my little finger. You tampered with the committee!

HEWITT: (containing his rage) The committee are gentlemen above being tampered with, sir!

POE: The committee is certainly gentlemen-- but I cannot place you in that category! You're an insipid cheat and a thief!

(Hewitt's face contorts with rage; he hits Poe squarely in the face, sending him rocking backward into the arms of some of the men in the audience. Poe recovers quickly, starts to go after Hewitt, but the men hold him back as he shouts and struggles, the scene becoming quite chaotic, Hewitt and others storming off)

POE: Cheat! Maggot! Teapot! (to the men holding him) Let me go!
{Poe and the men holding him collapse to the floor in a heap)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP CS to reveal Poe as he staggers alone on a street under a streetlight, quite intoxicated, face still bruised where Hewitt had struck him, mumbling to himself, adjusts his clothing. Poe hangs onto a lamp post a moment for support, then searches in his pockets for a cigar, finds a smashed one, the result of his encounter with Hewitt. Finding no other, he glances foggily at a small cigar shop nearby, makes his way unsteadily toward it at SL. A young female clerk is putting things away on a shelf in the store window as Poe makes his way to the window and peers in at her through the glass. The girl slowly turns toward Poe. Her name is MARY ROGERS, and the smile she gives to him is incandescent, beautiful face and figure, blonde hair. But the teeth are perfection and Poe stares at them for a long moment, then staggers forward, knees buckling under him. Mary rushes out of the shop to him and manages to hold him up in her arms, Poe's eyes bleary, but fixed on that still radiant smile.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP to reveal Poe lying on a bench in a small tavern room. DR. CHARLES REYNOLDS, last seen at Poe and Sissy's wedding, sits beside Poe. The tavern owner lingers in the b.g. Reynolds is gentle, concerned. Suddenly, Poe's eyes snap open, hands coming up to grasp at Reynolds, mouth working furiously in startled delirium.

POE:... heard all you said about me... every word a lie... horrible!... wonderful!... outrageous!

REYNOLDS: Come on now, Eddie... snap out of it... It's Charlie...

(Slowly, Poe seems to come back to reality, stares blearily up at Reynolds)

POE: Charlie...? Charlie, you old fuck, what're you doing in my dream?
REYNOLDS: This is no dream, Eddie. Someone found you in the woods passed out, brought you here to this tavern. You had my card in your pocket.

POE: (glances around) Where is she?

REYNOLDS: Where is who?

POE: The girl... with the exquisite... teeth...

REYNOLDS: (sighs) Eddiepoe... what in the hell have you been up to?

(Poe rubs his eyes, unclenches his hand, looks at the crumpled rose he has been holding)

POE: What's this?

REYNOLDS: Looks like a rose to me.

POE: I can't remember – anything.

REYNOLDS: Nothing?

POE: (sighs softly) Not after I arrived in New York. (beat) Oh, I suppose I drank a bit too much as is my habit...(beat) Then... a dream within a dream...(beat) I have a wooly taste in my mouth, Charlie... and the lingering shadow of something quite dreadful...

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP in the Poe bedroom SL. Poe is in bed with Sissy close by and attending to him.

SISSY: You poor dear poet. Lucky you have Charlie to look after you and bring you home. You should be ashamed of yourself.

POE: I'm so sorry.
SISSY: Is it so hard to trust me... to tell me when you can't be here? It just makes me madder than hell.

POE: Sissy... without your approval, I am but as a child groping benighted...

SISSY: Stop! (*whispers*) Stop writing what you say to me, Edgar...

POE: Edgar?

SISSY: Speak to me simply, Eddie...

POE: Shall I take a chance and be myself? Perhaps you won't love me. (*beat; darkly*) I drink as though I'm accomplishing an act of murder, as though there is something inside me that I have to kill...

SISSY: (*whispers*)... and still I love you...

(*She kisses him tenderly*)

BLACKOUT

*LIGHTS COME UP SR* to reveal Poe, Muddy and Sissy sit around a dining room table set for dinner. Poe looks at the sparse plates of bread and sorghum.

POE: Stale bread... very stale bread and sorghum. (*beat*) Well, shall we pretend it's fresh berries and cream? (*beat*) This is all so pitiful. The pretense being as pitiful as the meal. This plate isn't fit for pigs, which we don't have. But if we did... we'd be dining on a slice of ham tonight...

SISSY: Pigs would eat it, Eddie.

POE: What?

SISSY: The bread and sorghum.

POE: Oh my god, Sissy, how deft you are... at avoiding the point of any and all reason.
MUDDY: You're plain mean, Edgar. You ridicule her for trying to rise above the occasion. Women are seldom as simple as plots.

POE: Oh, you put it so well, Muddy. You should write...

MUDDY: Thank you, no! One in the family's a glut.

POE: Do you have any idea of what it's like for a young author... struggling with despair itself in the shape of a ghastly poverty?

MUDDY: Truth is we could all live on chicken feathers and be happy, but you can't wash them down with self-pity. What we're lacking in this house is resolve.

POE: (softly, ruefully) What our mother says is true. Forgive me, my dear. And Muddy, do you forgive me?

MUDDY: No drinkin' before noon. No charges against the plight and life of E.A. Poe. That's the trade, then we'll talk about amnesty.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SL and a riverbank of the Hudson ON THE SCREEN US. The tobacco shop girl MARY ROGERS’ body is carefully lifted from the water by police officers under the charge of CAPTAIN RAYMOND TOLLIVER, the heavyset officer seen in the beginning of the story. SERGEANT OGDEN, also seen earlier, as well as a MEDICAL EXAMINER, are part of the group. We can hear the wind and the ripple of the water. LIGHTS COME UP SL to reveal the group hunkered around the body of Mary Rogers. LIGHT FADES OUT on the SCREEN.

TOLLIVER: What’s that around her neck?

SGT. OGDEN: Looks like lace--

MEDICAL EXAMINER: Mmmm... tied so tight... it's completely buried in the flesh...
TOLLIVER: Seems to be fastened by a knot... just under the left ear...

MEDICAL EXAMINER: Horrible crime... strangled... beaten... teeth knocked from her mouth...

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SL to reveal Poe sitting at his desk in his studio, a shaft of light which also includes another lighted area that is the bedroom with Poe and Sissy's bed. The black cat, Catterina, is curled comfortably around his shoulders and neck like a black collar. A bottle of port sits on the desk close to Poe, from which he takes a drink, then goes back to writing pages of the story. “Murders in the Rue Morgue.” ON SCREEN US we can see Poe's quill pen gripped in his fingers writing the words that he speaks aloud.

POE: “... After great trouble, occasioned by the intractable ferocity of his captive during the home voyage... he at length succeeded in lodging it safely at his own residence in Paris...His ultimate design was to sell the beast...”

SISSY: (Entering from shadows, tentatively) Eddie...

(Poe quickly grabs the bottle of port and hides it in a drawer, then looks up toward Sissy as she enters. She leans over him, looking at the work before him)

SISSY: New story?

POE: (nods) Um. (beat) You wouldn't like it. I call it “Murders in the Rue Morgue.”

SISSY: Wonderful! Who gets murdered?

POE: A woman and her daughter.

SISSY: Is it Muddy and me?
POE: No!

SISSY: I'll just bet it is. You want to get rid of us... so you murder us in your story.

POE: *(smiles)* Perhaps it's not such a bad idea. What a thing it is to be pestered with a wife. *(beat; re: the story)* It concerns a puzzle that must be solved by a cunning intelligence.

SISSY: *(Plops in his lap)* Aha! Tell me more!

POE: Well... my hero... Auguste Dupin...

SISSY: It takes place in France?

POE: Don't interrupt! Yes... in Paris. Dupin is fond of enigmas, of conundrums...

SISSY: Like you.

POE: I warned you.

SISSY: Sorry. Go on.

POE: His is the kind of mind that I value... a mind that 'disentangles'...
 *(reacts to her sour expression)* Are you teasing me?

SISSY: But you sound so pompous! *(mocks him)* '... a mind that disentangles...'

POE: That's it. No more. Next thing you'll be sounding like my critics... 'Oh! Too Gothic! Too German!'

SISSY: Well, is it?

POE: Probably.
SISSY: Eddie, why do you look only in dark and spidery places for your stories?

POE: Well, these places are in all of us, they belong to us... we created them. We mostly read of it... but, there are those who must... do... and that is the chilling reality and... thrill of it.

SISSY: I have no dark places...

POE: (Pulls her close) No, you're a child of light... "In those looks, where whoso gazes faints, entangled in their mazes"

SISSY: Now, that's the kind of writing I like.

POE: Shelley's lines... not mine. Go to bed... I'll be there soon...

(She kisses him, moves to the door, stops and looks back, smiles impishly)

SISSY: After you gargle...

(She moves from the studio LIGHT THAT FADES OUT to the bedroom LIGHT, prepares for bed. Poe looks after her for a long moment, shakes his head slowly; takes out the bottle of port, looks at it. Now, he reaches down into the same drawer and brings out a small box, opens it to reveal the dark and withered ROSE he had in his hand in New York. We can see it ON THE SCREEN US. He places it on his desk and stares at it, trying to fathom its mystery. Then, he sighs, stretches, places the black cat on the floor and moves to the bedroom area, stripping his clothes as he enters it. Sissy sits in bed, her eyes on Poe who moves into bed. Sissy moves close to him. He takes her in his arms, begins kissing her ardently. Then, he turns and moves away as if stopped by his own increasing sensuality. Sissy is confused, disturbed)

SISSY: I may be young and stupid, but I say it is impious not to complete our vows and, more importantly, our needs.
POE: I thought... I mean... it seems as though your desires and womanhood are still sleeping... I feel my attachment to you is... ideal and spiritual...

SISSY: Why did you marry me? Why won't you tell people my true age? You're ashamed of me, of what you did.

POE: No... I married you because I loved you and couldn't live without you. I'm just afraid of... everything... especially failure. People snicker at my writing... and my too, too young wife. I believe they think I am captured by impotence in every cell of my being...

(Sissy's face clouds sympathetic, then she kisses him tenderly. Poe doesn't resist at first, kisses her back-- then his face darkens as he stares down at her, pulls away. He gets up and leaves the room. Sissy covers herself as best she can, staring after him, puzzled, angry, confused)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR revealing Poe standing in the midst of a few tombstones in a small cemetery. It is a grey, somber day. He is staring down at Mary Roger's single grave. Poe speaks directly to the audience.

POE: I had read many printed records of sensational bloody murders in the penny newspapers of the day...

(ON THE SCREEN US we can see two dark figures which appear to be Poe and Mary moving down the hall of a small Inn, Poe staggering as Mary affectionately kisses his neck and ear)

POE: (At the grave, reflective) But there was something more here in the death of this cigar store girl...

(Poe, on the SCREEN, pulls a key out of his pocket, inserts it into the keyhole. Door opens. They enter. Mary drapes herself all over him as they kiss passionately)
POE: *(At the grave, remembering)* The descriptions of her face... the line drawings... made me realize I had known her... intimately...

*(On SCREEN The door SLAMS SHUT. ON STAGE Poe totters slightly at the grave, then moves closer to the tombstone, stares down at some curious markings at the top of the stone)*

POE: *(To the audience)* Had it been in that blackout? But why had I been drawn here to her grave...?

*(He touches the markings, traces them with a finger. We can see the marking ON SCREEN US as Poe describes them)*

POE: It was a small oval ellipse with a cross at the top and the Hebrew letter "taw" at its center. What were the meanings of these strange markings? Under the ellipse are the two letters, "P.S.", and just below them, the single small case letter "m" with a dot under it. Below that, is a small triangle with the single digit "1".

*(He stares at the strange markings, his mind working to fathom their meaning)*

BLACKOUT

*LIGHTS COME UP on Poe standing SL in a spot lighted area with Dr. Charlie Reynolds. Poe is showing Reynolds the markings from the tombstone that he has drawn on a piece of paper.*

POE: *(Worried, anxious)* Well, it means something... a coded message of some kind...

REYNOLDS: Why? A message from whom? To whom?

POE: Something to do with her death.

REYNOLDS: Eddie, it was a dream. A dream!

POE: No, more than that. A memory. A key created by my mind. I have a part in this... I know it!
REYNOLDS: Come on, friend... you've got your iniquities, but murder is for the weak and unlucky.

POE: I am that, Charlie. I knew Mary Rogers. In my mind's eye I see her smiling... those incredible white teeth... the white of calamine or snow, no speck on their surface, no indenture near the edges...

(Beat, considering)

But I've always harbored an innate love of contradiction about life and death. Perhaps the experiment with Van Kirk is causing my imagination to run away with me...

(Poe and Reynolds are ushered from the SPOT LIGHTED area into another LIGHTED area CS by a servant that is a living room and are met by DR. HAMMOND, Van Kirk's personal physician, middle-aged, white hair, professional. A very elderly man, SILAS VAN KIRK, lies on a sofa. His face wears a leaden hue, eyes utterly lusterless, emaciation extreme)

HAMMOND: Dr. Reynolds, I have the utmost respect for you, but I must confess a terrible confusion with what you are doing with Mr. Van Kirk.

POE: I thought we were quite explicit, Dr. Hammond.

HAMMOND: But Mr. Poe, how can this... 'Mesmerism' possibly arrest the approach of death?

REYNOLDS: Are you familiar with the work of James Braid?

(Hammond shakes his head)

Well, he has called this trance-state that Mesmer introduced, a kind of artificial sleep... 'hypnotism' is the word he now uses—

HAMMOND: Well, I'm not one of those narrow-minded physicians who rule out the unorthodox. I'm familiar with the work done with nervous disorders and the anesthesia effects it has in major surgery-- but to hold back death?

POE: Dr. Hammond, do you recognize the survival of the self after death?
HAMMOND: Well, yes, as a Christian--

POE: I'm not talking about some Christian paradise-- but an unimpeded and nearly omniscient supersensitive cluster of unparticles--

HAMMOND: Dear me, I'm afraid you've really lost me now--

POE: Let me simplify it-- a second state-- after death-- a state that theoretically does exist. Now, to my knowledge, no person has as yet been mesmerized, or 'hypnotized', in 'articulo mortis'-- passing into this second state-- so it remains to be seen; first, whether in such condition, there exists in the patient any susceptibility to the hypnotic passes of my hands-- and secondly, whether, or for how long a period, the encroachment of death might be arrested by the process. Do you follow?

HAMMOND: I-- think so--

POE: Then-- may we proceed?

(Poe takes Hammond's silence as an affirmation)

As Mr. Van Kirk's personal physician, how long do you give the old gentleman?

HAMMOND: A week, ten days more or less--

(Poe moves to the sofa, followed by the others, where Van Kirk lies, propped up on pillows)

POE: Mr. Van Kirk, can you hear me, sir?

VAN KIRK: (feebly, but audibly) Yes.

POE: Are you entirely willing that I should continue the experiment of mesmerizing you in your weak condition?

VAN KIRK: Yes, I wish to be mesmerized. I fear you have deferred it too long...
POE: Very well, sir.

(Poe commences making mesmeric passes, a lateral stroke across Van Kirk's forehead, then lateral downward ones, as he directs his gaze entirely into the right eye of the man. After a moment, a very deep sigh escapes from the bosom of Van Kirk. Poe takes out his pocket watch and regards it)

POE: Five minutes before eleven. Look, Charlie, I perceive unequivocal signs of the mesmeric influence...With a few rapid lateral passes I made the lids quiver, and with a few more, closed them altogether...(To Van Kirk) Mr. Van Kirk... are you asleep?

VAN KIRK: (Audible whisper) Yes--asleep now. Do not wake me!--let me die so!

(Poe regards Van Kirk for a moment, then turns to Reynolds and Hammond)

POE: I do not think it advisable to disturb him further.

REYNOLDS: (nods, to Hammond) We should allow him to remain in this tranquil condition until death should supervene.

(Poe pours himself a drink from a decanter on a nearby table, downs it quickly)

HAMMOND: Gentlemen... I must confess to certain skepticism...

POE: The facts will shortly present themselves... and we shall all come face to face with our credibility.

HAMMOND: But to converse with the dead... it's... almost unthinkable...

REYNOLDS: Almost, Dr. Hammond... almost...

BLACKOUT
LIGHTS COME UP where Poe and Reynolds are seated SR at a small table drinking port. It is a small pool of light of the interior of the tavern. The door and the street with a streetlight outside can barely be seen.

POE: I don't have Hammond's skepticism, Charlie... but I do wonder sometimes if what we are doing is right...

REYNOLDS: Mesmerism is a medical therapy, Eddie. Goes back to Newton's concept of an electromagnetic ether.

POE: But is it right to tamper with God's infinite domain?

REYNOLDS: I never mix religion with scientific inquiry. If we can learn from Van Kirk's death, bring back transcendent knowledge from the Other Side, what a boon it would be to mankind.

POE: There are those who think I've been trying to use the dignity of philosophy to lift my writing above the journalistic level.

REYNOLDS: You know what your motives are and I know what mine are. My mother died very young, Eddie... like yours. If I could have uncovered the secret of survival after death back then, found some key to save her life, or even extend it for a few years, my God, I would have saved thousands by now.

(Three young men enter the tavern; they have been making the rounds and are pretty well into their cups. FREDERICK THOMAS is a novelist and songwriter, with a bawdy sense of humor and an iron leg. RUFUS GRISWOLD is an influential literary journalist, coarse-featured, bearded and balding, despite his twenty-eight years. HOLLY CHIVERS is also in his twenties, an aristocratic southerner, good-looking, well-dressed. They immediately move to Poe's table, laughing, delighted at seeing him)

THOMAS: Eddie! Been searching for you everywhere!

GRISWOLD: They've dragged me through every filthy saloon on the waterfront--
POE: Dear friends, you flatter me with your persistence. Seems I have some catching up to do. You all must know Charlie Reynolds, doctor, mesmerist, keeper of errant poets.

(To Reynolds, presenting the others)
Frederick Thomas, Holly Chivers, and Rufus Griswold, the precious fucking fellow who has the audacity to contest my self-appointed role as Arbiter of American Taste.

REYNOLDS: My pleasure, gentlemen... but I must leave you to your diversions as I have a pressing engagement with a young lady about to present the world with another bastard to contend with--

(They all laugh, shake hands. Reynolds claps Poe on the back)

REYNOLDS: Easy does it, Eddiepoe... remember your last visit to New York...

POE: Not to worry, Charlie. I am among friends.

REYNOLDS: (Eyeing them wryly) That's what worries me.

(He exits as they all laugh)

POE: (to Thomas) Lord, for a man with an iron leg and a bellyful of port, you seem an unusually spirited 'bon vivant' tonight!

THOMAS: (slapping his leg) My 'contrivance' notwithstanding, I have written a song out of profound respect for your genius and acquirements.

CHIVERS: Jesus, was that the sour ditty you were warbling earlier this evening? What a bloody ear twister!

THOMAS: (Pounds Chivers good-naturedly) Sour? Ear twister? You Black Irish asshole, you wouldn't know a good song if Verdi wrote it!

CHIVERS: Who's Verdi?
GRISWOLD: Only the operatic genius all Milan is raving about. If you had half the taste for opera that you have for port, you'd know that!

(Chivers grabs Griswold, tries to kiss his head)

CHIVERS: Let me kiss your bald spot, Gris. 'tis said to bring good fortune. On second thought, it'd probably bring me mouth lice.

THOMAS: (shouts to the innkeeper) More port! More port! We're drying out here!

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP on the street outside the tavern as the group comes out singing. There is a single street lamp.

POE/CHIVERS/THOMAS: (singing) "So good luck to those people and safe may they land"

(Poe leads Thomas, Griswold, and Chivers out of the tavern onto the street under the street lamp. They carry bottles of port, tipping up as they move off, laughing and singing raucously)

POE/CHIVERS/THOMAS: (singing)... "They are leaving their country for a far distant strand, They are leaving old Ireland, no longer can stay, And thousands are sailing to Americay"

(They end with a flourish, laugh and applaud themselves. Then Thomas puts his finger to his lips in a mocking gesture of silence)

THOMAS: Shhhh... no love lost on Sons of St. Patrick around here, lads... they think we're all drunks!

(They all laugh. Griswold moves to Poe)

GRISWOLD: My dear Poe.

POE: What, Rufey... you still here?
GRISWOLD: (overlooks the slight) How about contributing to my new anthology?

POE: In exchange for what?

GRISWOLD: A line of critical praise?

POE: (Shakes his head in the negative) What I need is a commission so that Sissy is warm and fed and I can hold my head up.

(Thomas points down the street)

THOMAS: Look who's coming --

CHIVERS: Ah, it's Nathaniel Willis!

(Approaching from SR under a SPOT LIGHT is NATHANIEL WILLIS, a lively, clever, and well traveled young man of striking appearance, six feet tall, slender, dressed with dainty elegance. He carries a white hat that he waves about him as if moving to music.)

GRISWOLD: Oh, God, I just can't deal with his Miss Nancyism... look at him... minueting up Pine Street... queer as a gondolier.

POE: A more estimable man, in his private relations, never existed.

WILLIS: Ah, my dear, dear sweet friends!

(They all shake hands and embrace. Griswold remains aloof)

POE: Do you come from the newspaper this late, Nathaniel?

WILLIS: Dear God, I'm toiling under whip and spur... obliged to turn to account every trumpery thought I can lay my wits to... but... my rubbish, such as it is, brings me a very high price.

THOMAS: A pen in one hand...
CHIVERS: ... and a bottle of Eau de cologne in the other...!

(They all laugh, Willis joining in good-naturedly)

POE: Can you give us a taste of your journalistic wares?

WILLIS: Ah, today, people simply dread being mistaken for dead and coffined! Who's to say when such grievous conditions as tetanus and asphyxia can simulate death? Indeed, ecstasy has been known to cause a partial and momentary suspension of life!

(They laugh approvingly)
I have, in this regard, written of and fashioned a coffin for just such concerns.

(They all, with the exception of Griswold, eagerly and loudly express their delight. They start to move off down the street, but Poe suddenly stops, his eyes fixed on something nearby)

CHIVERS: What is it, Eddie? What's the matter?

(A POOL OF LIGHT BATHES The TOBACCO SHOP Poe entered days ago, closed now, dark, silent. Poe stares at the shop window, reacts to Mary Rogers as she appears inside, young, pretty, sensual. She smiles at Poe, dazzling, teeth white as snow. Then she disappears as quickly as she had appeared. Poe shakes the memory off, follows his friends as they move off toward SR singing drunkenly)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP CS that illuminates what appears to be the interior of a funeral parlor. The room contains several coffins of various types and sizes, some holding earthly remains. Beyond the coffins, Poe and his friends enter, Willis lighting a lamp that throws an eerie glow through the grim room. Willis has a bottle that he drinks from and is quickly catching up with the others in unsteady revelry. They all look at the coffins and the occupants with great interest and dark humor. Griswold is appalled.
WILLIS: *(indicating a coffin)* Here's the one I designed. I call it... a "life preserving coffin"... automatically opens... if the occupant stirs.

THOMAS: *(to the corpse in the coffin)* Hear that, my fine fellow? You have nothing to worry about. But we must inspect the mechanisms first hand. Come along, Holly, help me with this gentleman... he appears a bit stiff...

*(Thomas is trying to get the corpse out of the coffin as Griswold watches, aghast. Chivers comes and helps)*

CHIVERS: No more stiff than you are, Frederick!

GRISWOLD: Stop that! You musn't! Oh, this is terrible, obscene!

*(But they manage to sit the corpse in a chair and stuff a cigar in its mouth. Willis moves on to another coffin. Poe climbs into the coffin from which the corpse had been removed)*

WILLIS: *(indicating)* Now, here... an attachment of bells... so the revived occupant can ring to... alert those above ground.

POE: *(sitting upright in the coffin)* To be buried alive... appalling! The very soul sickens at the thought... you have done humanity a service, Nathaniel.

*(He lies down in the coffin. Thomas and Chivers are removing a female corpse from another coffin. Griswold tries to prevent them, the men grappling over the lady)*

GRISWALD: No! No! No!

THOMAS: *(to the female corpse)* Come give me a kiss, my angel! You are a splendid girl and in fitting company! *(kisses the corpse)* Ah, I love the smack of a pair of rosy lips!

WILLIS: *(to Poe, peering into the coffin)* Are you comfy?

GRISWOLD: Disgraceful, Poe! You're all despicable!
POE: (Sits up, takes a swig from his bottle) I shall prove the survival of the self... in a second state... after death.

CHIVERS: After death? A second state?

POE: Through the application of... Mesmeric influence.

THOMAS: A bit much to swallow, Eddie boy.

GRISWOLD: Ridiculous.

POE: Doctor Charlie Reynolds and I have an experiment in progress. Soon, we shall prove the theory to the world.

(The two corpses they have removed are on the floor, the female on her back, the male on top of her. The others look down at them)

THOMAS: Well, maybe there's something in what you say, Eddie!

CHIVERS: They're bloody dead-fucking!

(They all laugh, except Griswold who turns from the scene in horror)

GRISWOLD: You'll all burn in Hell!

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SL on a small office with a door that reads: LEA & BLANCHARD – Publishers. MR. LEA and MR. BLANCHARD confront Poe in the office. Both men are dour.

BLANCHARD: Mr. Poe... your 'Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque' had a printing of 750 copies and was undertaken... entirely at our expense...

POE: I'm aware of that, Mr. Blanchard, but what have I gotten out of it? A few copies and the copyright.
LEA: *(rifles through some newspaper reviews)* Look at the reviews... 'slipshod'... 'wild'... meaningless', 'pointless', 'aimless'... 'caricature run mad'...

POE: *(scowls, pulls out another newspaper)* What about this? *(quotes)* 'The author... has placed himself in the foremost ranks of American writers'...

BLANCHARD: We're not unaware of your potential, Mr. Poe... but an advance at this point is simply unwarranted...

POE: Then I'll sell you the copyright... for just a few dollars...

*(Both Blanchard and Lea laugh derisively)*

LEA: My dear fellow, we haven't sold the edition we've printed. What would we do with the copyright?

POE: But I have eight more stories... for a second edition...

BLANCHARD: I'm sorry, Poe... but I'm afraid we're simply not interested in any second edition.

*(Seething rage builds in Poe; he stands and glares at the men, body trembling, fists clenched)*

POE: You little dot-and-carry-one maggots... I've served you like St. Patrick served the toad. Well, I hereby relieve you of any further fucking of E.A. Poe!

*(Turns and storms haughtily out, leaving the men in open-mouthed shock)*

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR on a small police station office where Captain Tolliver and Sgt. Ogden are regarding news reports.
OGDEN: *(quoting from paper)* ‘... This brutal murder seems to have the police paralyzed...’

TOLLIVER: *(crushes the paper)* It’s only been a week, for God’s sake... the press makes her look like a saint and us like idiots--

OGDEN: Maybe it’s time for a reward--

TOLLIVER: *(beat; considers it)* Five hundred dollars-- and tell them that we are proceeding with vigor despite there being an absence of any clues whatsoever-- *(beat)* I want everybody who ever knew this girl brought in-- customers, family, friends. If we’ve questioned them, we’ll question them again. Get on it, Sergeant --

*(Ogden nods, moves out. Tolliver regards the crumpled paper, then tosses it into his wastebasket)*

BLACKOUT

*LIGHTS COME UP* on SR as Poe lies on a cot smoking opium, other figures sprawled in misty bunks. Poe, deeply under the influence, squirming, in the tortures of some horrific nightmare...

*On the SCREEN US is an OPIUM FLASH* all played out in dark SHADOWS. Inside the Poe house, Sissy lies on the floor in a pool of blood, Muddy shrieking with ghastly terror as THE SHADOW of some dark monstrous figure, hairy hand wielding a long straight razor, attacks her, cutting her throat from ear to ear.

The monster pauses in front of a mirror, the shadow reflection now that of a vicious-looking Orangutan, the hairy face BECOMING that of POE. Then, TURNING back to APE as it turns on the fallen figure of Sissy, grasping her throat in its talons. ON STAGE Poe comes out of the nightmare SCREAMING, SOBBING, hurls the pipe away from him.

BLACKOUT
LIGHTS COME UP on Poe and Charlie Reynolds and Poe on a platform that appears to be a grassy knoll above an aqueduct that overlooks a river far below that we can see ON THE SCREEN US.

POE: (Tortured) I was the monster, Charlie...!

REYNOLDS: Opium was the monster...

POE: I ripped Sissy apart...then Muddy!

REYNOLDS: In the story you hallucinated...

POE: But what if I just saw the truth about myself? That it’s in me, the power, the desire to kill...then I could have killed Mary Rogers...and I could kill again...

REYNOLDS: Yes, you could, if it were other than dust in your eyes, but it is exactly that...a deception...

POE: (Suddenly) Let’s find out, Charlie. We’ll do it in the same way I wrote “Murders in the Rue Morgue.” I chose the outcome first, then worked backward, adapting every element...

REYNOLDS: Regression? No, no...regression is very dangerous...untried...

POE: Don’t give me that doctor crap...My life is coming apart...whatever the cost I want to know!

(Reynolds regards his friend’s imploring face for a long moment)

REYNOLDS: Alright, let’s go.

POE: No one comes here. Do it!

REYNOLDS: On the grass, under a tree? (Poe nods) You are a fucking brittle and crazy friend.
(Reynolds hesitates, glances around, then hunkers down next to Poe who sits on the grass. Slowly, Reynolds passes his hand laterally across Poe’s forehead, making mesmeric passes to induce a trance state in his friend. Poe’s eyes close as he slips into the state.)

REYNOLDS: Do you know this voice, Eddie?

POE: Yes.

REYNOLDS: Let your mind travel backward...from this time to July 10th...the night Mary Rogers was murdered. Is that all right?

POE: Yes.

REYNOLDS: Quietly drifting backward now...all is safe...back...back...

(ON SCREEN US appear dreamlike fuzzy SHADOW images of what Poe is recalling, a tavern room, Poe savagely making love to Mary Rogers on a bunk. The shadow figures appear to be quite drunk. Now, the lovemaking of the figures takes on an even darker tone as the lovemaking escalates into conflict. We can see the figure of the man picking up a bottle of port from a table and smashing it in the mouth of the female figure. Her scream is bloodcurdling as the figures fade away.)

POE: (Collapses into Reynolds arms as he comes out of the trance, sobs uncontrollably) My God...my God...!

REYNOLDS: Don’t hold your breath, Eddie...breathe...you’re frightened...breathe...

POE: I saw it! I hit her! Her teeth, my God, those beautiful teeth shattered...(Beat, anguished) There’s something inside me, Charlie...a force...

REYNOLDS: Yes, a force for good...and bad...but you can solve it with a choice, Eddie...
(Poe pulls away from Reynolds, stands perilously close to the edge overlooking the river. He totters there, staring downward. Reynolds moves toward him in alarm)

POE: ...An impulse, Charlie...that increases to a wish, the wish to a desire, the desire to an uncontrollable longing...

REYNOLDS: Listen to me, Eddie...just because you hit her doesn't mean you killed her...

POE: ...It’s an imp...deep inside me...a perverse imp...that compels me to act contrarily...simply for the reason I should not...

REYNOLDS: Edgar, my dear friend, we all have a limb of Satan...none of us are paragons...we are a mix...There is the trouble of our original sin...and rogue imps...

  (Poe totters again, almost as if he is being compelled to plunge into space. Reynolds wants to grab him, but is afraid he might be dragged off as well)

POE: I've given my literary creations license, Charlie...license to indulge in every passion...allowing them to torture for pleasure...even commit murder! (Beat) Somehow...in a moment of frenzy...I surrendered to those darker instincts I've bottled up inside myself!

  (Reynolds reaches suddenly as Poe nearly topples off the ledge, yanks him back to safety. Poe crumples into his arms, sobbing)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR in Captain Tolliver's office, the big man behind his desk, Poe seated in a chair opposite. Captain Tolliver regards Poe with an expression of amused tolerance. Poe is intense, nervous, despairing, but determined to make his point. Tolliver bites off the end of a cigar, lights it.
TOLLIVER: Well, Mr. Poe, I’m something of an admirer of yours... I particularly enjoyed... "Murders in the Rue Morgue"... fascinating... clever character, your Dupin... all this, what did you call it... "deductive reasoning"? Not the real world, of course...

POE: Captain Tolliver, I'm not here for a critical analysis of my writing...

TOLLIVER: My dear sir, I'm afraid you're taking your work much too seriously.

POE: I killed Mary Rogers, don't you understand! I must be arrested and incarcerated before this madness overtakes me and I kill again!

TOLLIVER: Mr. Poe, I'm a very busy man, and I really don't have time to indulge you in some creative flight of fantasy.

POE: You must believe me!

TOLLIVER (Tolliver regards him for a beat, then) All right, you killed her. But you must provide me with more evidence than alcoholic blackouts and vague memories.

POE: But isn't my confession enough?

TOLLIVER: I'm afraid not... particularly in light of the fact that we already know who killed Mary Rogers, and have plenty of solid evidence to support it.

(Poe can only stare at the man with a mixture of relief and skepticism)

POE: You know who killed her?

TOLLIVER: Absolutely. Now, please stop wasting my time.

(Slowly, Poe rises and goes out of the office, passing Ogden who eyes him darkly as he comes into the office from a side room. Ogden shuts the door after Poe goes out)
TOLLIVER: Hear that? *(Ogden nods)* Unfortunately, we do not have any solid evidence. Not yet. But all criminals have one thing in common--

SGT. OGDEN: Eventually, they return to the scene of the crime.

TOLLIVER: Exactly. I want our man followed night and day. Give them shifts and see that they stick to them. I don’t want him left out of their sight for a moment.

BLACKOUT

**LIGHTS COME UP ON CS. Poe is in a huge ballroom where people dressed in lavish costumes dance gaily. Masked dancers, clowns, etc. spin to the music of a chamber orchestra. An elegantly costumed and masked young woman revolves to Poe and takes him in her arms, dances him off across the ballroom. A huge grandfather clock is tolling the midnight hour...Poe and the masked young woman dance across the floor. She removes her mask, revealing that it is SISSY, her face pale and wan. But as they spin around, the face of Sissy CHANGES and becomes MARY ROGERS, glistening smile, dazzling white teeth. The clock tolls its final chime...A shrouded figure, its grave clothes dabbled in blood, appears amid the dancers who freeze in stricken silence, acknowledging the presence of the RED DEATH. Now, the dancers begin to scream, dropping one by one, blood streaming from their mouths, noses, ears...**

BLACKOUT

**LIGHTS COME UP SL on Poe and Sissy in their bedroom. Poe awakens in bed next to Sissy from the nightmare, gasping for breath and perspiring. Sissy responds from sleep, holding him.**

SISSY: Eddie... it's all right... it was just a dream...

*(He clutches at her... then, as if some hidden and restricted passion has been let loose, he begins to make love to Sissy, stripping the nightgown from her body, kissing her with unrestrained ardor, she joining him in unbridled lust)*
BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP in the Poe house at SR. Sissy sings to her own accompaniment on the piano, her eyes shining and seeking out Poe. He is rendering his own accompaniment on the flute. The room is filled with their guests, Dr. Reynolds, Willis, Thomas, Griswold, Chivers, and several young women. Muddy is also doing her usual thing in the kitchen, fixing tea and cakes.

SISSY: (singing and playing) "I know where I'm going, she said,
And I know who's going with me...
I know who I love--
But the dear knows who I'll marry.
Feather beds are soft...
And painted rooms are bonny...
But I'll forsake them all, to go with my love--"

(Sissy suddenly stops as she begins to bleed profusely from her mouth. Muddy cries out in alarm; others gasp. Poe drops his flute and charges forward to her as she clutches at her mouth, blood pouring through her fingers. Dr. Reynolds moves quickly forward as Muddy grabs for towels and brings them to her. Reynolds and Poe quickly escort her toward the bedroom, the guests terribly disturbed, shocked)

REYNOLDS: I'll take care of her... wait outside...(to Muddy) Get me some more towels...

(Muddy moves to comply, taking Poe's arm to escort the stricken man from the room)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COMES UP in the same room. The guests are all gone. Poe paces the room like a caged animal, his face and body racked with anguish. Muddy comes out of the bedroom, eyes wet with tears, wringing her hands, Reynolds close behind, wiping his hands, his face dark and disturbed. Poe rushes to him.
REYNOLDS: I'm afraid it's... quite serious...

POE: She must have broken a blood vessel singing... that's it, isn't it?

REYNOLDS: No, Eddie... I believe it to be...

POE: I don't want to hear it!

REYNOLDS: You have to know, Eddie, she can die.

(Poe stares a long moment at Reynolds. Then, he turns and addresses the audience)

POE: ..."And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night...and darkness and decay held illimitable dominion over all."

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SL in the Poe bedroom. Poe hovers over Sissy who is in bed.. Pulls the covers up around her. Sissy's face pale, breathing heavily. He gives her a sip of water.

SISSY: A medical therapy? Mesmerism?

POE: It has a respectable scientific lineage... (He stops, seeing the confusion on her face) I can't bear the thought of losing you...

SISSY: But Eddie, you must be strong, Charlie says...

POE: I told you I don't want to hear that! You're better... every day you're better!

SISSY: Then, why Mesmerism?

POE: To hold back death. To fight it. To empower your mind and soul into such resistance that the old Thief goes somewhere else in the night. (beat; intense)
Don't you see, Sissy-- when I have you in the trance state, I have some control over your mind... and body... I can help you.

(Sissy regards his intense face for a moment, smiles, strokes his cheek)

SISSY: (brings out magazine) I read your biography in the Saturday Museum... it covers the entire front page. It's such a wonderful account of your life.

POE: It should be, I wrote it myself... lies and all...

SISSY: They aren't lies! You're a genius-- a brilliant writer-- I've always known that no matter what any of those idiotic critics say.

POE: God, that you have to lie here in this cramped and horrid room. (beat) We'll move to New York for the summer... maybe a cottage... or farmhouse.

SISSY: Maybe... I won't last... until summer. (coughs slightly) It's getting cold.

(Poe moves to a cabinet, retrieves a military cloak that he folds around Sissy's body)

POE: Maybe this will help.

SISSY: Look at me! Skin and bones! "Death in life"-- isn't that what they call it?

POE: Stop it, Sissy... this isn't like you.

SISSY: Make love to me, Eddie...

POE: Now?

SISSY: She can't hear us.
POE: You're too weak, Sissy.

SISSY: Maybe it will make me strong.

(Poe hesitates, then slowly takes her in his arms, begins kissing her neck. She responds passionately, begins coughing wildly. He holds her as she continues to cough)

BLACKOUT

SPOTLIGHT illuminates Poe at SR. He is holding a newspaper of the time. Speaks directly to the audience.

POE: (reads from the newspaper)"... Those who are guilty of such horrid crimes, choose darkness rather than light... “

(Poe looks up, his mind working it out, scowls deeply. He drops the newspaper and begins to walk slowly across the stage, the SPOTLIGHT following him)

POE: (To the audience as he moves slowly) I had to go. I was being pulled inexorably toward the place I had seen in the mesmeric trance.

(Poe stops for a moment, listens, hears a NOISE, moves forward stealthily as if he is peering through foliage. The SPOTLIGHT EXPANDS to include two small boys scampering nearby who stop to regard some women’s apparel lying on the ground. Poe moves forward, the boys turning to run off. Poe moves to the clothing, leans down and examines a white petticoat, picks up a pocket handkerchief, examines it. ON THE SCREEN US we can see what he describes)

POE: (To the audience, showing them) It’s a petticoat...and a handkerchief with initials embroidered on it: "M.R." There are also some bloodstains on it.

(Poe reacts, bends down to the ground)
POE: (To the audience) There appears to be some evidence of a heavy burden having been dragged across the ground here.

(Just at this moment, a man comes charging out of the shadows, attacks Poe with his fists. DAVID PAYNE is in his early thirties, good-looking, intense, raging)

PAYNE: You killed her!

(Poe is stunned by the attack, can only put up his hands to defend himself. Payne tackles him and bears him to the ground, beating at him unmercifully. Captain Tolliver and several other police officers suddenly appear and move quickly to grab Payne and pull him off Poe who is bleeding and battered)

PAYNE: Let me go...!

(Payne recovers himself slightly, gestures at Poe bitterly)

PAYNE: He did it!

(Captain Tolliver shakes his head wearily, turns to Poe)

TOLLIVER: Convinced him, did you?

POE: I haven't talked to him... I don't even know him...

TOLLIVER: What the devil are you doing here, Poe? You nearly ruined everything!

PAYNE: He was with her! I saw him!

TOLLIVER: It's no use, Payne! Our case against you is airtight!

POE: But Captain--

TOLLIVER: I'm losing my patience with you, Poe! Payne was engaged to Mary Rogers and he's returned to the scene of the crime--
POE: But so have I, Captain!

TOLLIVER: Because you're a desperate writer looking for material! Now get out of here before I run you in for interfering with the performance of my duty! (to the police, re: Payne) Take him away.

POE: No! No! You're making a mistake!

(Tolliver hisses sarcastically at Poe as they move off)

TOLLIVER: We don't need any bloody 'deductive reasoning', Mr. Poe.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS come up on a small area SL that represents Van Kirk's house. Dr. Hammond is washing his hands in a basin at the far side of the room. Reynolds is examining Van Kirk. Poe sits in a chair near the bed, eyes on Van Kirk. Reynolds uses an ophthalmoscope to examine Van Kirk's eyes.

POE: But they've got the wrong man, Charlie--

REYNOLDS: Not according to them.

POE: It doesn't matter. I know the truth. Payne is innocent. He could be convicted and hanged for a crime that I committed--

REYNOLDS: Oh, come now, Eddie--

POE: But I'm not going to let that happen-- I've thought of a way to convince them, Charlie.

REYNOLDS: Of what? That you're a murderer?

POE: I'm going to write a sequel to "Murders in the Rue Morgue"... in which I will imagine a series of nearly exact coincidences occurring in Paris.

REYNOLDS: Coincidences?
POE: A young working girl named... "Marie Roget"... has been murdered under precisely similar circumstances with Mary Rogers...

REYNOLDS: And you think that will convince the police?

POE: I will enter into a very long and rigorous analysis of the New York tragedy. No point will be omitted. I will examine the opinions and arguments of the police and the press upon the subject... and indicate the true murderer, which I alone know, in a manner that will give renewed impetus to the investigation. What do you think?

REYNOLDS: I think you're an obsessive fool. It's a labor in vain, Eddie... but do it if you must. Could be a catharsis at best...

(Dr. Hammond moves to them, wiping his hands)

HAMMOND: (to Reynolds) Well?

REYNOLDS: (Referring to the old man, Van Kirk) His condition is precisely the same. It seems evident that, so far, death has been arrested by the mesmeric influence. (beat) All we can do is wait.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME up in the Poe house SR. Sissy sits in a chair, swaddled in a coat. Muddy is rubbing her feet.

SISSY: (angrily) So where could he be? He's late, very late. (sulking) Probably gin-bibbing with his lunatic chums.

MUDDY: Not about drink, Sissy, it's about gender. Men are taught they're sure-footed and fool-proof.

SISSY: I don't care what it is, I'm sick of it. I'm worried and angry... sick as a drowned cat...

MUDDY: Sissy... now listen to old Muddy. Edgar is a good man, a brilliant and clever man... maybe the best ever, but he is a man and will
live in many worlds before he dies. Some you'll occupy with him, some you don't want to see. So, child, add cream and sugar and take it with your tea.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP CS. SPOTLIGHT picks up Poe weaving along the pavement of a city street, tottering from side to side, bleary-eyed from drink. He wears his frock coat inside out. Poe staggers, turns and reacts to a DARK FIGURE wearing a hooded cloak, face unseen, that looms up out of the shadows. Poe backs away, startled, seemingly alarmed by the figure’s inexorable tracking toward him. Poe turns, backs away, drunkenly, moving faster, then stumbles, falls to the ground. NATHANIEL WILLIS suddenly appears, spies Poe and rushes to him. The hooded figure has disappeared.

WILLIS: Eddie, my dear boy... what under heaven could have put you in this fix?

(Poe looks around for the dark figure, sees only Nathaniel, confused)

POE: (Grins crookedly up at him) What fix?

(Willis helps Poe to his feet. Poe falls flat again; Willis goes for him as Poe begins BARKING like a dog, then CROAKING loudly like a frog, squiggling around on the ground)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR as Willis leads Poe into the lighted area representing the interior of the house. Muddy meets them, obviously distressed and angry.

WILLIS: Oh, Eddie! If ever there was a perfect mystery on earth, you are one... and one of the most mysterious.
MUDDY: (To Nathaniel) You make Eddie drunk, then you bring him home! Get off with you!

(Willis starts to turn and leave, but Poe grasps him by the shoulder)

POE: Never mind the old bitch. Come in.

(Poe takes a flower from a vase, puts the stem between his teeth and begins to dance around, HUMMING between his teeth. He grabs Muddy, dances her around, then takes a whirl with Willis who seems to enjoy it)

WILLIS: Oh! Oh... don't make me perspire, Eddie!

(Suddenly, Poe collapses onto a sofa. Muddy rushes to him, he pushes her away as she fusses over him. He coughs lightly. Willis stands nearby, glances at books on desk, picks one up)

POE: Where's Sis?

MUDDY: Locked herself in her room... so she doesn't have to look at you...(touches his brow) You've got a fever...

POE: Stop your bleating and get out!

MUDDY: I'm sending for Dr. Reynolds.

(She turns and exits. Willis moves to Poe, sits down close to him with a book, rifles through it)

WILLIS: How about if I read to you a bit? Calm you down and all that.

POE: (to himself, dismally) I'm a sick poet.

WILLIS: Poetry! Yes... Shelley, perhaps... Ah, here...(reads) "Drink to the nectar circling in your veins..."
(He stops, realizing what he has read as Poe looks at him with a suspiciously owl-like stare. Willis grins nervously, pulls out a silk handkerchief, folds it up and mops Poe’s brow. Poe lies back, his mind drifting into another world, another time)

POE: Oh, God... Nathaniel... can’t remember but... loathed by my mother... must have ruined her life... sucked gin out of... soda bread... keep me peaceful... so young... diaper soiled too many times... crying... ‘Mama... Mama’... for another piece of bread... her breast... sore and infected... seeping drops... sweet milk... and... Napoleon brandy... (beat; sobs) Old... old, addicted... crying... for the next shot... 'Mama... Mama’...

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP on Poe in a spotlight SL. He speaks directly to the audience.

POE: “Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth...I heard many things in hell. How, then, was I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthily--how calmly I can tell you the whole story- -It was impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night...”

(LIGHT EXPANDS to include the bed in Van Kirk’s house and the elderly man lying quietly in it. Poe now stands over the bed, looking down at Van Kirk. There is an empty claw-footed bathtub nearby. There is the MUFFLED SOUND OF A HEARTBEAT that grows louder)

POE:... “Object there was none... Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire... I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture-- a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold.... By degrees... I had made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever...”

(Van Kirk’s mouth opens and he lets out a SHRIEK. Poe reaches out suddenly, drags the old man from his bed onto the floor, then swiftly pulls the entire small bed over on top of Van Kirk; Poe leaps
on top of it, his body pressing it down on the old man, smothering him. But the HEARTBEAT CONTINUES LOUDLY, QUICKLY, MUFFLED. Poe presses his body downward for a long moment, eyes wide with anxiety as he listens to the muffled HEARTBEAT. At length, the BEAT slows, then ceases altogether. Poe reacts to the silence, then slowly gets up and removes the bed, bends down and examines the corpse. He places his hand on the heart, holds it there for a moment. There is no pulsation)

POE:... “He was dead... stone dead... His eye would trouble me no more... :... If you still think I was mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for concealment of the body...”

(Poe drags the body to the bathtub and struggles to lift it)

POE:... “The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence...”

(Poe shoves the corpse into the tub as the LIGHT CHANGES and we can see only large misshapen shadows that give us only an impression of what he is doing)

POE:... “First, I dismembered the corpse... cut off the head and arms and the legs...”

(Poe’s shadow bends over the bathtub in the yellow light, a hatchet held over his head, bringing it down again and again)

BLACKOUT

Now the LIGHTS COME UP to reveal that planks are being removed by Poe from the center of the living room, leaving what appears to be a dark hole; Poe now slowly and carefully replaces the flooring boards)

POE:...” I replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye- -not even his-- could detect anything wrong—“

(Now, as the last board is replaced, Poe reacts as Tolliver and other officers enter. Poe smiles innocently)
POE: Welcome, Captain Tolliver.

TOLLIVER: What are you doing here, Poe?

POE: I'm Mr. Van Kirk's houseguest.

TOLLIVER: (eyeing Poe warily) Someone reported hearing a shriek.

POE: I fear that was my own... in a dream...

TOLLIVER: Where's Van Kirk?

POE: Absent... in the country... for his health... I'm caring for the house for a few days... (beat) You may search... search well...

(Poe sits in a chair directly over the site of the replaced floorboards. Tolliver and his men glance around. NOW, WE HEAR A LOW, DULL, QUICK SOUND -- much as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. Poe gasps for breath -- stares at the officers who do not seem to have heard it. Poe gets up from the chair suddenly as the SOUND INCREASES; he grates the chair on the floorboards in an attempt to mask the sound, but the NOISE GROWS LOUDER, LOUDER, LOUDER!

POE: (To the audience)...” Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! - - no, no! They heard! They suspected! They knew! They were making a mockery of my horror! I couldn’t bear those hypocritical smiles any longer!”

(The SOUND OF THE MUFFLED HEARTBEAT grows LOUDER and Poe begins SCREAMING)

POE: “Villains! Dissemble no more! I admit the deed!-- tear up the planks!-- here, here! -- it was the beating of his hideous heart!...”

BLACKOUT

LIGHT COMES UP on Poe at his desk writing.
POE: (To himself, relieved, gleeful) There...every word moves the story forward...probably think the old man is a father figure...but what the fuck do I care if it's worth 10 dollars...(beat, writes) and the title is..."The Tell-Tale Heart" by E.A....

(Muddy enters, removes her travelling coat, looks up at him. Poe whirls on her in a fury, slamming his work to the floor)

POE: Get out! Leave me alone!

(Muddy continues on into the place and begins straightening it up)

MUDDY: Don't mind me... just continue on now with your manic fret and fuss.

POE: I'm trying to work, for Christ's sake!

MUDDY: I know, dear. We're trying to live.

(Muddy stops in front of him, reaches into her pocket, pulls out some money and hands it to him)

POE: What's this?

MUDDY: I sold a story you discarded in the wastebasket here some weeks ago. There's enough there to fill our bellies twice.

POE: What the hell do I care about food when I'm writing... and anyway... how dare you come in here unbeknownst to me, steal a piece of writing that I, myself, have declared 'no damn good' and sell the bloody thing?

MUDDY: Plenty there for a good jar of brandy too.

POE: Is there?

MUDDY: I knew that would drag your attention to the head of the line.
POE: Come here, old girl. Let me give you an affection and praise your inventiveness.

(Muddy starts to walk away from Poe, turns her head around and tosses over her shoulder with a smile:)

MUDDY: I'll live the day without it.

(Muddy exits. Poe about to continue working, when suddenly he reacts to: THE DARK FIGURE standing in the shadows. CLOAKED now. The figure is dressed in DARK, BULKY clothes. His face shadowed by a thick BLACK HOOD OVER HIS HEAD. A single ROSE adorns the forehead of the hood. Poe is stunned, jumps from the desk, frightened. Now, the figure disappears. Poe is puzzled by the strange figure. Stares. Confused. Was it a hallucination?)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP in Poe's study. Poe is at his desk spreading out some papers with markings on them, indicates for Reynolds who appears to have just come in, taking off his coat.

POE: I've deciphered some of the markings I saw on Mary Roger's tombstone...

REYNOLDS: You had me come all the way out here for this...? Couldn't it have waited 'til morning...?

POE: No, time is running out. An innocent young man is in jail. I've got to finish "Marie Roget". I've had this block for days. But my mind seems clear now.

(Points. We see what he describes on the SCREEN US.)

POE: Look... the ellipse... it represents an egg... the "sealed mystery"... now, this little character outside the small triangle might either be a Greek omega, or the Arabic 3, or...(darkens)... "M"... for Mary...

REYNOLDS: Eddie... this is all nonsense...
POE: Nonsense? No...

(Grimly intense. Opens a small box on his desk, shows the contents to Reynolds. We also see the contents ON THE SCREEN US. There are a scattered number of human teeth in the box)

POE: I found these in my pocket. I stole her teeth, Charlie! And do you know why? Teeth have always been equated with aggression. They fulfill a need by taking from the outer world, cutting, dismembering, and pulverizing in order to nourish soma and psyche. That's why I coveted them so madly. I needed a force that would be strong enough to extract me from my lethargy. Teeth represent activity and power, Charlie, don't you see? Primitive people used them as adornments and fetishes. I needed them to be endowed with those elements I lack: strength and courage--

REYNOLDS: Eddie, you can't be serious with all this.

POE: (Impassioned) I felt their possession could alone ever restore me to peace... give me back my reason... only teeth endure, survive beyond death... they transcend death!

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP on Poe sitting at his desk. Papers are strewn about, writing inscribed on each page, a prominent one headed: “The Mystery of Marie Roget” by Edgar A. Poe. We can see this ON SCREEN US.

POE: (Writing) “All Paris is excited by the discovered corpse of Marie, a girl young, beautiful...”

(ON SCREEN US we can see a towed boat bringing in the corpse of Mary Rogers)

POE: “... and notorious. This corpse is found, bearing marks of violence, and floating in the river...”
(ON SCREEN US we can see the clearing where Mary's clothing was found. Poe rises and talks directly to the audience)

POE: “...But before proceeding further, let us consider the supposed scene of the assassination, in the thicket at the Barriere du Roule. This thicket, although dense, was in the close vicinity of a public road...”

(POE moves across the stage to CS where he had found Mary's clothing. He looks around confusedly, reacts as he sees a body lying on the ground. Fearing the worst, he moves to the body and rolls it over. It's David Payne who appears to be quite dead)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP on Tolliver's office. Captain Tolliver is pacing back and forth, chewing on his cigar. He regards Poe darkly as he sits near the desk.

TOLLIVER: We released Payne because we lacked enough evidence to hold him.

POE: Perhaps now you're willing to believe what I've been telling you.

TOLLIVER: Mr. Poe, I don't believe you killed Payne any more than I believe you killed Mary Rogers.

POE: But I strangled him! I know I did! I must have done it!

TOLLIVER: (Exasperated) He left a note! A suicide note! (beat) What's more, he didn't die of strangulation... there are signs that he ingested an overdose of laudanum.

POE: Laudanum?

TOLLIVER: Mr. Poe, my advice to you is... either stop writing or stop drinking... or both.

(Poe stares at the man, uncomprehending, confused)
BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP on Poe writing at his desk in his study SL. He stops writing, looks up and talks directly to the audience.

POE: We will dismiss Payne from our investigations. His suicide, however, corroborative of suspicion, is without deceit...

(Reynolds moves from the shadows in the light next to Poe,)

REYNOLDS: It's time to awaken Van Kirk.

POE: I can't think about him! Not now! Not after what's happened!

REYNOLDS: Nothing's happened, Eddie. For Christ's sake. Stop thinking of yourself. Think of that poor child... your wife. She needs you. The experiment may be the key to saving her life, or extending it.

(Poe regards Reynolds intense face. Then, he rises and they both move to THE LIGHT in CS where the old man, Van Kirk, lies in a bed, heavily breathing. Dr. Hammond stands nearby. Poe leans over the old man and begins making mesmeric passes over his body)

POE: (To the audience, explaining as he goes) “For the purpose of relieving Van Kirk from the mesmeric trance, I make use of the customary passes. The first indication of revival is afforded by a partial descent of the iris. It is observed, as especially remarkable, that this lowering of the pupil is accompanied by the profuse out-flowing of a yellowish ichor from beneath the lids, of a pungent and highly offensive odor...(Reynolds whispers something to Poe. Poe nods, then to Van Kirk) Mr. Van Kirk... can you explain to us what are your feelings or wishes now? (To the audience) After a moment, hectic circles begin to appear on Van Kirk's cheeks. The old man's tongue quivers, rolls violently in his mouth. His jaws and lips remain rigid. “

VAN KIRK: For God's sake! --Quick!-- Quick! --Put me to sleep--or, quick! --waken me!-- quick!-- I say to you that I am dead!

(Poe and the others react, shaken and undecided what to do.)
Then, Poe tries to awaken the man with passes, then shaking him)

POE: (To the audience) "I had believed... I had hoped this strange detour from my agony of guilt and despair might momentarily distract me... but no one could have prepared me for what followed... I rapidly continued making mesmeric passes, amid cries of "DEAD! DEAD!" absolutely bursting from Van Kirk -- Then, the man's whole frame at once, within the space of seconds... crumbled... absolutely rotted away beneath my hands. And upon the bed, before us, lay a nearly liquid mass of loathsome... of detestable putridity..."

(Nothing changes about the old man lying in the bed, but Poe becomes violently ill, clamps his hand over his mouth and charges away from the bed. Reynolds looks down at the bed. Van Kirk simply lies there as he was, dead -- no sign of the loathsome mass that Poe had described. Poe dry retches by the bed, his body heaving with the waves of nausea. Poe wipes at his mouth with a kerchief, trying to contain the sickness pervading his body)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR in the Poe bedroom as Poe sits on Sissy's bed, holding her hand, his face still racked with the ghastly memory of the night.

POE: It was horrible... horrible... Charlie tried to convince me that it was my imagination... but I saw it! I saw it!

SISSY: But he was an old man... his mind was weak...

POE: No... it must never be tried again...

SISSY: But Eddie... I believe in you... I know you can make it work...

POE: You don't understand... we were tampering with things better left alone...

SISSY: Is it better to leave me... alone?
POE: I’d give my life for yours.

SISSY: Then let the risk be mine to take. Give me a chance... no matter how small...

POE: Sissy, no...

SISSY: My body may be weak and frail... but my mind, it’s strong, Eddie... and my belief in you... it’s in my heart... *(Gathers him into her arms, holds him tightly, speaks softly into his ear)*  And... if, in the end, it shouldn’t work... after I’ve gone... I’ll be your guardian angel, watch over you in spirit... and I’ll give you signs of my presence... sigh upon you in the evening winds... or fill the air you breathe with perfume from the censers of the angels...

*(She kisses his face tenderly. He turns his face from her, darkening)*

POE: I’ve never deserved you. There's so much... about me... you don't know...

SISSY: I know all I need to know. *(beat)* Put me into trance... show me that place... the Valley of the Many-colored Grass...

*(Poe regards her face for a long moment. The, he lights a candle, puts it on the small table next to the bed. LIGHTS DIM until we can see nothing but the flickering candle and Poe’s face as he describes what WE BEGIN TO SEE ON THE SCREEN US)*

POE: “... And a range of giant hills that shut out the sunlight from its sweetest recesses... From the dim regions beyond the mountains... 
... a narrow and deep river... the "River of Silence"... with many dazzling rivulets... and the whole surface of the valley, carpeted all by a soft green grass... and in groves about this grass, like wildernesses of dreams... fantastic trees...

*(And ON THE SCREEN we can see Sissy walking, skipping through the grass, laughing, happily exulting in the beauty of the wondrous place)*
POE: (Cont’d)... whose tall tender stems slant gracefully towards the light that peers at noon-day into the center of the valley...(Now, to the audience) I felt all the agonies of her dying... I loved her more dearly and clung to her life with more desperate pertinacity... I was insane... with long intervals of horrible sanity…”

BLACKOUT

(LIGHTS COME UP SL to reveal that Poe is now seated at a small tavern table with a bottle of port in from of him that he pours into a glass. He has been drinking heavily)

POE: (Cont’d, to the audience) “During these fits of absolute unconsciousness, I drank-- God only knows how often or how much. As a matter of course my enemies referred the insanity to the drink, rather than the drink to the insanity…”. But to keep from sinking further, I had to continue work on Marie Roget... to convince the police of my guilt...

(The CLOAKED DARK FIGURE appears behind Poe, face HIDDEN by shadows)

POE: (Cont’d) I had to make the story as factual as possible... to disprove every theory so the police could have no other course than to arrest me for murder...

(The cloaked figure disappears. Standing now in a STREAM OF LIGHT is a young, good-looking naval officer, LIEUTENANT WILLIAM ST. JOHN. He wears what appears to be the same type of cloak the dark figure only moments ago wore. Only the hood hangs from his back now)

POE: (Cont’d) Mary Rogers had a secret lover, of whom her relatives knew nothing... I had narrowed it down to only one possibility...

(Suddenly, Poe charges up to the man, a pistol coming from beneath his cloak. He shoves the muzzle of the pistol in the shaken St. John’s face)
ST. JOHN: Who are you...? What do you want...?

POE: Who I am is of little importance. "An interested party." What I want is the truth.

ST. JOHN: About what?

POE: Your relationship with Mary Rogers.

ST. JOHN: I told the police everything I know.

POE: I have killed before, and I have nothing to lose by doing it again. Were you her lover? (beat; St. John nods) All of it. I make no moral judgments. Only seek the facts.

ST. JOHN: I'd... gotten her pregnant... and on the day she was murdered... I took her to see Mrs. Loss... a midwife... she owns a tavern not far from where they found Mary's body...

POE: You left her there?

ST. JOHN: I had to report for duty. It was the last I saw of her.

POE: And you kept this from the police?

ST. JOHN: The scandal... my career in the service...

(Poe regards the man's face, slowly lowers the muzzle of the pistol)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR. Poe sits down at a TAVERN table, pulls a silver flask out of his pocket and takes a gulp or two, places it back in his inside left hand jacket pocket. The tavern proprietor, MRS. LOSS, a bulky woman, regards Poe with a mixture on her face of hardness and severity.
MRS. LOSS: Brought in your own mother's milk, eh? Why're you here... lookin' to be comfy while you swill? Out!

POE: Not at all, dear lady, but speaking of mothers and such... Mary Rogers and her problem comes to mind...

MRS. LOSS: If she ain't a drunk, I don't know her.

POE: Then Lieutenant St. John and your lovely self are at odds... legally.

MRS. LOSS: (A pause-- she regards him warily) You the bloody police?

POE: Ever see a copper drink from a silver flask while on duty?

MRS. LOSS: (shrugs) Why should I tell you anything? Who the hell are you anyway? You talk so lofty and rude, like a damn foreigner!

POE: You're going to tell someone... myself or the police... you choose, dear.

MRS. LOSS: (beat; then:) I didn't have nothin' to do with no murder. Fact is, I'm only a midwife... so I help the girls deliver. It's a nightmare with all the mess an' screamin'. I mean, I can't do it for nothin'. She didn't have the proper money, so I turned her out. Not a charity house here, you know--

POE: (Gets up) The police will learn the truth in time, but I will stay committed to it whether they do or not.

MRS. LOSS: She shouldn't 'a been whorin' around to get herself in the fix.

POE: (regards her darkly) I know who killed Mary Rogers, Mrs. Loss... and I intend to prove it no matter how long it takes.

(Poe moves away as if to exit, turns and gives her one last parting shot)
POE: (Cont’d) You, my woman, are a drab shell of compassion... and an ugly piss-pot to boot.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP on Poe in his study. He is sitting huddled over his desk, papers, notes everywhere, heavy arcane-looking books spread out on the desk. The bottle of port is nearly empty, and he reflects a night of heavy drinking. Nearby, at the edge of the pool of light we can see Sissy lying asleep in her bed. Catterina is curled on her bosom, taking warmth from her frail body and giving some of its own in return. ON THE SCREEN US we can see the night sky and a storm building, the clouds ominous.

POE: (To the audience) Sissy's fragile spirit clung to its tenement of clay... the bitter moments seemed to lengthen and lengthen as her gentle life declined... like shadows in the dying of the day...

(Poe suddenly dashes most of the papers off his desk in a fury. CRACK OF THUNDER. Quick LIGHTNING FLASH on THE SCREEN US. Then, we see ON THE SCREEN Poe's desk in the study. Poe goes back to poring over the huge old books, rifling through pages, fingerling down passages which we can see ON THE SCREEN. Leatherbound volumes about the Rosicrucians, the Templars, cryptograms. ON SCREEN Poe's finger lingers on a chapter heading "The Priory of Sion". Finger touches the "P", then the "S"- - then moves to a paper showing the letters among the markings he saw in the dream of Mary Roger's tombstone. The chapter begins: "One of the main factors discernible in Templarism was the possible existence of a secret inner group, or hidden order-- a secret society calling itself the Priory of Sion."

POE: (sleepily, almost a whisper) "Once upon a midnight dreary,
while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume
of forgotten lore...

(On SCREEN STORM RAGING, SOUND OF LOUD TAPPING AT THE DOOR)
POE: (Eyes closed, nodding) ... While I nodded, nearly napping...

(Poe’s eyes snap open and he listens, then turns to the audience)

POE: Suddenly there came a tapping,
   As of someone gently rapping, rapping
   at my chamber door.
'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, tapping at my chamber door--
Only this and nothing more...

(SOUND of more TAPPING, STORM raging outside)

POE: "... Ah, distinctly I remembered it was in the bleak December...
   ... And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the
   floor...
   ... And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain...
   ... Thrilled me--filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before...
   ... 'tis the wind... and nothing more...

(Poe gets up suddenly, staggers from the effects of the wine,
moves to pantomime opening the shutters, the wind blasting
inside)

POE:... Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter, in
there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore...

(A Raven, dark as night, flutters in from the shadows and lands on
Poe’s desk. Poe staggers backward away from the bird, shocked,
staring at it in horror as it regards him with its tiny black marble
eyes)

POE: (To the raven, terrified)"... Ghastly grim and ancient Raven,
   wandering from the nightly shore...
   ... Tell me... thy name...

THE RAVEN: (squawks hoarsely) ... Nevermore..."

(The Raven flies out into the shadows)
BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP as Poe awakens screaming from a nightmare. He is lying on a sofa in Reynolds’ house. Reynolds is close to him, tries to calm Poe who continues to writhe in the grip of his nightmarish hallucination.

REYNOLDS: It’s alright, Eddie…it’s me…Charlie...

(Poe slowly comes out of it, stares at Reynolds, then around the room)

REYNOLDS: We’re at my house...

POE: How...did I get here?

REYNOLDS: I brought you here. I came to see you at the cottage, but just as I arrived, you raced past me into the forest...

POE: (Trying to recall) The...raven...

REYNOLDS: Raven? What raven?

POE: A poem I wrote..."The Raven"...it all became real...the house...in the forest...I followed the raven there...

REYNOLDS: Yes...and I followed you...You went in...I heard you scream...

POE: You...saw...what happened...?

REYNOLDS: I found you lying in an upstairs room.

POE: Nothing else?

REYNOLDS: There was no one there. The house is old, seems to have been deserted some time ago.
POE: But...I saw... (Sobs) Madness! Madness!

REYNOLDS: No, Eddie, you're just under great strain...You must have imagined you saw...Mary Rogers... (Beat, grimly) There was one thing I did see...in that room...

POE: (Reacts) What?

REYNOLDS: Slippery elm...bloodstains on a slab...recent stains...

POE: Slippery elm...? What's that, Charlie?

REYNOLDS: Only one thing it's used for. An abortion. It...swells in the body...causes bleeding...

   (Poe reacts, incredulous, sits up)

POE: I saw it, Charlie.

REYNOLDS: What? An abortion?

POE: (Nods slowly) I think that was what I saw...Mary Rogers getting an abortion...It...was real...but not...the abortionist...couldn't see his face...

REYNOLDS: Eddie...

POE: Dreams! Hallucinations! Clairvoyance! I don't know! But I saw it, Charlie! The memory still lingers in some dark place in my mind. (Beat, recalling) I have all those books in my library – I could have read about the Priory of Scion years ago...the secret society, the symbols – it could all be the product of my insanity.

   (Poe sinks back down on the sofa, sobbing, his body trembling with anguish)

BLACKOUT
LIGHTS COME UP on Tolliver seated at a table in a small restaurant. Poe enters, holds in his hands a package, wrapped in parchment plain wrapping paper, tied off with some string. Poe moves quickly to his table. The man's dinner is brought to him by his waiter. Tolliver looks up, gives Poe a stern look. Stuffs a cloth napkin into the top of his shirt collar, chews on his food.

TOLLIVER: (Impatiently) What is it now, Poe? Can't you see I'm eating? I've waited all day long to enjoy this fine dinner.

POE: Please don't stop on my account, Captain. (sits across from him) But in between bites, you might be well served to glance at what I've brought you...

TOLLIVER: You and your little theories have wasted enough of my time. If I had it my way... you would be in some dark jail cell for hindering this investigation. (motions for him to leave) Now, please... take advantage of my generosity and...

POE: What must I say to convince you that I may be responsible for the death of Mary Rogers? Arrest me now!

TOLLIVER: Arrest you for what? Being a raving lunatic? (beat) Damn it, Poe. I've spent years solving hundreds of crimes... and you... with your old text books and 'deductive reasoning'... your arrogance supersedes common sense.

POE: I don't have the time or the patience to be arrogant. You're making a grave mistake.

TOLLIVER: Get out! Now! Out of this restaurant!

(Poe gets to his feet. Before exiting, Poe places the wrapped package on Tolliver's table)

POE: If you have any investigative integrity in you at all... you'll study this carefully. Maybe then you'll be convinced.

TOLLIVER: Out, Poe!
(Poe turns. He exits. Tolliver is furious. Breathless. He's lost his appetite. He angrily grabs the package. Unties the string around it, removes the parchment and stares at the title)

TOLLIVER: (Aloud, contemptuously) "The Mystery of Marie Roget" by Edgar A. Poe.

(Tolliver shakes his head in disgust. Throws the book back down on the table. Begins eating again)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP in the office of GEORGE GRAHAM, the magazine editor, a big, expansive man of fifty. He is confronting Poe who regards him balefully.

GRAHAM: I have three rules for achieving happiness, Poe...
... ‘Trust in God, pay your bills, and keep your bowels open…’

POE: (icily) I didn't come to you for nauseating homilies, George. My wife is terribly ill.

GRAHAM: You have my deepest sympathies, of course... but I simply cannot give you a two-month advance...

POE: How can you refuse me like this? I abandoned my own magazine to work for Graham’s!

GRAHAM: Poe, my dear young man, I am grateful for your efforts here... but I...

POE: I don't want gratitude! Gratitude won’t pay my fucking bills! God, George, you agreed to subsidize my magazine within a year, and no matter how profitable I've made Graham’s, I get damn little in return.

GRAHAM: Did you expect me to support a rival journal... and to lose my brilliant editor?
POE: *(bitterly disdainful)* Well, I'm disgusted with your contemptible fashion-plates, music and love tales. *(beat)* I have only one thing left to say--

*(Turns his backside to Graham and lets a LOUD FART. Poe turns and exits)*

BLACKOUT

*LIGHTS COME UP on a city street, Poe and Willis by a lamppost. Poe carries numerous editions of different papers that he loads drunkenly into the arms of the accommodating Nathaniel Willis. Willis flutters somewhat as he drops some of the load and tries to retrieve them.*

POE: I quit Graham, Nathaniel... the bumfuck gave my job to Griswold...

WILLIS: Ah, the ungrateful turd... he never did appreciate what you did for his paper.

POE: My pen's for hire, Lord knows, but coining one's brain for silver at the nod of a master...

WILLIS: To me, you're a God... an exile in heaven!

POE: God? My whole nature utterly revolts at the idea that there is any Being in the Universe superior to myself.

*(Suddenly, Poe reacts to the sight of THE CLOaked DARK FIGURE revealed nearby. Face HIDDEN by shadows. The rose on the forehead of his hood. They exchange a quick glance. The Cloaked figure pushes a pedestrian out of the way, rushing off toward SL. Poe goes for the figure like a shot, his face livid with rage. Willis is alarmed, goes after him, his arms filled with the newspapers. But the figure disappears into the shadow and Poe is suddenly confronted by RUFUS GRISWOLD approaching up the street. He holds a DARK CLOAK draped over his arm. Poe looks for the fleeing cloaked figure, but he is gone. Fearful, confused, Poe then confronts Griswold angrily)*
POE: Griswold, you contemptible shit!

GRISWOLD: It wasn't my fault! It was Graham's idea. He seems to believe me to be a better editor.

POE: You insinuated yourself, you worked on him!

(Enraged, Poe leaps at the man, grabbing his collar and raising his walking stick as if to crush his skull. Griswold is terrified, but glares defiantly at him)

GRISWOLD: Go ahead... you must be wicked to have so evil an imagination!

(Poe stops, reacting to the words. It is just long enough for Willis to drag him off away from Griswold)

BLADEOUT

LIGHTS COME UP on Tolliver sitting at a desk in his office. Poe's story manuscript 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' lies on Tolliver's desk. His hand moves to it, taps it with his fingers, then curiosity gets the better of him and he opens it, glances at a page somewhere in the middle. We see the WRITING ON THE SCREEN US and Poe appears in SPOTLIGHT SR.

POE: (To the audience)"... Who then, is the secret lover whom Marie meets upon the morning of Sunday, and who is so deeply in her confidence that she hesitates not to remain with him until the shades of the evening descend..."

(Tolliver glances up, face reflecting his deep consideration; then he moves to the front of the manuscript and begins to read)

BLADEOUT

LIGHTS COME UP CS to reveal the interior of the Poe house. Poe sits silently in a chair, his face brooding and sullen-- several young
women are collected around Sissy, giving her articles they have brought with them for her comfort. Nathaniel Willis, Frederick Thomas and Holly Chivers are spreading food, clothing and money on a table.

WILLIS: So, my dear, we simply took the liberty of explaining that you suffer from an unusual sensitivity to the slightest stimulus...

THOMAS: The sixty dollars came from a newspaper editor... Jack Bosley...

CHIVERS: A Brooklyn lawyer collected a like amount during a court appearance...

WILLIS:... And John Jacob Astor's grandson sent ten dollars! All considered tributes of "sympathy with genius!"

POE: (explodes) For God's sake, I don't want this kind of indignity! (slaps newspaper, to Willis) Some malicious idiot sent your editorial appeal here, and it made Sissy sicker!

SISSY: Eddie, they're our friends...

POE: Goddamn it, I'm not some charity case to be pitilessly thrust before the public to cheer my enemies.

WILLIS: (weakly) But Eddie, we only thought...

POE: (shakes newspaper at him) It's insipid and untrue! "Without friends!" Christ, I could name a hundred people I could turn to for aid!

WILLIS: Eddie, dear friend, we were only trying to help...

POE: I don't need your fucking help. Get out of here. All of you. GET OUT!

(Sissy is mortified as the friends slowly, sheepishly file out. She begins to cough heavily, sinks weakly down, Poe moving to hold her in his arms)
BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SL in the Tolliver bedroom. Tolliver sits in bed, propped up on pillows, reading Poe’s manuscript 'Marie Roget' by candlelight. His wife, DRUCILLA, a hefty woman lies next to him, squirming around, the flickering candlelight obviously bothering her. Her face is spread with what seems to be a fatty lard, thicker in spotty patches. She has strapped to her forehead a piece of canvas. Her chin-strap makes it difficult to speak in that the leather straps go up on both sides of her head, held by a buckle on top. Poe is SPOTLIGHTED next to the bed.

POE: (To the audience)”... and here, most fitly, comes the consideration of the continued absence of him of the dark complexion...”

DRUCILLA: (To Tolliver, slurred speech) Excuse me, Raymond... but your candle is sucking the moisture out of my skin... and it smells like brown coal...

TOLLIVER: (glances at her over his glasses) Uh huh... Well, I thought it, myself, to be more like waxy pitch oil...

DRUCILLA: Oh, my God, there’s no such thing...

TOLLIVER: Good night, love. Hang onto the bed now, so you won’t slide off...

(Tolliver continues reading)

POE: (To the audience) “... this man lives, and is deterred from making himself known, through dread of being charged with the murder...”

(Tolliver looks up, scowls deeply, puts a marker in the book, closes it, glances at his wife, then snuffs out the candle)

BLACKOUT
POE: I'm sorry... I behaved so miserably. I know they were only trying to help.

(Sissy, smiles, touching his cheek tenderly, speaks softly)

SISSY: I believe... there is a great heartbeat in the sea... born of tide and current, Muddy says, like breath and bloodstream... what do you say?

POE: I say, if it makes you feel better, we shall stay right here forever...

SISSY: It does... pulled the fever right off my brain.

POE: Do you love me, Sissy? If the answer's 'no'... mumble it...

SISSY: That's all I do, Eddie... love you...

POE: Ahh... you are a breezy little poet.

SISSY: (long beat) Eddie... I would like to float out to sea... cool and painless... no more heat... no more fuss...

POE: ... and let the sea take you alone to a hard and unfriendly grave? (beat) Sissy... let the moment be determined by the stars, not ourselves. If you slip across, wifey... I will be close behind...

(Kisses her face tenderly, lovingly. Now, he glances out at sea. ON SCREEN we can see a CLIPPER SHIP, wind in its sails, crossing the horizon)

BLACKOUT

POE: The naval officer, St. John, said he took Mary Rogers to see Mrs. Loss... she's a midwife. But why? If she were pregnant, it could only be
in a very early stage -- unless he had taken her there to end her pregnancy.

REYNOLDS: But the abortion... if there were one... didn't take place at the tavern...

POE: No... at that house. But St. John is the key here. He knows more than he told me.

REYNOLDS: But what do you need me for, Eddie?

POE: I want you with me, Charlie, so that I know what I'm seeing and hearing is real... not just another hallucination.

REYNOLDS: *(Considering it)* Fantasy aside, my friend, the labyrinth we have been struggling through is now producing what may be... real clues.

POE: *(beat)* Ever heard of "Occam's Razor"?

REYNOLDS: Can't say that I have.

POE: Doctor Occam was one of the sharpest minds of the fourteenth century. He put forward the intellectual principle known as "Occam's razor". If a simple solution fits the facts, don't invent complications. *(beat)* If I should indeed solve this puzzle, Charlie... I will have proven one thing... that perhaps madness *is* the loftiest intelligence...

BLACKOUT

*LIGTHS COME UP SR as Poe and Reynolds enter ST. John's small hotel room. Poe and Reynolds move slowly into the room. They react in shock and horror-- a sliver of moonlight illuminates St. John, ghastly, sitting in a chair, his eyes open, his throat cut from ear to ear. Poe turns away, sickened, then stares at something else: a rose on a table, a small triangle with the number "3"-- We can see these items ON SCREEN US. Reynolds moves forward to inspect the corpse. He doesn't have to tell Poe the man is dead. Then, they both*
react to a SOUND coming from the shadows nearby. Reynolds takes a revolver out of his coat pocket, Poe reacting to it.

Dark figure of a CLOAKED and HOODED man stands close by holding a bloody knife held threateningly. He turns and runs, SPOTLIGHT FOLLOWING as Reynolds and Poe charge after him. Reynolds lifts his pistol and fires swiftly, drops the hooded man SL like a stone. Reynolds now at SL cautiously approaches the figure on the ground. He looks down at the man's hooded face, noting the rose on the forehead of the hood. Reynolds reaches down and yanks the hood from the man's head. Poe moves up, stops, uncertain.

POE: Who is it... do you know him...?

REYNOLDS: (glances up at Poe) It's... Nathaniel Willis...

(Poe reacts, stunned, disbelieving, moves forward and stares down at the face of Willis, eyes staring and quite dead, the blonde curls encircling his pale face.)

POE: Nathaniel-- but it can't be. I don't believe it.

REYNOLDS: But you must believe it, Eddie. It proves you're not a murderer.

POE: It doesn't prove anything! Except perhaps that Nathaniel knew St. John and that he may have been a member of the secret society-- but you saw the wound-- the blood was dark-- he'd been killed some time earlier-- and Nathaniel has no knife.

(REynolds quickly searches Nathaniel)

REYNOLDS: Maybe he threw it away earlier-- came back to the scene of the crime to retrieve it--

(They stare at each other, confused, perplexed)

BLACKOUT
LIGHTS COME UP SL Sissy lies bundled up, Catterina is curled on her bosom. Sissy is very weak and pale. Poe sits on the bed beside her, holds her hand.

POE: I'm right here, my darling...

SISSY: It's... time...

POE: I'm frightened, Sissy...

SISSY: It gives me... hope... remember... what you wrote... in one of your stories... "at death... the worm is the butterfly..."

POE: But to... put you in trance now... you're so weak...

SISSY: Not my... mind... please, Eddie... I want to see... the valley... again... the trees... the "River of Silence"... the green grass...

(Poe hesitates for a long moment, then slowly makes a lateral mesmeric pass across her face, her eyes closing under it)

SISSY: (Cont'd, weakly) Maybe... this time... you'll be there... with me...

(Poe makes another mesmeric pass and Sissy slips into trance. He has to stop... to wipe tears from his eyes, to control his anguish. ON SCREEN US we can see the VALLEY OF THE MANY-COLORED GRASS – with Poe and Sissy embracing on the edge of the beautiful River of Silence)

POE: (To the audience as he holds Sissy on stage)“... And we were locked in each other's embrace, beneath the serpent-like trees...

(ON THE SCREEN US they look down into the waters of the River of Silence)

POE: (Cont’d, to audience, on stage) ... and looked down within the waters of the River of Silence at our images...
(Poe and Sissy, hand-in-hand, walk off through the exquisite foliage. Then, we see that the scene begins to darken, strange flowers burst open on trees)

POE: (Cont’d, to audience, on stage)... And then a change fell upon all things. Strange brilliant flowers, star-shaped, burst out upon the trees where no flowers had been known before. The tints of the green carpet deepened...

(Suddenly, ON SCREEN US Sissy pulls away from Poe and begins to run across the carpet of grass. He runs after her, startled and concerned)

POE: (Cont’d, to audience, on stage)... She had seen that the finger of death was upon her bosom, that she had been made perfect in loveliness only to die...

(ON SCREEN US Sissy stops, turns toward Poe, her body undergoing some strange TRANSFORMATION, arms and legs MERGING with her body, a filmy substance coating her. Poe stands transfixed, unable to move, arms outstretched toward her. Then, the transformation, the METAMORPHOSIS is completed-- and there is nothing left of her except a large magnificent BUTTERFLY with fluttering multi-colored wings-- It poises in mid-air near Poe, then rises into the sky over his head. Then, SCREEN GOES BLACK, and we see only Poe ON STAGE with Sissy lying in bed, eyes closed. Poe's eyes are also closed, then slowly open. He stares straight ahead at Sissy lying still in the bed. Poe makes passes over her quickly, intently)

POE: (softly) Sissy...

(But as Poe tries to awaken her, Catterina suddenly seems to startle awake instead, the cat moving away from Sissy's bosom where it had been absorbing heat from her body. It seems there is no more heat. Poe stares at the cat, then at Sissy, alarm rising in him like a tide. He touches her face and gasps in horror at the icy coldness. His face contorts as he realizes she is dead. His mouth works in a silent scream)
POE (cont’d) No... no... no, no, no...!

(He knocks over a chair, sobs coming from his mouth. Muddy runs into the room in her nightdress, reacts, horrified at the scene, begins to cry, grabs Poe, tries to placate him. But the man is in an anguish of grief and begins smashing things in the room, crying out.)

POE (cont’d) No, no, no... Oh, God...!

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME BACK UP SL. Reynolds is examining Sissy, his face grim. Poe sits on the bed, staring, unable to comprehend the truth.

REYNOLDS: I'm sorry, Eddie...

POE: No! The mesmeric influence-- we've got to keep trying!

REYNOLDS:... She's gone...

POE: She can't be! She can't be!

(He throws himself across Sissy's still body, sobbing with grief. Reynolds touches him comfortingly)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME BACK UP SL. Sissy reposes on the bed, laid out in death. She is all in white with a small gold cross at her throat, feet bare. Her hair is soft and arranged as custom dictates. A WOMAN sits next to the bed. She is an artist and bends into her easel and canvas, finishing the last portrait of Sissy. Poe is at the foot of the bed, face buried in his hands. Muddy is behind him. The room is half dark and in shadows.

MUDDY: (softly) Looks delicate, don't she? (beat) Pretty child...
POE: She appears as she is... *(Touches Sissy’s bare foot)* Bare feet are a little girl's credentials... they speak of joy and play... but all this has left me alone now.

MUDDY: No, Edgar, she'll have a place in every heart and a home in yours. You and Sis are the other half of one another. Kiss her cheek and let her rest beneath her stone.

*(Poe slowly moves to kiss Sissy's cheek)*

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR inside a small cemetery chamber with Sissy's open casket lying on a vault altar stand. Numerous people are gathered, Muddy, Poe's friends except Nathaniel Willis. Poe stands draped in the cloak that had served Sissy as a blanket, his face lined with grief, eyes staring at the casket as some men begin to place the lid on it. Poe rushes forward and tries to prevent them, shrieking hysterically.

POE: No! No! She isn't dead!

*(Friends pull him away. Captain Tolliver, Ogden, and two other officers enter and confront the wild-eyed Poe. Tolliver salutes)*

TOLLIVER: It's unfortunate I have to come here now, Mr. Poe. I respect your grief. But it is my unpleasant duty to arrest you for murder.

*(The onlookers gasp. Poe stares at Tolliver blankly)*

TOLLIVER: *(cont’d)* I finally got around to reading your "Mystery of Marie Roget"... the facts were quite convincing. You were right from the beginning. *(to the officers)* Take him.

*(The officers take hold of Poe's arms and begin to lead him away. The onlookers are shocked, stunned. Poe glances back at Sissy's coffin as they lead him away, face wracked with unimaginable pain and grief)*
BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SL on Poe who sits on a prison cot wearing prison clothing, head in his hands in abject anguish. He is dressed in prison garb. There is a single wooden chair, a small table with a metal pitcher and a glass. Above him is a skylight of iron bars, moonlight filtering into the cell. Muddy enters accompanied by a jailor who carries a large band of keys and leads her into Poe's presence.

MUDDY: Eddie...

POE: (Looks up, shakes his head in despair) You shouldn't have come here.

MUDDY: Well... I am here. To think of you caged, innocent that you are, I couldn't bear to leave you here... alone.

POE: I did it, Muddy.

MUDDY: It's just the poet in you, Eddie, struggling through the deliriums. You got trapped in your own plot. It's the drama of it, dear... I know you.

POE: No...you don't...

MUDDY: I know the man who married my poor dead child as I know my own name.

POE: Just go away...

MUDDY: I will with you beside me... but first I'll see the governor.

POE: No! You don't understand... I deserve to be here and... worse.

MUDDY: Now look, Poe... you're a man... and one not without sin, but then we all have our own wickedness. You are no murderer... don't have the soul for it. (beat) Please, please choose to live and don't let Sissy's death make you despair.
POE: You're... too late...

BLA**CKOUT**

*LIGHTS COME UP on the same scene later in the night. Poe hunkers on the floor next to the cot. He is still suffering greatly from the despair of Sissy's death and withdrawal from alcohol. Poe looks up at LIGHT coming in from a barred skylight above him, stares at it, struggles to his feet and staggers from his corner to the tall iron bars that imprison him. He takes off his frock coat, rips out the lining. Tying long pieces together in tight knots. Poe steps up on a chair, laces one end of the coat's lining through the skylight's bars, tying it off tightly. Poe then wraps the other end repeatedly around his neck, tying off the remaining lining with the part hanging from the bars. A perfect noose. He sighs deeply, kicks the chair away, as we:*

BLA**CKOUT**

*LIGHTS COME UP in the cell reprising the scene at the beginning of the play with Poe on the floor and Tolliver, the doctor, and the guards hunkered over him.*

TOLLIVER: How long until it wears off?

DOCTOR: An hour, maybe more.

TOLLIVER: Well, I want him alive and well when he goes on trial tomorrow for the murder of Mary Rogers.

BLA**CKOUT**

*LIGHTS COME UP ON Poe lying as he was on the cell cot. ON THE SCREEN US we can see the SHADOW that represents his nightmare, a glimpse of the apparition within. It is the SHADOW of an ORANGUTAN, snarling beast glowering from its place of concealment. It carries in its claw hand the long, open straight razor that it slices through the air, its blazing eyes on an unseen*
victim. The SHADOW of the great horrifying beast wields the razor blade, wildly slashes it through the air. Then, it disappears from the SCREEN.

ON STAGE Poe suddenly sits up on the cot wide awake and SCREAMING. Then, he seems to calm down as if some great important idea has occurred to him, He is breathing heavily but his mind seems clear now and he murmurs --

POE:... simple... facts...

(THE DARK CLOAKED FIGURE appears in the cell near his cot. Stands before Poe, face HIDDEN by shadows. The Cloaked figure slowly reaches up and pulls off its hood, REVEALING a face ONLY TO POE. He is aghast. The CLOAKED figure then vanishes. Tolliver bursts in, responding to the scream. A wild-eyed Poe grabs Tolliver, forces himself to speak in a hoarse whisper)

POE:... Tolliver... I'm... not... the... murderer... I know... the... truth...

(Poe struggles to get up, but Tolliver holds him down)

TOLLIVER: Calm down, Poe. Everything's going to be all right.

POE: No... I'm not... guilty... It wasn't... me... who killed... Mary Rogers...

TOLLIVER: The mystery is over... solved by your own hand... I will hear nothing more of it.

POE: You must... listen... to me...

TOLLIVER: I have listened enough.

POE: But you must... I was... wrong... I know now... what's been... happening... to me...

(Poe continues to fight. Tolliver holding him down)
POE: (cont’d) Please... Tolliver... you must... help me... I know... the truth... I've solved... the... puzzle...!

TOLLIVER: It's over, Poe. Do you hear me? OVER!

POE: No...! No...! No...!

(Poe's adrenaline pumping, he begins to get the better of Tolliver. Poe works his way off the table, pushing Tolliver back)

TOLLIVER: Ogden! Guard! Get in here! Now!

(Poe grabs the pitcher from the table and smashes it across Tolliver's head, knocking the man to the ground unconscious)

BLACKOUT

IN THE DARK we can HEAR THE SOUND OF BELLS ringing in the distance. We CAN HEAR POE's voice.

POE'S VOICE: “Hear the loud alarum bells--
Brazen bells!
What tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!

The sound increases, the LIGHTS SLOWLY COME UP on the burial chamber SR where Poe enters, wet and disheveled, breathing heavily from his escape, still somewhat disoriented from the injection the doctor had given him. THE SOUND OF THE BELLS CONTINUES.

POE'S VOICE (Cont’d) In the startled ear of night
How they scream out their affright!
Too much horrified to speak,
They can only shriek, shriek – “

Poe struggles to remove the lid of his wife's coffin. He stares down at the pallid and rigid figure of Sissy inside, racked once again with despair as he touches her cold face. Sissy doesn't move as Poe sinks
down beside the coffin in utter exhaustion and grief, sobbing himself into a half sleep.

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS SLOWLY COME UP SR to reveal Poe sleeping next to Sissy's coffin, the wind HEARD whipping outside, and there's the SOUND of something else, indistinguishable at first, then more clear. Poe's head slowly comes up, eyes opening, reacting to the SOUND of CRYING, almost a whisper. Poe is on his feet quickly, staring into the coffin, straining to detect any motion in the corpse...The SOUND comes again, a sigh, a movement, a tremor upon the lips. Poe is shaken, but ecstatic, chafes and strokes the temples and the hands. Poe grabs her, holds her in his arms.

POE: (sobbing) Sissy, dear, sweet Sissy... you've come back to me... you've come back...

(Sissy begins to cry, her arms coming up to clutch at Poe. He manages to lift her bodily from the coffin, both collapsing to the ground, stroking her face lovingly. She returns each caress with her own loving touch and whispers)

SISSY: I'm here, Eddie... I'm here...

(Poe kisses her softly. He then reacts to a SOUND NEAR HIM. A presence in the vault. Out of the shadows appears REYNOLDS, dressed in the dark cloak, his hood off; he smiles at Poe)

REYNOLDS: So, Eddie, you escaped... what a clever and resourceful man you are...

POE: I... tried to... kill myself...Then, I saw the orangutan... reaching out to me... with the razor... but this time it was Occam’s Razor... and I saw the simple truth I had refused to believe...

REYNOLDS: Which was...?
POE: The house where I witnessed the abortion... I never mentioned who I saw... but you did... you said it was Mary Rogers. And there was only one reason you could have known that. The same reason you never told Captain Tolliver about Nathaniel's murder. (beat) Because it was you, Charlie... that day on the aqueduct....You planted the seeds with mesmeric suggestions... and my poor wine-soaked imagination did the rest...

REYNOLDS: It was fascinating to watch, dear friend. The worlds you created... the fantastic and irrational... they became real for you... you lived them.

POE: And made myself look the raving lunatic... guilty of the murders you committed...

REYNOLDS: Not murders, Eddie. Sacrifices to the greater good. My God, I couldn't just sit around and wait for the weak and aged to die-- I had to take the initiative, seek out the young and strong that might better tolerate the experiment--

POE:... I knew Mary Rogers... but I didn't kill her...

REYNOLDS: She was my first subject... and first failure... I'm afraid she couldn't survive the abortion she requested... or the trance into which I had placed her...

POE: So you made some attempts to throw suspicion my way.... a touch here.... a touch there.... Stimulation was the key, wasn't it, Charlie...?

REYNOLDS: Remember what you said about teeth, my dear boy? "To nourish the soma and the psyche..."

POE: Then you also murdered Payne... and St. John...

REYNOLDS: You, of all people, should understand what these small sacrifices could mean for humanity.

POE: The markings on the tombstone... Van Kirk's death... the abortion... all part of the same created deception...
REYNOLDS: You helped me perfect mesmeric suggestion, Eddie... I used it as I imagined how you would use it... with ingenuity... you're right, I did plant the seeds... I followed your every move...

POE: And I was the perfect scapegoat. How could you do this to me, Charlie? I loved you as a brother, trusted you...

REYNOLDS: You never really believed in what we were doing. Not until I made your mind believe it. Before that-- all you were doing was using me and the mesmeric experiment to vivify and arouse interest in your own 'philosophy'-- to glorify yourself!

POE: That's not true--

REYNOLDS: Isn't it? You wrote all those papers that people began to take seriously-- and Nathaniel told me you thought it was all 'excruciatingly and unsurpassably funny'!

POE: Maybe at first-- but then--

REYNOLDS: I listened to them all talking about your brilliant mind until I wanted to vomit! I was doing something real. Something important-- for humanity. You were nothing but a sham-- stealing my ideas to enhance your writing and reputation!

POE: No, Charlie-- no--

REYNOLDS: Yes! While you were mocking the truth of my efforts with cheap journalism, I was working night and day to make mankind's dream come true. I'm determined to conquer death, dear Eddie, and not you or all the sentimentality or morality in the world can stop me! I'll prevent death in those that matter, those people of importance-- and let all the rest go. What a world that will be then!

POE: You're... sick, Charlie... I feel sorry for you...

(Poe manages to lift Sissy up from the floor, helps her to stand upright, her dark hair streaming down. Poe half-carries her out of
the vault, both moving SL, spotlight following. Reynolds moves after them)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME BACK UP SL as Poe stumbles with Sissy across the burial site; dark gravestones cluttering the garden of sleep. Poe leads Reynolds in a game of CAT-AND-MOUSE. In and around the silent sentinels of the dead. The landscape seems angrier now, fog issuing from the shadowy gloom, the CRIES of Sissy heard faintly, Poe’s BREATHING more dominant. Reynolds is only a few feet behind. Poe trips, over a stone marker. He falls to the ground, almost takes Sissy with him. But he leaps to his feet before Reynolds is upon them. Poe blindly finds refuge behind a large MARBLE TOMBSTONE. He huddles with her behind the gravesite, wraps his arms around Sissy, holds her tightly, terrified --

POE: (whispers, frantic) We must go far away, wifey-- lose ourselves and find happiness somewhere together.

(For a second, everything is still; the mood remains ominous. Then, Poe looks up and regards a DARK FIGURE emerging out of the shadows. It is Reynolds, smiling thinly at them as he approaches slowly. Poe regards Reynolds grimly as the man suddenly attacks Poe with his fists, knocks him to the ground. Poe pulls himself back to his feet, but Reynolds smashes him again, leaves Poe bloody and injured. Reynolds grabs Sissy, presses against her seductively, passion rising with her resistance to him -- but she won’t capitulate. He hits her, knocks her to the ground; Sissy murmurs incoherently as he drags her prone form to another grave marker. He bends down over Sissy’s body as he begins to fondle her, licks at her bloodied lip, touches her breasts in unpleasant and loathsome ways. Poe watches horrified, pulls himself to a seated position, swaying unsteadily, disoriented)

POE (cont’d, imploring) -- No--don’t-- I beg you--!
(But Reynolds tears the clothes from her quivering body and mounts her -- Sissy still dazed from Reynolds having hit her, trapped beneath him, as he moans and twists violently into her. Sissy’s eyes close, as the MOANING SOUND seems to drive her into her own rising lust, hypnotic, her body weaving under him now)

SISSY: (softly)-- Eddie-- make love to me-- don’t be afraid-- I would be so grateful --

(Anger gives way to disbelief as Poe stares at their bodies merging, shocked, twisted in pain. He tries to get to his feet, but staggers)

POE:-- Sissy-- no-- no-- not me-- it’s not me!

(But Reynolds and Sissy twist and writhe together like one animal, bringing blood to the surface of their skin with their clawing fingers. Reynolds then draws a ROSE from his pocket across Sissy’s naked breast, a thorn leaving a bloody cut in the flesh. Poe now gathers every last vestige of inner strength left to him and makes a sudden leap at Reynolds, swinging his fists wildly. Reynolds is knocked away as Poe scoops Sissy up from the dirt and, throwing her clothes around her, begins to carry her away. Reynolds gets to his feet as Poe glares at him bitterly, clutches Sissy tighter as he backs her away from Poe)

POE: (cont’d) You despicable BASTARD-- How could you do this to Sissy?

REYNOLDS: But that isn't Sissy, dear boy. Don’t you know who that is? It's Ligeia. Don't you remember? You wrote it. “She came and departed as a shadow...”

(Sissy begins to move away from Poe; he reacts, startled, uncertain)

POE: No...
REYNOLDS: Your words, Eddie... “In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her...” She died, and you brought her back to life... “These are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes-- of my lost love-- of the Lady Ligeia!”

(Poe stares at Sissy and now sees another woman’s face-- Ligeia-- radiant looking, raven-black eyes and hair, older than Sissy, her skin rivaling the purest ivory, but with a strangeness pervading her features. Poe is chilled into stone, watches the figure begin to WAVE, then BREAK APART like smoke separating. Poe SCREAMS)

POE: Sissy!

(Poe tries to grab at the parts, to bring them back together, but the miasmatic ghost-like waif SHIMMERS and DISAPPEARS. Poe drops at the edge of the gravesite, sobbing. Reynolds moves closer, his voice sympathetic)

REYNOLDS: I know it’s a disappointment... but at least you had a few moments more... (grins darkly)... as did I...

(Poe suddenly comes up off the ground in a rage, has Reynolds by the throat, strangling him, but Reynolds manages to pull him off, slams him backward to the ground, hovers over him.)

REYNOLDS: (cont’d) Could have used you in the beginning, but I didn’t. Only experimented with those I felt would be missed the least.

(Poe slowly looks up at him, face bitter, livid)

POE: Like Nathaniel...?

REYNOLDS: Nathaniel's not dead. Just out of town. You saw what I suggested. Your mind is like a child's... eager to play... (beat; darkly) Now your escape has made me realize I should have used you. The others were failures because their minds were weak and unimaginative. But you can make the bridge in articulo mortis...

POE: No!
REYNOLDS: That mind of yours is like no other. If anyone will be susceptible to magnetic influence, it will be you.

(Poe suddenly starts to leap at Reynolds once again, but this time Reynolds is ready for him. Slips the ROSE again from his pocket and passes it quickly in front of Poe's face, a lateral mesmeric movement that freezes Poe in his tracks. This Reynolds follows with mesmeric passes with his other hand)

REYNOLDS: (Cont'd) Indulge me once again, dear friend. Science and expediency are old bedfellows.

(But Poe fights against the mesmeric influence like a wild man, screams at Reynolds and strikes the man with all the force left in him. Reynolds, hit hard, falls backward into an open coffin close by. Poe staggers forward and slips the casket cover quickly over Reynolds in the coffin. Reynolds begins to recover in the casket and struggles to keep Poe from fastening the cover)

REYNOLDS: (From in the casket) No! Stop it! Eddie, don't -- !

(But Poe is determined and screams at Reynolds as he fastens the casket top, sealing Reynolds inside)

POE: There! There! Die, you fucking monster! There will be no bells for you! No air for you! No one will come until morning and you will be long dead by then! “Demons must sleep, or they will devour us--they must be suffered to slumber, or we perish.”

(Reynolds SHRIEKS horribly inside the coffin)

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SL Poe sobs and sinks down beside Sissy's still open coffin, dejected and once more filled with despair. She lies still in death. He cries for a while.

POE: (Soft, anguished) We loved with a love that was more than love --
BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP SR on Poe in his study at his desk, shoulders bent wearily; the Raven sits on a bust of Pallas nearby.

POE: (To the audience) “And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted -- nevermore!”

BLACKOUT

LIGHTS COME UP CS ON THE SCREEN where we can see an austere four-story building with vaulted gothic windows. A PLAQUE on a stone wall reads: WASHINGTON MEDICAL COLLEGE. ON SCREEN SUPERED the legend:
Baltimore, Maryland October 7, 1849

LIGHTS COME UP FURTHER SL on DR. MORAN, an older professional, who leads a group of young interns into a hospital room where Poe lies on a bed in leather restraints. He appears to be sleeping.

MORAN: This next patient is quite an interesting one...Edgar Allan Poe... he may look mad, but don't be deceived... this is a great man.

INTERN: (In disbelief) Edgar Allan Poe? How can this be?

MORAN: Well, it's Poe alright...

INTERN: But, what happened to him?

MORAN: The ravages of brandy and sloe gin. Here is a man who loves spirit more than life... far more than his own life.

BLACKOUT
LIGHTS COME UP on hospital room SL, Poe's room, revealing the man lying in bed, writhing madly, a PRIEST sitting nearby, adjusting his covers. Poe's hands reach out beyond the restraints, grasps at the priest, eyes wild and paranoid, peering at him through a wild tangle of hair like those of a cornered animal. He is defiant and intense, speaks in a hoarse whisper:

POE: How the devil, sir... did you get into this place?... not a word I beseech you... been here sometime myself... terrible accident...

PRIEST: Now, now... just calm down...

POE: Hold your tongue I tell you!... I caught somebody else's!... had always too much of my own... Oh, God... Oh, God...!

(He begins flailing again. The priest takes a flask of whiskey from his coat, opens it, presses the opening to Poe's lips. Poe reacts, drinks eagerly, sucking at the bottle, draining its contents, his murmuring and gesticulating subsiding. He lies quietly, reacting to a SOUND that he hears, like the light TINKLING of BELLS, crystal-clear and ethereal)

POE'S VOICE: “Hear the mellow wedding bells
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
Through the balmy air of night
How they ring out their delight!”

(The priest gets up and exits. Poe stirs as he moves off, opens his eyes and stares upward, listening intently. We can HEAR A SOFT SOUND LIKE THE SWINGING OF THE CENSERS OF ANGELS)

SISSY'S VOICE: (reprise)... I'll be your guardian angel... watch over you in spirit... sigh upon you in the evening wind... fill the air you breathe... with perfume from the censers of angels...

(Poe smiles, breathing in deeply through his nostrils.)
Now, he turns his head slightly, reacts to Sissy as she appears out of the darkness, her thin pale hand reaching out to him. He smiles in recognition, holds out his hand as his leather restraints fall away. Sissy comes to him silently, radiantly, lies down beside him; he turns toward her, encircling her thin body with his arms, holding her close. ON THE SCREEN US we can again see the VALLEY OF THE MANY-COLORED GRASS Poe and Sissy together, walking through the grass, joyfully laughing. POE'S VOICE CAN BE HEARD.)

POE (V.O.) "And all my days were trances,
And all my nightly dreams--"

(They are now hand-in-hand, walking off into the distance of this remarkably beautiful place)

POE (V.O.) "Were where thy dark eye glances,
And where thy footstep gleams--"

(They stop, turn to look at one another, their bodies undergoing the TRANSFORMATION, arms and legs merging with the body, the filmy substance coating them)

POE (V.O.) (a whisper) "In what ethereal dances,
By what eternal streams."

(Then, the METAMORPHOSIS is complete, the two large BUTTERFLIES poised in mid-air, then rising into the clear blue sky...)

SLOW BLACKOUT and the words ON SCREEN:

This story was fiction based on fact and told in the spirit of Poe's life and work. No one was ever formally charged in the death of Mary Rogers, but it was widely speculated that Poe knew far more than he revealed in "The Mystery of Marie Roget."

CURTAIN