

Dark Heart of Zoe by A.D. Hasselbring

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Dark Heart of Zoe

by A.D. Hasselbring

from the works of Edgar Allan Poe

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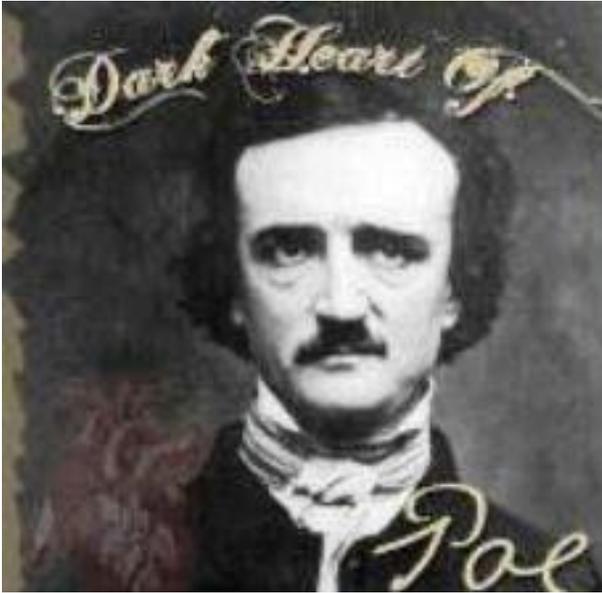
Dark Heart of Poe

by A.D. Hasselbring

Cast of Characters

2/3M

Edgar and Poe/Walker



First Produced at

**The Simi Valley Cultural Arts
Center**

Simi Valley, CA

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Produced by IT'S A NEW DAY
David Ralphe, Artistic Director

Director..... Andrew James
Executive Producers Steve Hayes and Pat Lewis
Production Producers..... Kaelia Franklin and Allison Chase Williams
Sound Design Common Time Sound
Costume Design Allison Chase Williams
Production Crew/Creative Team Rena Petrello, Julie Pound, Bob Decker,
Seth Kamenow, Kris Keppler Mikita,
Eric McGowan, Carly Crocker,
Brenda Bohem Miller, Rosa Linda Diaz,
Micah Cover and the Simi Valley Cultural
Center Technical Staff
Original Photography..... Rena Collette Photography

ORIGINAL CAST

EDGAR TRAVIS WINTERSTEIN
POE/WALKER AUSTIN ROBERT MILLER

CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
EDGAR	Weary, disheveled, at the end of his rope	40s	M
POE	Young, vibrant, sharply dressed, EDGAR's younger artistic self, equal parts romantic and sinister.	20-25	M
WALKER	Genteel, professional	Open	M

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ACT I

Early October, 1849.

DARK. The SOUND of a faint HEARTBEAT.

LIGHTS UP.

EDGAR, 40s, weary, and at the end of his rope, lies on a COT in a sparsely-appointed room. He wears ill-fitting, mismatched clothing, has a single BLANKET at his feet, a BOTTLE of Cognac in his hand.

There is a DESK, scattered PAPERS, a LARGE MIRROR, and a locked DOOR.

POE (OFF STAGE)

Last night,

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP.

POE (OFF STAGE, CONT.)

...with many cares and toils oppress'd,

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP.

POE (OFF STAGE, CONT.)

Weary,

EDGAR stirs in his sleep and mumbles.

EDGAR (ONSTAGE) AND POE (OFF STAGE)

Weary,

POE (OFF STAGE)

Weary, I laid me on a couch to rest.

LIGHTS begin to FLICKER. A cacophony of HELLISH SOUNDS fills the room, then DISSOLVES. Someone is KNOCKING outside the door.

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

Sir? Mr. Reynold, sir?

EDGAR jolts awake.

EDGAR

Yes. I am here — I am here.

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

It's Mr. Walker. I just wanted to know if the clothes were alright.

EDGAR

The clothes...

He looks down and adjusts his mismatched ensemble.

EDGAR

Yes, they are more than sufficient for my purposes. I thank you for your kindness, sir.

EDGAR approaches the door but does not open it.

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

I'm having yours cleaned. It may take a while. Shall I leave them outside your door when they are ready?

EDGAR

That would be most convenient if you will. My sincere thanks.

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

Of course, sir. Is there anything else I can do for you, Mr. Reynolds?

EDGAR

Why are you calling me Reynolds?

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

That's the name you gave, sir, when you checked in. Did I misunderstand?

EDGAR

No, I — I mean — My Christian name is Edgar. Would you please call me that?

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

Of course, sir.

EDGAR

Thank you.

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

Also, you said you had an urgent letter?

EDGAR

A letter?

EDGAR rushes back to the desk, where he retrieves a LEATHER SACHEL.

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

Yes. Would you like me to post it for you?

EDGAR empties the satchel, spilling out numerous drafts of letters, old and new.

EDGAR

No. That won't be necessary.

WALKER (OFF STAGE)

Very good, sir.

EDGAR begins to pore over the letters, tearing some up and dropping them on the floor.

EDGAR

Letters are a dangerous thing, you know, Mr. Walker. You send them out into the world like a child and hope they will meet their purpose.

EDGAR tears another letter, then stops and begins to read one he'd written to John Allan.

EDGAR (CONT.)

But they seldom do. Do they, Mr. Walker?

(pause)

Mr. Walker?

There is no answer.

EDGAR (CONT.)

They seldom do.

EDGAR reads aloud.

EDGAR (CONT.)

Richmond, Monday.

EDGAR (ONSTAGE) AND POE (OFF STAGE)

Sir,

EDGAR looks to the door. Nothing. EDGAR continues.

EDGAR

After my treatment on yesterday and what passed between us this morning, I can hardly think you will be surprised at the contents of this letter. My determination is at length taken — to leave your house and endeavor to find some place in this wide world, where I will be treated— not as you have treated me —

Again, I have heard you say (when you little thought I was listening, and therefore must have said it in earnest) that you had no affection for me —

You have moreover ordered me to quit your house, and are continually upbraiding me with eating the bread of Idleness, when you yourself were the only person to remedy the evil by placing me to some business —

You take delight in exposing me before those whom you think likely to advance my interest in this world —

EDGAR can read no further.

LIGHTS SHIFT and the memory of his earliest days overtake him. A WIND begins to blow through the room.

DREAMS

(1827)

EDGAR (CONT.)

Oh, that my young life were a lasting dream!
My spirit not awakening, till the beam
Of an Eternity should bring the morrow.
Yes! tho' that long dream were of hopeless sorrow,
'Twere better than the cold reality
Of waking life, to him whose heart must be,
And hath been still, upon the lovely earth,
A chaos of deep passion, from his birth.
But should it be — that dream eternally
Continuing — as dreams have been to me
In my young boyhood — should it thus be given,
'Twere folly still to hope for higher Heaven.
For I have revell'd when the sun was bright
I' the summer sky, in dreams of living light,
And loveliness, have left my very heart
In climes of mine imagining, apart
From mine own home, with beings that have been
Of mine own thought — what more could I have seen?
'Twas once — and only once — and the wild hour
From my remembrance shall not pass —
Some power or spell had bound me —

A GUST OF WIND SWEEPS the letter from his hand.
EDGAR has entered a state of delirium from which he
will not recover.

EDGAR (CONT.)

'Twas the chilly wind
Came o'er me in the night, and left behind
Its image on my spirit — or the moon
Shone on my slumbers in her lofty noon
Too coldly — or the stars — howe'er it was...

EDGAR (ONSTAGE) AND POE (OFF
STAGE)

That dream was as that night-wind — let it pass.

EDGAR (CONT.)

I have been happy, tho' [but] in a dream.
I have been happy — and I love the theme:
Dreams! In their vivid colouring of life
As in that fleeting, shadowy, misty strife
Of semblance with reality which brings
To the delirious eye, more lovely things
Of Paradise and Love — and all our own!
Than young Hope in his sunniest hour hath known.

LIGHTS SHIFT and EDGAR's demeanor changes as
HELLISH SOUNDS again fill the room.

EDGAR looks to the door. Nothing.

The MIRROR behind him BEGINS TO GLOW.
EDGAR approaches it. The REFLECTION he sees is
that of POE: young, vibrant, sharply dressed, EDGAR's
younger artistic self, equal parts romantic and sinister.

EDGAR (CONT.)

I am young,

POE

— not yet twenty,

EDGAR AND POE

— am a poet,

POE

— if deep worship of all beauty can make me one — and wish to be so in the common
meaning of the word.

EDGAR

I would give the world to embody one half the ideas afloat in my...

EDGAR AND POE

...imagination.

POE

I am and have been from my childhood, an idler. It cannot therefore be said that,

EDGAR AND POE

“I left a calling for this idle trade,”

EDGAR

a duty broke,

POE

...a father disobeyed,

EDGAR

...for I have no father —

POE

...nor mother.

The cacophony of HELLISH SOUNDS again fills the room. The mirror separating the two men begins to run RED WITH BLOOD, then CRACKS.

BLACKOUT.

LIGHTS UP and POE is in the room with EDGAR, who now stands almost hypnotized.

TO—
(1833)

POE (CONT.)

Sleep on, sleep on, another hour —
I would not break so calm a sleep,
To wake to sunshine and to show'r,
To smile and weep.

Sleep on, sleep on, like sculptured thing,
Majestic, beautiful art thou;
Sure seraph shields thee with his wing
And fans thy brow —

We would not deem thee child of earth,
For, O, angelic, is thy form!
But, that in heav'n thou had'st thy birth,

Where comes no storm.
To mar the bright, the perfect flow'r,
But all is beautiful and still —
And golden sands proclaim the hour
Which brings no ill.

Sleep on, sleep on, some fairy dream
Perchance is woven in thy sleep —
But, O, thy spirit, calm, serene,
Must wake to weep.

POE snaps his fingers. EDGAR wakes and begins to cough. Unaware of POE, EDGAR grabs his bottle of Cognac and drinks. Poe watches.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH
(1842)

POE (CONT.)

The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal — the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution.

EDGAR reaches for his bottle, but finds it empty. In a desperate attempt at self-medication, he searches for another bottle, which he finds at last.

POE (CONT.)

The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

EDGAR drinks. LIGHTS SHIFT.

EDGAR

But the Prince Prospero was happy,

EDGAR and POE tell the story as if two halves of the same person.

POE

...and dauntless...

EDGAR AND POE

...and sagacious.

EDGAR

When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends from among the knights and dames of his court, and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his castellated abbeys. This was an extensive and magnificent structure, the creation of the prince's own eccentric yet august taste. A strong and lofty wall girdled it in. This wall had gates of iron. The courtiers, having entered, brought furnaces and massy hammers and welded the bolts. They resolved to leave means neither of ingress or egress to the sudden impulses of despair or of frenzy from within. The abbey was amply provisioned. With such precautions the courtiers might bid defiance to contagion.

POE

The external world could take care of itself. In the meantime it was folly to grieve,

EDGAR AND POE

...or to think.

POE

The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure. There were buffoons,

EDGAR

...there were improvisatori,

POE

...there were ballet-dancers,

EDGAR

...there were musicians,

POE

...there was Beauty,

EDGAR AND POE

...there was wine.

POE

All these and security were within. Without was the...

EDGAR AND POE

"Red Death."

EDGAR

It was toward the close of the fifth...

POE

...or sixth...

EDGAR

...month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, that the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

POE

It was a voluptuous scene, that...

EDGAR AND POE

...masquerade.

EDGAR

But first let me tell of the rooms in which it was held. There were seven — an imperial suite. In many palaces, however, such suites form a long and straight vista, while the folding doors slide back nearly to the walls on either hand, so that the view of the whole extent is scarcely impeded.

POE

Here the case was very different; as might have been expected from the duke's...

EDGAR

...love of the bizarre.

POE

The apartments were so irregularly disposed that the vision embraced but little more than one at a time.

EDGAR's room now becomes Prospero's domain.

EDGAR

There was a sharp turn at every twenty...

POE

...or thirty yards,

EDGAR

...and at each turn a novel effect. To the...

POE

...right...

EDGAR

...and left, in the...

EDGAR AND POE

...middle...

EDGAR

...of each wall, a tall and narrow Gothic window looked out upon a closed corridor which pursued...

POE

...the windings of the suite....

EDGAR

These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened.

POE

That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example,

EDGAR

...in blue —

LIGHTS CHANGE with each color.

POE

...and vividly blue were its windows.

EDGAR

The second chamber was purple in its ornaments and tapestries, and here the panes were purple.

POE

The third was green throughout, and so were the casements.

EDGAR

The fourth was furnished and lighted with orange —

POE

The fifth with white —

EDGAR

The sixth with violet.

POE

The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in...

EDGAR AND POE

...black velvet ...

POE

...tapestries that hung all over the ceiling...

EDGAR

...and down the walls,

POE

...falling in heavy folds...

EDGAR

...upon a carpet...

EDGAR AND POE

...of the same material and hue.

EDGAR

But in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations.

POE

The panes here were scarlet —

EDGAR AND POE

...a deep blood color.

EDGAR

Now in not one of the seven apartments was there any lamp or candelabrum, amid the profusion of golden ornaments that lay...

EDGAR AND POE

...scattered to and fro,

EDGAR

...or depended from the roof.

POE

There was no light of any kind emanating from lamp or candle within the suite of chambers.

EDGAR

But in the corridors that followed the suite, there stood, opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire that protected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room.

POE

And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances.

The once barren room is now alive with the images of
EDGAR's imagination.

EDGAR

But in the western or black chamber the effect of the fire-light that streamed upon the dark hangings through the blood-tinted panes, was ghastly in the extreme, and produced so wild a look upon the countenances of those who entered, that there were few of the company bold enough to set foot within its precincts at all.

POE

It was in this apartment, also,

EDGAR

...that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before. But,

EDGAR AND POE

...in spite of these things,

EDGAR

...it was a gay and magnificent revel.

POE

The tastes of the duke were peculiar.

EDGAR

He had a fine eye for colors and effects. He disregarded the decora of mere fashion. His plans were bold...

POE

...and fiery, and his conceptions glowed with

EDGAR AND POE

...barbaric lustre.

POE

There are some who would have thought him mad.

EDGAR

His followers felt that he was not.

POE

It was necessary to hear,

EDGAR

...and see and...

EDGAR AND POE

...touch him,

POE

...to be sure that he was not.

EDGAR

He had directed, in great part, the moveable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fete; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders.

POE

Be sure they were...

EDGAR AND POE

...grotesque.

EDGAR

There were much...

POE

...glare...

EDGAR

...and glitter...

POE

...and piquancy...

EDGAR AND POE

...and phantasm —

EDGAR

...much of what has been since seen in...

EDGAR AND POE

"Hernani."

EDGAR

There were arabesque figures with...

EDGAR AND POE

...unsuited limbs ...

EDGAR

...and appointments.

POE

There were delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these —

EDGAR AND POE

...the dreams —

POE

...writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps.

EDGAR

And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away —

POE

They have endured but an instant —

EDGAR

And a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music...

POE

...swells,

EDGAR

...and the dreams...

POE

...live, and...

EDGAR AND POE

...writhe to and fro...

EDGAR

...more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many-tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods. But to the chamber which lies most westwardly of the seven, there are now...

EDGAR AND POE

...none of the maskers who venture;

EDGAR

For the night is waning away; and there flows a ruddier light through the blood-colored panes; and the blackness of the sable drapery appalls; and to him whose foot falls upon the sable carpet, there comes from the near clock of ebony a muffled peal more solemnly emphatic than any which reaches their ears who indulge in the more remote gaities of the other apartments.

POE

But these other apartments were densely crowded, and in them beat feverishly the heart of life. And the revel went whirlingly on, until at length there commenced the sounding of midnight upon the clock.

EDGAR

And then the music ceased, as I have told;

POE

And the evolutions of the waltzers were quieted; and there was an uneasy cessation of all things as before. But now there were twelve strokes to be sounded by the bell of the clock; and thus it happened, perhaps, that more of thought crept, with more of time, into the meditations of the thoughtful...

EDGAR AND POE

...among those who revelled.

EDGAR

And thus, too, it happened, perhaps, that before the last echoes of the last chime had...

EDGAR AND POE

...utterly sunk into silence,

EDGAR

There were many individuals in the crowd who had found leisure to become aware of the presence of a masked figure which had arrested the attention of no single individual before. And the rumor of this new presence having spread itself whisperingly around, there arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of disapprobation and surprise — then, finally, of terror, of horror,

POE

...and of disgust.

EDGAR

In an assembly of phantasms such as I have painted, it may well be supposed that no ordinary appearance could have excited such sensation. In truth the masquerade license of the night was nearly unlimited; but the figure in question had out-Heroded Herod, and gone beyond the bounds of even the prince's indefinite decorum. There are chords in the hearts of the most reckless which cannot be touched without emotion. Even with the utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally jests, there are matters of which no jest can be made.

POE has transformed himself into the Red Death.

EDGAR (CONT.)

The whole company, indeed, seemed now deeply to feel that in the costume and bearing of the stranger neither wit nor propriety existed. The figure was tall and gaunt, and...

POE

...shrouded from head to foot...

EDGAR

...in the habiliments of...

EDGAR AND POE

...the grave.

POE

The mask which concealed the visage was made so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse that the closest scrutiny must have had difficulty in detecting the cheat.

And yet all this might have been endured, if not approved, by the mad revellers around.
But the mummer had gone so far as to assume the type of the...

EDGAR AND POE

Red Death.

EDGAR

His vesture was dabbled in blood — and his broad brow, with all the features of the face,
was besprinkled with the scarlet horror.

POE

When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon this spectral image...

EDGAR

(which with a slow and solemn movement,

POE

...as if more fully to sustain its role,

EDGAR

...stalked to and fro among the waltzers)

POE

...he was seen to be convulsed, in the first moment with a strong shudder either of terror
or...

EDGAR AND POE

...distaste;

POE

But, in the next, his brow reddened with rage.

EDGAR

"Who dares?"

POE

...he demanded hoarsely of the courtiers who stood near him,

EDGAR

— "who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him —
that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise, from the battlements!"

POE

It was in the eastern or blue chamber in which stood the Prince Prospero as he uttered these words.

EDGAR

They rang throughout the seven rooms loudly and clearly —

POE

For the prince was a bold and robust man, and the music had become hushed at the waving of his hand.

EDGAR

It was in the blue room where stood the prince, with a group of pale courtiers by his side. At first, as he spoke, there was a slight rushing movement of this group in the direction of the intruder,

EDGAR AND POE

...who at the moment was also near at hand,

POE

...and now, with deliberate and stately step, made closer approach to the speaker.

EDGAR

But from a certain nameless awe with which the mad assumptions of the mummer had inspired the whole party, there were found none who put forth hand to seize him;

EDGAR AND POE

...so that, unimpeded,

EDGAR

...he passed within a yard of the prince's person; and, while the vast assembly, as if with one impulse, shrank from the centres of the rooms to the walls, he made his way...

EDGAR AND POE

...uninterruptedly,

EDGAR

...but with the same solemn and measured step which had distinguished him from the first, through the blue chamber...

POE

...to the purple —

EDGAR

...through the purple to the green —

POE

...through the green to the orange —

EDGAR

...through this again to the white — and even...

EDGAR AND POE

...thence to the violet,

EDGAR

...ere a decided movement had been made to arrest him. It was then, however, that the Prince Prospero, maddening with rage and the shame of his own momentary cowardice, rushed hurriedly through the six chambers, while none followed him on account of a deadly terror that had seized upon all.

EDGAR AND POE

He bore aloft a drawn dagger,

EDGAR begins to move toward POE.

EDGAR

...and had approached, in rapid impetuosity, to within three or four feet of the retreating figure, when the latter, having attained the extremity of the velvet apartment, turned suddenly and confronted...

EDGAR AND POE

...his pursuer.

POE holds out an arm, stopping EDGAR in his tracks.

POE

There was a sharp cry — and the dagger dropped...

EDGAR

...gleaming upon the sable carpet,

POE

Upon which, instantly afterwards, fell prostrate in death...

EDGAR AND POE

...the Prince Prospero.

EDGAR falls lifeless to the ground.

POE

Then, summoning the wild courage of despair, a throng of the revellers at once threw themselves into the black apartment, and, seizing the mummer, whose tall figure stood erect and motionless within the shadow of the ebony clock, gasped in unutterable horror at finding the grave-cerements and corpse-like mask which they handled with so violent a rudeness, untenanted by any tangible form.

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

BLACKOUT. EXIT POE.

LIGHTS UP. EDGAR awakens on the floor where he fell. He coughs, pulls himself up to a standing position, and looks around the room before sitting at his desk to write.

EDGAR

The state of my mind has, in fact, forced me to abandon for the present, all mental exertion. The renewed and hopeless illness of my wife, ill health on my own part, and pecuniary embarrassments, have nearly driven me to distraction. My only hope of relief is the "Bankrupt Act," of which I shall avail myself as soon as possible. Had I resolved upon this at an earlier day, I might now have been doing well — but the struggle to keep up has, at length, entirely ruined me. Mrs. Poe is again dangerously ill with hemorrhage from the lungs. It is folly to hope.

EDGAR coughs, picks up the bottle, but sets it back down, then stands. His cough returns. He grabs the bottle, drinks, crosses to the cot where he falls asleep.

BLACKOUT.

In the dark, we hear the MURMUR of a CROWD and a JUDGE's GAVEL trying to silence them.

LIGHTS UP. POE is in the room. EDGAR is asleep.

THE TELL-TALE HEART

(1843)

EDGAR slumbers as POE begins to speak.

POE

TRUE! Nervous — very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses — not destroyed — not dulled them. 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, am I mad? Hearken! And observe how healthily — how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. 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! He had the eye of a vulture — a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees — very gradually — I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

LIGHTS SHIFT. The room transforms and POE takes over.

POE (CONT.)

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded — with what caution — with what foresight — with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it — oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, so that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in!

I moved it slowly — very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! — would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously — oh, so cautiously — cautiously (for the hinges creaked) — I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights — every night just at midnight — but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he has passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

POE moves to the door and continues.

POE (CONT.)

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers — of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back — but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily. I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed,

EDGAR jolts up in the bed.

POE (CONT.)

...crying out —

EDGAR

"Who's there?"

POE

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening; — just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief — oh, no! — it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself —

EDGAR AND POE

"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney — it is only a mouse crossing the floor,"

POE

...or ...

EDGAR AND POE

"It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp."

POE

Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel — although he neither saw nor heard — to feel the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little — a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it — you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily — until, at length a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye.

POE leans further into the room as his intensity grows.

POE (CONT.)

It was open — wide, wide open — and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness — all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

A FAINT HEARTBEAT can be heard.

POE (CONT.)

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over acuteness of the senses? Now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

The HEARTBEAT grows LOUDER.

POE (CONT.)

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! Do you mark me well? I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me — the sound would be heard by a neighbor! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room.

POE attacks EDGAR in the bed, throwing him to the ground and crushing his skull.

POE (CONT.)

He shrieked once — once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

A series of LIGHTS FLASH. The SOUNDS OF DISMEMBERMENT can be heard.

BLACKOUT.

LIGHTS UP.

EDGAR is gone.

POE (CONT.)

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye — not even his — could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out — no stain of any kind — no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all — ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock — still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart, — for what had I now to fear?

POE opens the door.

POE (CONT.)

There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbor during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled, — for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search — search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct:

The FAINT HEARTBEAT begins again.

POE (CONT.)

— it continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness —until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

As the HEARTBEAT grows LOUDER, POE becomes increasingly more frantic.

POE (CONT.)

No doubt I now grew very pale; — but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased — and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound — much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath — and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly — more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men — but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! What could I do? I foamed — I raved — I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder — louder — louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! — No, no! They heard! — They suspected! — They knew! — They were making a mockery of my horror! — This I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! — And now — again! — Hark! Louder! Louder! Louder! Louder! —

"Villains!" I shrieked, "Dissemble no more! I admit the deed! —Tear up the planks! Here, here! — It is the beating of his hideous heart!"

BLACKOUT.

END ACT I

ACT II

Dark. A HEART BEATS.

POE (OFF STAGE)

— It is the beating of his hideous heart!

There is an explosion of VOICES MURMURING from the darkness as we hear a GAVEL trying to silence the CROWD to little avail. The increasing sound of the POUNDING and methodical GAVEL give way to the slow, but emphatic, sound of the BEATING HEART.

LIGHTS UP.

All is quiet. EDGAR wakes, alone. He's desperately ill, but must write. He goes to his desk and picks up his QUILL.

EDGAR

You speak of "an estimate of my life" — and, from what I have already said, you will see that I have none to give. I have been too deeply conscious of the mutability and evanescence of temporal things, to give any continuous effort to anything — to be consistent in anything. My life has been whim — impulse — passion — a longing for solitude — a scorn of all things present, in an earnest desire for the future.

There is a FLAP of raven wings outside an unseen window. A haunted EDGAR looks up.

EDGAR (CONT.)

Once upon a midnight dreary...

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP.

EDGAR shakes, starts to pour a drink, and stops himself. He sets the bottle down.

EDGAR (CONT.)

Once upon a midnight dreary...

LIGHTS DOWN.

LIGHTS UP. The mood shifts.

THE RAVEN
(1845)

EDGAR (CONT.)

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door.
Only this, and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow; — vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow — sorrow for the lost Lenore —
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore —
Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me — filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating,
"Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door —
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; —
This it is, and nothing more."

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
"Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you" — here I opened wide the door; —

EDGAR opens the door to the room, where POE stands,
though EDGAR does not see him.

EDGAR (CONT.)

Darkness there, and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word,

EDGAR AND POE

"Lenore?"

EDGAR

This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word,

EDGAR AND POE

"Lenore!"

EDGAR

Merely this, and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice:
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore —
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore; —
'Tis the wind and nothing more!"

EDGAR flings open the unseen window.

EDGAR (CONT.)

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;

POE controls the unseen Raven with the slightest
movement of his hand.

EDGAR (CONT.)

Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door —
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door —
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore.
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore —
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"
Quoth the Raven,

EDGAR AND POE

"Nevermore."

EDGAR

Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning — little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door —
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing further then he uttered — not a feather then he fluttered —
Till I scarcely more than muttered, "Other friends have flown before —
On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before."
Then the bird said,

EDGAR AND POE

"Nevermore."

EDGAR

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
"Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only stock and store,
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore —
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of 'Never — nevermore.'"

But the Raven still beguiling all my fancy into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;

Then upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore —
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking "Nevermore."

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then me thought the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose footfalls tinkled on the tufted floor.
"Wretch," I cried, "thy God hath lent thee — by these angels he hath sent thee
Respite- respite and nepenthe, from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"
Quoth the Raven,

EDGAR AND POE

"Nevermore."

EDGAR

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! — prophet still, if bird or devil! —
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted —
On this home by Horror haunted, tell me truly, I implore —
Is there — is there balm in Gilead? — Tell me — tell me, I implore!"
Quoth the Raven,

EDGAR AND POE

"Nevermore."

EDGAR has now lost all sense of self. The SOUNDS of
HELL surround him. POE revels in his torture.

EDGAR

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! — prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that Heaven that bends above us, by that God we both adore —
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore —
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven,

EDGAR AND POE

"Nevermore."

EDGAR

"Be that word our sign in parting, bird or fiend," I shrieked, upstarting —
"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!
Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my loneliness unbroken! Quit the bust above my door!
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"
Quoth the Raven,

EDGAR AND POE

"Nevermore."

EDGAR

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

EDGAR sits, staring up at the raven. POE looks on.
LIGHTS FADE.

LIGHTS UP. Time has passed. The bird has not moved.
EDGAR stands in the doorway, looking up. LIGHTS
FADE.

Time passes. LIGHTS UP. EDGAR sleeps in his cot.

POE SLAMS the door. EDGAR wakes, frightened, and
goes to his desk as POE looks on. EDGAR writes.

EDGAR (CONT.)

For the first time during two months I find myself entirely myself — dreadfully sick and depressed, but still myself. I seem to have just awakened from some horrible dream, in which all was confusion, and suffering. I really believe that I have been mad — but indeed I have had abundant reason to be so.

POE begins to laugh. For the first time, EDGAR seems to notice him. Still laughing, POE turns his back on EDGAR.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

(1846)

EDGAR (CONT.)

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitively settled — but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile now was at the thought of his immolation. He had a weak point — this Fortunato — although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself upon his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity, to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmary, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack, but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially; — I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself, and bought largely whenever I could.

LIGHTS SHIFT. EDGAR is now fully engrossed in the reality of the story as POE plays his part.

The sights and SOUNDS of the catacombs exist inside EDGAR's room.

EDGAR (CONT.)

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking much. The man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him — "My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking to-day. But I have received a pipe of what passes for Amontillado, and I have my doubts."

POE

"How?"

EDGAR

...said he.

POE

"Amontillado? A pipe? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!"

EDGAR

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

POE

"Amontillado!"

EDGAR

"I have my doubts."

POE

"Amontillado!"

EDGAR

"And I must satisfy them."

POE

"Amontillado!"

EDGAR

As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchresi. If any one has a critical turn it is he. He will tell me — "

POE

"Luchresi could not tell Amontillado from Sherry."

EDGAR

"Any yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own."

POE

"Come, let us go."

EDGAR

"Whither?"

POE

"To your vaults."

EDGAR

"My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchresi — "

POE

"I have no engagement. Come."

EDGAR

"My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the sever cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with nitre."

POE

"Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchresi, he cannot distinguish Sherry from Amontillado."

EDGAR

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm; and putting on a mask of black silk and drawing a roquelaire closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo. There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honour of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning, and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux, and giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed.

We came at length to the foot of the descent, and stood together upon the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors. The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

POE

"The pipe,"

EDGAR

...said he. "It is farther on," said I; "but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls." He turned towards me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum of intoxication.

POE

"Nitre?"

EDGAR

...he asked, at length. "Nitre," I replied. "How long have you had that cough?"

POE

"Ugh! ugh! ugh! - ugh! ugh! ugh! - ugh! ugh! ugh! - ugh! ugh! ugh! - ugh! ugh! ugh!"

EDGAR

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

POE

"It is nothing."

EDGAR

...he said, at last. "Come," I said, with decision, "we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a manto be missed. For me it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchresi — "

POE

"Enough,"

EDGAR

...he said.

POE

"The cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

EDGAR

"True, true," I replied; "and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily, but you should use all proper caution. A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damps."

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

"Drink," I said, presenting him the wine. He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

POE

"I drink,"

EDGAR

...he said,

POE

..."to the buried that repose around us."

EDGAR

"And I to your long life." He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

POE

"The vaults,"

EDGAR

...he said,

POE

..."are extensive."

EDGAR

"The Montresors," I replied, were a great and numerous family."

POE

"I forget your arms."

EDGAR

"A huge human foot d'or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are imbedded in the heel,"

POE

"And the motto?"

EDGAR

"Nemo me impune lacessit."

POE

"Good!"

EDGAR

...he said. The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Medoc. We had passed through long walls of piled skeletons, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

"The nitre!" I said. "See, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river's bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough — "

POE

"It is nothing,"

EDGAR

...he said;

POE

"Let us go on. But first, another draught of the Medoc."

EDGAR

I broke and reached him a flacon of De Grâve. He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upwards with a gesticulation I did not understand. I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement — a grotesque one.

POE

"You do not comprehend?"

EDGAR

...he said. "Not I," I replied.

POE

"The you are not of the brotherhood."

EDGAR

"How?"

POE

"You are not of the masons."

EDGAR

"Yes, yes," I said; "yes, yes."

POE

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

EDGAR

"A mason," I replied.

POE

"A sign,"

EDGAR

...he said,

POE

"a sign."

EDGAR

"It is this," I answered, producing from beneath the folds of my roquelaire a trowel.

POE

"You jest,"

EDGAR

...he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces.

POE

"But let us proceed to the Amontillado."

EDGAR

"Be it so," I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our rout in search of the Amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and descending again, arrived at a deep crypt, in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth side the bones had been thrown down, and lay promiscuously upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior crypt or recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavoured to pry into the depths of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

"Proceed," I said; "herein is the Amontillado. As for Luchresi — "

POE

"He is an ignoramus,"

EDGAR

...interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered.

EDGAR shoves his alter-ego into the abyss and CHAINS him to the wall of the room.

EDGAR (CONT.)

A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet, horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the key I stepped back from the recess.

"Pass your hand," I said, "over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is very damp. Once more let me implore you to return. No? Then I will positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power."

POE

"The Amontillado!"

EDGAR

...ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment. "True," I replied; "the Amontillado."

The dank dampness of the catacombs is palpable, and the
SOUND OF WATER DRIPPING fills the room.

EDGAR (CONT.)

As I said these words I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche. I had scarcely laid the first tier of my masonry when I discovered that the intoxication of Fortunato had in great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was not the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibration of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labours and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel, and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused, and holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within. A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated, I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier, I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs, and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall. I replied to the yells of him who clamoured. I re-echoed — I aided — I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamourer grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight;

I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognising as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said —

POE

"Ha! ha! ha! — He, he, he! — a very good joke, indeed — an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo — He, he, he! — over our wine — He, he, he!"

EDGAR

"The Amontillado!" I said.

POE

"He, he, he! He, he, he! Yes, the Amontillado. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the palazzo, the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone."

EDGAR

"Yes," I said, "let us be gone."

POE

"For the love of God, Montessor!"

EDGAR

"Yes," I said, "for the love of God!"

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud, "Fortunato!" No answer. I called again, "Fortunato!" No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick; it was the dampness of the catacombs that made it so. I hastened to make an end of my labour. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. In pace requiescat!

EDGAR finds himself moving backward.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

EDGAR is alone at his desk. He writes.

EDGAR (CONT.)

This "evil" was the greatest which can befall a man. Six years ago, a wife, whom I loved as no man ever loved before, ruptured a blood-vessel in singing. I took leave of her forever and underwent all the agonies of her death.

EDGAR, engrossed in the letter, does not notice that POE has unchained himself and is standing in the SHADOWS.

EDGAR (CONT.)

She recovered partially and I again hoped. At the end of a year the vessel broke again — I went through precisely the same scene. Again in about a year afterward. Then again — again — again and even once again at varying intervals. Each time I felt all the agonies of her death — and at each accession of the disorder I loved her more dearly and clung to her life with more desperate pertinacity I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. During these fits of absolute unconsciousness I drank,

EDGAR AND POE

God only knows how often or how much.

EDGAR

As a matter of course, my enemies referred the insanity to the drink rather than the drink to the insanity. I had indeed, nearly abandoned all hope of a permanent cure when I found one in the death of my wife. This I can and do endure as becomes a man — it was the horrible never-ending oscillation between hope and despair which I could not longer have endured without the total loss of reason. Can you or will you help me?

THUNDER CRACKS.

POE emerges from the darkness and appears over EDGAR's shoulder.

LIGHTS SHIFT.

EDGAR (CONT.)

I am calm and tranquil and but for a strange shadow of coming evil which haunts me.

EDGAR looks at POE.

EDGAR AND POE

What can this mean?

SOFT MUSIC begins to play.

EDGAR walks center stage, touching a POOL OF AMBER LIGHT.

ELDORADO
(1849)

EDGAR

Gaily bedight
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow
Had journeyed long
Singing a song
In search of Eldorado

But he grew old
This knight so bold
And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length
He met a pilgrim shadow
"Shadow," said he,
"Where can it be—
This land of Eldorado?"

EDGAR AND POE

"Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,"

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes