

Month/Day/Year

Street

City

State

Zip Code

(Based on, If Any)

Revisions by

(Names of Subsequent Writers,
in Order of Work Performed)

Current Revisions by

(Current Writer, date)

Registered: ####

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Small, dark, silent. A 35-year-old man sits slouched over his desk, his expression bare, nearly catatonic. He's almost sickly slender, with a pale complexion and gray eyes, slightly curled black hair and a mustache over his thin lips. He wears a dark shirt with a Byronic collar and a black neckerchief.

Meet EDGAR ALLAN POE. Several drably-manufactured editions of his story collections, along with a book on "ratiocination," are stacked on the desk. A bottle of whiskey and a glass sweat onto a folded newspaper.

Around the room, a clear specimen-jar filled with cloudy liquid contains what looks like a pig fetus. Newspaper clippings of murders and disappearances line the walls and coat every flat surface. A microscope, magnifying glass, ruler, compass and surveying instruments complete the tableau.

At the center of his desk, in a vain attempt to attract the writer's attention, is a blank sheet of white paper. He TAPS a quill on it and chews his lip. Nothing comes.

The paper's whiteness, its blankness, overtakes the screen as the camera closes in on it. An image slowly forms, blurry at first, only the neutral colors coming through, as we

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

A female CORPSE among the muddy reeds of a riverbank. Her Victorian-era clothes are torn and tattered, her hair is matted and wet, her face bruised and swollen. A rope circles her neck.

PULL BACK to reveal that the rope is pulling her onto shore. PAN UP to two men at the other end of the rope, the looks on their faces attempting to conceal their aversion to the scene before them.

They are surrounded by MEN AND WOMEN who have gathered-- a scene is brewing. We hear their VOICES expressing horror and shame; some of the men attempt to shield their female companions' faces from the badly mutilated corpse before them. Light rain falls; minor-key string MUSIC plays.

**SUPERTITLE: The New Jersey banks of the Hudson River.
Wednesday morning, July 28, 1845.**

A BOY of about ten makes his way through the small crowd, and when he sees what they are looking at, he turns and runs off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Bystanders are heard:

BYSTANDER #1
Who do you suppose it is?

BYSTANDER #2
Could be that girl gone missing from New
York...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Along a road stands a house with an animal pen beside it and a sign identifying it as an inn, "Nick Moore's House."

The boy from the riverbank runs toward it.

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The boy enters a shuttered, empty pub. Behind the bar a fat elderly WOMAN is putting away glasses. Eye contact.

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

She stands at the bottom of a stairwell with the boy and a young man, sending the latter upstairs.

He ascends and knocks at a door, then, hearing no response, enters hesitantly.

INT. INN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Inside is a sparsely-furnished room with the curtains closed. Asleep on a cot with a straw-filled mattress is ARTHUR CROMMELIN, 32.

The first man nudges him awake.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

CLOSE-UP of the young woman's face. Through her bruises we can see she was very beautiful. A pair of hands enters frame and removes the rope from around her neck, leaving red, rash-like marks on it.

Some POLICE engage themselves in directing the small crowd away; speaking with the men who brought the body onshore; and covering it with a blanket. A horse-drawn cart waits nearby.

Crommelin -- tall with dark hair, good-looking, bourgeois -- arrives, led by the boy. He interrupts one of the police, who says a few words and lifts the blanket so that Crommelin may see. He doesn't want to look but must. Crommelin nods

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

and the officer replaces the blanket. Some of the bystanders have peeked.

The other officers then lift the body like a sack of potatoes and load it onto the cart. The driver WHIPS the horse into motion. PAN across the river, and CLOSE IN on the slight skyline of Manhattan in the distance.

INT. BROADWAY JOURNAL - DAY

A messy, cramped office is overfilled with desks, typesetting equipment, and papers littering every surface. A few men of various ages are working, conversing. A sign on the wall reads "BROADWAY JOURNAL."

Poe, somewhat dishevelled, slouches over his desk, obviously not doing whatever he is employed to do here: he is poring over a newspaper's "DEATH NOTICES," following the lines of minute type with his (dirty, bitten nails) fingers.

A younger man, the eager and friendly CHAMBERS, approaches with a sheaf of papers, which he unceremoniously deposits on Poe's desk.

CHAMBERS

The new Longfellow poems. Briggs wants 2,000 words on them by next week.

POE

Why do I waste my efforts on this doggerel?

Chambers sees what Poe has been reading.

CHAMBERS

Browsing hopefully?

(furtively)

Listen, it's not my place, but my hunch is that Briggs expects some actual writing from you.

POE

What does he care? He still gets to put my name on the cover.

CHAMBERS

My experience with Briggs is that even the most famous author in the country can't rely on reputation alone: you need to produce.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

What's the bother? For years I write
with no recognition beyond the acclaim of
a few snobs...

CHAMBERS

I'm no snob!

POE

...then I produce the most popular poem in
history and my previous audience spurns
me.

Poe goes back to his reading, effectively dismissing him.

CHAMBERS

In any case, I don't see why you aren't
more interested in the deeds of the
living.

POE

The dead are infinitely more interesting
than the living, Chambers; just take a
look around.

Chambers scans the roomful of moribund-looking journalists.

INT. DR. COOK'S EXAMINING ROOM - DAY

The corpse lies on an examining table in a gray room.

Police introduce Crommelin to DR. COOK, a rotund, slightly
buffoonish middle-aged man in a doctor's smock, and depart.

Dr. Cook places a tray of medical implements on the table.
With a loud RIP, he tears open the woman's dress, pulling it
off her left arm. He proceeds to strip her down to her
underwear, discarding on the floor a lace collar and cuffs, a
muslin slip and petticoat, garters and stockings.

The woman is splayed awkwardly on the table, her arms hanging
over its sides, like she's just suffered another violation.
Dr. Cook replaces her right arm over her midsection. The
hand is covered by a dainty white glove. He removes it and
tosses it with the rest of the clothes.

ECU: a gloveless left hand, a gold band on its ring finger.

ECU: a large bruise behind the right ear.

ECU: a smaller bruise behind the left ear.

ECU: rope burn on the neck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ECU: tweezers removing a small piece of torn cloth from gashes in the right wrist...

ECU: ...and the left...

ECU: ...same tweezers, same cloth, from one ankle...

ECU: ...and the other.

ECU: scrape marks on the shoulder blades and back.

ECU: bruises and chafing on sharp pelvic bones.

ECU: blood on the inside of the thighs.

Dr. Cook peers into her crotch with a prudish look on his face, not shying from something grotesque, but showing the disdain for the female anatomy peculiar to Victorian-era medical practitioners.

His crusty hand reaches for a spotlessly shiny, steel speculum, which FLASHES blindingly on the screen. When the image again becomes discernible, the speculum is a pair of scissors cutting a lock of hair. We are now

INT. EXAMINING ROOM - LATER

Dr. Cook folds the lock of hair into a piece of paper, then presents it to Crommelin, who places it and an article of the woman's clothing in a small carpetbag.

They shake hands and Crommelin exits.

EXT. FERRYBOAT - EVENING

As the gray day fades to black, Crommelin stands aboard a ferryboat with a look of sadness and dread on his face.

EXT. 126 NASSAU STREET, MANHATTAN - NIGHT

Crommelin pauses before knocking on the door of a three-story, red brick building with a flat roof that identifies itself as a "BOARDING HOUSE."

A YOUNG WOMAN-- late teens, black-- answers and admits him.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She leads Crommelin into a room where a white WOMAN sits. Seeing the look on his face, hers turns to horror. Crommelin removes from his bag the cloth and lock of hair he took from the corpse. The two women collapse into each other.

EXT. BROADWAY - DAY

Early morning light, still gray & gloomy. Follow Poe making his way up the street. His clothes are unpressed, his face unshaven, and he looks nauseous-- he is hungover.

An omnibus-- a large public carriage-- is drawn by a team of horses. Pigs and prostitutes alike walk the street unminded. Children with smudged faces and tattered clothing scavenge for rags and garbage among the lower reaches of the crowd. One sits on a curb, patting her little hand in a puddle.

Poe passes women selling food from carts and men hawking their wares and services. A knife-grinder wheeling a sharpening stone blows a bugle to announce himself; Poe cringes at the blast as he passes. A clam seller makes his pitch:

CLAM-SELLER

Here's clams! Here's clams today! They
lately came from Rockaway!

A barefoot girl in layers of calico rags tends a cart, selling hot corn (the hot dog of her day). She yells:

HOT-CORN GIRL

Hot corn! All hot! Just came out of the
boiling pot!

Poe sees two men argue outside a shop. They are interrupted when another, pushing a wheelbarrow full of coal carelessly plows between them.

Poe continues up Broadway, passing City Hall and the Police Station, and walks into a shop on the corner of Pearl Street, "Anderson's Cigar Store." A four-foot cigar-store Indian stands sentry.

INT. CIGAR STORE - CONTINUOUS

It's a small room with a couple of tables and chairs and a counter in the rear tended by a pretty young WOMAN. Behind her, cigar boxes fill shelves. Before the counter are racks holding several daily and weekly newspapers.

A BELL on the door rings as Poe enters. A group of MEN smokes and drinks coffee with the newspapers spread before them. There is:

THOMAS, 46, a short, round, white man with a full beard and a full voice, wearing a vest and an open shirt.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JESSUP, 52, small and frail, his dirty black hair pressed down across his forehead, in an old and ill-fitting suit.

RALPH, late 60s, black, bearded and nearly blind.

CUSTOMERS move in and out the door and to and from the counter.

THOMAS

She was raped, the coroner said.

JESSUP

That doesn't mean anything.

RALPH

Could have been one man, could have been two. Could have been more.

THOMAS

(reading from the paper)

"The coroner stated positively that the poor girl had been horribly violated, and that there was not the slightest trace of pregnancy."

JESSUP

I don't want to hear that.

RALPH

Ain't gonna learn nothin', you don't hear details like that.

THOMAS

That's right.

(continuing)

"Strangulation by hand indicated the execution had been by a single assailant."

Our man is at the counter, buying smokes and a paper.

JESSUP

Surely the great Edgar A. Poe has a hypothesis?

POE

What?

THOMAS

Who killed Mary Rogers? Don't you look at the papers?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE

No, I...

THOMAS

(to others)

How do you like that? The great author who doesn't read!

RALPH

Leave the man alone, Thomas. He looks ill.

POE

Who is Mary Rogers?

A CUSTOMER who has entered overhears.

CUSTOMER

It's a disgrace, what this city is coming to.

All but Poe nod their agreement, and the customer exits.

THOMAS

We'd forgive you due to your recent arrival in our city, Mr. Poe, but surely you could not have failed to notice the young beauty who tends the counter here, or did until last week?

JESSUP

(anxiously showing Poe the paper)

She's been murdered.

THOMAS

Disappeared Sunday, not a word of her for two days, then yesterday, she turns up floating in the Hudson, just off Elysian Fields.

JESSUP

Bruised and battered, beaten and bloody.

Poe rolls his eyes slightly at the alliteration.

RALPH

Bet it was one of her boyfriends. She was always talking to the young men in here, battin' her eyelashes and lookin' pretty, makin' talk with near every one come in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JESSUP

It had to have been a whole gang of 'em. How could one man do such harm as they describe?

THOMAS

I think that man it says she was seen with took her for a prostitute, she said something daft, and he killed her in a moment of anger and dumped her in the river.

POE

(reading paper)

It says here she disappeared some time ago, then turned up unharmed.

JESSUP

Several months ago, for three days. She never really explained what happened.

THOMAS

Anderson said it was some family affair, out of state.

JESSUP

She didn't have any family, besides her mother.

RALPH

Might not have been her they pulled from that river. I bet you she comes in here tomorrow to go to work like nothin' happened, same as before.

POE

A moment ago you wanted to bet me it was a gentleman acquaintance.

RALPH

I make you that bet, too. Hedge it.

POE

I'm afraid a man of my limited means would be ill-advised to gamble with you, sir, on the fate of a mysterious young woman. Good day, gentlemen.

They mumble good-byes, Poe walks out the door, and it SLAMS.

JESSUP

"Limited means"?

EXT. POE'S FRONT STOOP - DAY

Poe walks slowly along a side street's colonial row houses, reading the newspaper. He turns toward one and looks up to find a woman his age, CLAIRE-- plain but pretty with her brown hair pulled up-- sitting on the stoop with a few envelopes in her hand.

CLAIRE
Something from your Boston publisher.

POE
Is it big or small? If it's big, it's bad news.

They climb the steps and enter his house.

INT. POE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

It's tiny, dark and a shambles.

CLAIRE
I'm afraid it's big.
(opening it)
Do you want me to read it?

POE
No.

Standing before one another there's a moment of longing between them. Propriety forbids their succumbing to it. Instead, Poe collapses into a chair and drops the newspaper.

Claire reads:

CLAIRE
(skipping to the good bits)
"Dear Mr. Poe: Enclosed..." and so on.
"Regret to inform..." yes yes yes. "As your editor and friend of so many years, I presume I may speak with, and that you are entitled to, a degree of candor..."

POE
(sarcastic)
Oh, marvelous.

CLAIRE
"...It appears you hope with this novel to reestablish your reputation among the educated classes after the unprecedented popular success of 'The Raven' caused
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE(cont'd)

some among them to deny its artistic value..."

POE

Ha! To say the least!

He agitatedly gets up now and starts to nervously fiddle with his scientific devices, peering through the microscope and switching its slides, etc.

CLAIRE

"...However, salon society axiomatically rejects what the masses embrace. Popular tastes run toward the familiar and captivating--the engaging rhyme and meter of 'The Raven,' for example. I doubt whether tales of the wild, improbable and terrible can ever be popular in this country. Dickens has already given the final death blow to writing of that description."

Poe SCOFFS audibly.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

"Kind regards," et cetera. "Mr. J.E. Heath, Southern Literary Messenger."

They are silent a moment.

POE

So do you agree with him?

CLAIRE

I don't know.

(pause)

I will say I think you would be better served were you to imagine something other than decaying mansions and the torture of the mind.

Nothing from Poe.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

Edgar, really, I wish I didn't feel compelled to call uninvited all the time to check on you.

POE

So why do you?

CLAIRE

Because you are clearly incapable of caring for yourself, Edgar.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE(cont'd)

(looking around at the mess)
I mean, look at this place. When we are
wed, I can promise you, I won't stand for
this. And when was the last meal you had
consisting of something other than
whiskey?

POE

I'm not answering that.

CLAIRE

At least help me clean up a bit.

POE

I need to write. Will you leave me
alone, please?

CLAIRE

You're welcome.

POE

I'm sorry. Very well, I'll clean up
later, I promise. But now I have the
urge to write.

CLAIRE

Are you going to the magazine today?

POE

I haven't decided yet.

CLAIRE

Fine. I'm leaving.

POE

Good-bye.

(She starts to leave.)

Claire?

(She pauses in the doorway.)

Thank you.

Claire smiles sympathetically and exits.

Beside him, Poe sees the newspaper with the Mary Rogers story
on the front page. He looks at it, then looks up, thinking.

EXT. BROADWAY - DAY

Later in the same miserable day, a 30-ish, middle-class WOMAN
with a bandage on her ear walks into the police station. She
wears a dress of light, gauzy printed cotton, a high-necked
cotton collar and cuffs with white embroidery, a light piece
of silk taffeta, tan leather gloves, and carries a small
purse with a drawstring top hung on her wrist.

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

She walks in on a group of four COPS in a blocked-off section of the large room. Except for one who is doing some paperwork, they are sitting around with their feet on the desks, smoking, snacking and chatting.

COP #1
 Could've been anybody, how am I supposed to know?

COP #2
 Probably an Irishman.

COP #3
 You know how they are.

WOMAN
 Excuse me?

They ignore her, and go on chatting.

COP #2
 Too bad there's no reward, we could have some fun tonight.

COP #1
 Aye!

WOMAN
 (a little louder)
 Excuse me?

COP #3
 Chief was sure anxious to bring some charges on somebody.

WOMAN
 (much louder)
 Excuse me!

The one who has been working speaks up.

COP #4
 One moment, ma'am.

He puts down his pen and walks over; he's young, slender, attractive and arrogant.

COP #4 (cont'd)
 My name is Officer Hilliker. What can I do for you, ma'am?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN

Good morning, Mr. Hilliker. My name is Mrs. Morse, and I want you to arrest my husband.

HILLIKER

Your husband?

MRS. MORSE

Yes. He routinely beats me. He makes a sport of it.

HILLIKER

Do you have any evidence of this?

Mrs. Morse presents her bandaged ear with a "duh" type of expression.

HILLIKER (cont'd)

Mm-hmm. Anything else?

Her glance moves from him to the others behind him, uncomfortable. Noticing this:

HILLIKER (cont'd)

I understand, ma'am. Come with me.

He leads her into a small room off the larger one.

INT. ANTEROOM - CONTINUOUS

Once the door has closed, Mrs. Morse turns her back to him and hesitantly lowers her dress from her shoulders. She is absurdly uncomfortable with this extremely modest display.

Black-and-blue bruises cover her shoulders and arms.

HILLIKER

I see. I'm turning around.

He does. She puts her sleeves back on her shoulders and turns around.

MRS. MORSE

Thank you.

He turns back to face her.

HILLIKER

And where is your husband now, Mrs. Morse?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. MORSE

At his office. It's not far from here.

HILLIKER

Lead me to him.

They exit.

EXT. NASSAU STREET - TWILIGHT

Mrs. Morse and Officer Hilliker arrive at a building on the same street as the boarding house. The sign of the "Broadway Journal" hangs from a building behind them; others identify "Tammany Hall", "New York Herald" and "New York Tattler".

She knocks at the door, and hearing no answer produces from her purse a key and opens the door. They go in.

INT. MORSE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A WIDE ANGLE of the empty and quiet office with Mrs. Morse and Hilliker in a corner of the frame, him peering over her shoulder. The camera MOVES through the emptiness of her husband's office and toward them as a perplexed expression forms on her face.

MOVE past them to the street outside.

EXT. CITY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Twilight approaches. Still moving, camera passes BRAWLERS as they spill out of a bar and fistfight; bystanders gather, cheering them on.

Continuing, PROSTITUTES proposition men on the street. Move toward an upscale 1840s equivalent of a nightclub-- the "concert saloon". MUSIC may be heard emanating to the street outside as patrons go through the door. Following them into

INT. CONCERT SALOON - CONTINUOUS

Low light, lush decor, expensive furnishings, a few gambling tables. Smaller tables and chairs are arranged in the direction of a stage. A PIANO PLAYER tinkles the ivories; a WOMAN accompanies him in song. Made-up and fancily-dressed WOMEN make their way about the room, stopping to talk to the gentlemen.

Camera settles on a table occupied by two MEN. The elder is 45, Scottish, tall and healthily plump, with the proud and distinguished bearing and full gray beard of Karl Marx, Frederick Douglass and other prominent Victorian-era males. It is JAMES GORDON BENNETT.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Beside him is WILLIAM ATTREE, a fairly scruffy-looking, black-haired and clean-shaven reporter of about 35.

Newspapers are stacked on their table under their drinks. They smoke cigars.

ATTREE

And what's the front page for tomorrow?

BENNETT

Rogers again.

ATTREE

You have an editorial prepared?

BENNETT

Clearly the poor girl was the victim of a youth gang.

ATTREE

Clearly? The coroner was certain only one attacker caused the injuries.

BENNETT

My editorial demands that the Manhattan coroner conduct his own investigation, and *I* am certain he will disagree.

ATTREE

Given the same facts?

BENNETT

It's not our position to question such an esteemed professional.

ATTREE

Well, that depends...

BENNETT

I know, William, for heaven's sake.

ATTREE

But as long as it fits...

BENNETT

Precisely. You can see what these gangs are doing to the city; it's virtually unfit for human habitation.

ATTREE

I can't very well argue with that, though the other papers might. You've heard the theories of her supplemental income?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BENNETT

I don't know quite what to make of that.

ATTREE

It certainly could have been true, judging from her behavior; she was known to walk out at night.

BENNETT

That is interesting. But in light of the Tattler's predilection for prostitution and promiscuity stories, I think we should pursue the immigrant line.

ATTREE

They'll appeal to the more prurient interests of New Yorkers...

BENNETT

I originated prurience among New Yorkers after that whore Jewett was killed, don't you remember?

One of the girls hears the name and looks angry-sad toward Bennett. But she only dares to for a moment.

BENNETT (cont'd)

Besides, this Rogers story will have no lack of opportunity in that department, you'll see.

A different YOUNG WOMAN approaches their table, giving them a sexy look. She leans over and whispers in Bennett's ear.

BENNETT (cont'd)

Not at the moment, thank you.

She leaves.

ATTREE

So immigrants it is, then.

BENNETT

Irish from the east, Negroes from the south, it's like an invasion! A woman ought to be able to walk out on a Sunday morning without fear for her life-- do you disagree?

ATTREE

Hardly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BENNETT

These people arrive in New York with no civilizing influence whatsoever, and carry on as if this were Gomorrah!

ATTREE

Just to play devil's advocate, sir--

BENNETT

I've heard it, Attree. Men can't be expected to give these people-- these crude half-men-- work as long as they...

ATTREE

...As long as they resist the civilizing influences of our society.

BENNETT

You are too familiar with my positions on these matters, William, I will say that.

ATTREE

Should I head down to the Police Office tomorrow, see if they have anything?

BENNETT

Psshh. They won't. But we'd be remiss not to state as much. They're as bad as the gangs, I daresay.

ATTREE

Sir?

BENNETT

They care no more for the life of an innocent girl. Police should be preventing crimes such as this, not just responding-- and then only when a reward is offered.

ATTREE

You mean, like a patrol.

BENNETT

A patrol! Precisely. They should have officers on patrol-- a force for protection, in advance of crime.

ATTREE

And you plan to cover this in tomorrow's editorial?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

BENNETT

No, not yet. First step is to get the public to antagonize those who would do ill in our city. Then, if no killer is found, we start to blame the police.

The curtain onstage opens on a group of underdressed young women. APPLAUSE. MUSIC starts and they begin a dance routine.

Bennett puts his cigar to his lips as he claps, looking conspiratorially at Attree to signal the conversation is over.

EXT. 126 NASSAU STREET - DAY

Poe stands at the door to the boarding house. He's considerably cleaned up from yesterday. He pauses a moment to collect himself and take a deep breath before he KNOCKS.

The black girl seen earlier answers.

POE

(handing her a card)

Good morning. I'm looking for Mrs. Phebe Rogers.

GIRL

Just a moment, please.

She goes inside and leaves the door ajar. Through it, Poe's POV shows the victim's mother seen earlier, PHEBE ROGERS, sitting in a chair with Crommelin standing over her.

The girl returns and admits him.

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - CONTINUOUS

Phebe is elegant but modest, a young 60, once beautiful, now worn down by a hard life and the recent tragedy.

PHEBE

To what do we owe this honor, Mr. Poe? I can't imagine you're looking for a room.

POE

I hope to speak with you about the recent unfortunate events regarding your daughter.

CROMMELIN

(startled and offended)

Now look here, my good man...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHEBE
(to Crommelin)
It's all right, Arthur.
(to Poe)
I'm Mary's mother, Phebe Rogers.

POE
A pleasure, madam. I'm very sorry.

PHEBE
And this is Arthur Crommelin, a family
friend...

POE
(offering his hand)
Sir.

Crommelin reaches out to shake his hand, but suspiciously.

PHEBE
And this is Samantha, whom we employ
here.

SAMANTHA
(slight curtsey)
Sir.

POE
Again, my deepest condolences to all of
you. I'm sure this is a very hard time.

PHEBE
What can we do for you, Mr. Poe?

POE
Well, I'm sure I don't need to tell you
of the reluctance of the police to
involve themselves in the murder of a
person of modest means. Without a
reward... And perhaps you are familiar
with my fictions on the subjects of
crimes and their solvers. I hope to find
the person or persons who killed your
daughter, Mrs. Rogers, with the intention
of making this horrible crime the subject
of my next novel.

CROMMELIN
Your intent, if I may say so, is to
invade this family with your probing
questions for your own financial benefit.
You'll have to look elsewhere to revive
your career, Mr. Poe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PHEBE

Mr. Poe, you will appreciate my wish to mourn in peace, and remember Mary as she lived, not as she died.

POE

If you please: Unlike the police, Mrs. Rogers, I am an expert in detection. For instance, one probably would not expect me to know that the last person to let a room here came from Portsmouth, wore a beard, and paid in coins.

Phebe and Samantha are impressed; Crommelin is not.

CROMMELIN

Anyone could have learned that by interviewing the man...

POE

Which is impossible for me to have done since he is still upstairs, and I have only just entered, and there is no window in his room, nor other entrance to the boarding house.

It's clear by their reactions this is all true.

POE (cont'd)

Also unlike the police, I do not require your remuneration to motivate me.

PHEBE

I've entrusted communications with the police to Mr. Crommelin.

POE

Mrs. Rogers, forgive me if I be rude, but what makes Mr. Crommelin himself beyond suspicion? Are his whereabouts fully accounted for in the days Miss Rogers was missing?

CROMMELIN

Are yours?!
(moving to lead him out)
I don't think...

PHEBE

Arthur, please!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

POE

My ultimate object is only the truth. Indeed, investigation of the truth is the motivation behind all my narratives. And I speak from experience: my own mother and wife were both, like your daughter, taken before their time. I know your loss. So my sympathy is born of familiarity, not conjecture. My work, in truth, is but a distraction from their memories, which torment me. Yes, I hope to publish this tale. But for the work to succeed, by any measure, I must find who did this-- an ending. And to do that, I need your help.

(to Crommelin)

Indeed, I need the help of all of you.

PHEBE

What do you require of me, Mr. Poe?

POE

I would need to know everything about Miss Rogers. To speak with all who knew her in the most candid terms. Unpleasant though it may be, the sooner I may begin, the greater the likelihood the criminal will be found.

PHEBE

Very well, Mr. Poe, I will agree to that. Mary deserves as much. And I don't think I can rest until I know the truth. Nor she, I hasten to add.

Poe's attention is drawn to an oil portrait over the mantle of a beautiful young blonde woman.

POE

(walking toward it)

Is this...?

SLOW ZOOM on the painting during these next three lines.

PHEBE (O.S.)

It is. An acquaintance begged her to sit for him, and gave her the painting.

POE (O.S.)

A beautiful girl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

PHEBE (O.S.)

Thank you. It's a remarkable likeness, I must say.

CROMMELIN

Mary always wanted to be photographed, but it was too costly. So the artist painted her perfectly to scale.

PHEBE

Mr. Poe, how may we begin?

POE

(as awakened from a trance)
Ah, well, first I should need to know who last saw Mary?

PHEBE

I am told she last spoke with a boarder, a Mr. Daniel Payne.

FLASHBACK:

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - DAY

HAND-HELD ANGLE from behind, MARY ROGERS, wearing a blue dress with white cuffs and collar and carrying a white leghorn hat, walks through the boarding house hallway toward a door which is ajar.

Through it we can see the nude back of a man at a wash basin.

CLOSE-UP of Mary's mouth, smiling at her privacy-invasion.

PHEBE (V.O.)

This was early Sunday morning.

As the next line is delivered, we see Mary's lips move, saying roughly what Phebe says she is saying.

PHEBE (V.O.) (cont'd)

She told him that she was going to visit my sister, in Jane Street, which she had also told me the night previous, and asked would Mr. Payne wait for her that evening at the omnibus stop at Broadway and Ann Street, to which he agreed.

END FLASHBACK

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - DAY

POE

And where is Mr. Payne now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROMMELIN

He disappeared the day before yesterday,
just as I was indentifying Mary's body, I
imagine.

POE

And left no word?

PHEBE

Samantha went to give him clean sheets in
the morning and all his things were gone.

Samantha confirms with a nod.

Poe looks deep into Phebe's eyes, produces paper and pencil,
and asks:

POE

Mrs. Rogers, what kind of girl was Mary?

Phebe takes a long pause. She can't meet his gaze. She gets
a little choked up, then regains her composure.

PHEBE

The first thing one needs to know to
understand Mary, Mr. Poe, is that she is
not my daughter.

Poe is surprised, Crommelin stunned. From Samantha's
reaction, we can tell she was privy to this information.
FLASHBACK:

EXT. NEW ENGLAND TOWN - DAY

Title: New London, Connecticut Two years earlier

ESTABLISHING SHOTS of a small New England town losing its
charm. Like most such towns, it features a central square
around a statue of a Revolutionary War hero; a Presbyterian
church; a General Store; a blacksmith; and several colonial-
style houses whose bright colors have faded and chipped.

PEOPLE dressed in black exit one of these..

INT. ROGERS HOUSE - DAY

...which is furnished only with the most basic, Spartan
necessities.

Phebe sits in a chair, also in black, several years younger.
GUESTS walk up to her, say a few comforting words, and move
on. Phebe is stoic.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

An older MAN stands over Phebe's shoulder. When the last of the guests has moved on, he leans over and speaks in her ear. Phebe nods.

He goes toward a door off the modest living room and knocks.

MAN

Mary?

Hearing no answer, he slowly opens the door himself.

INT. ROGERS HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sitting on the bed, dressed in black, is Mary. She bows so we cannot see her face; her hands fold gently in her lap.

MAN

Mary?

She lifts her chin. CLOSE IN on her face. This is the first good, long, direct look we've gotten of her: a perfectly stunning, all-American blond beauty. She has been crying.

MAN (cont'd)

It's time.

Mary takes a deep breath and stands. She's a head taller than him, slender and athletic. When she walks past him through the narrow doorway, he takes the opportunity to glance down at her modest decolletage. Mary notices.

INT. ROGERS HOUSE - SALON - CONTINUOUS

She enters the room where her mother waits and walks over to her. He follows. She takes her mother's hand. Phebe looks up at her and motions Mary to sit.

PHEBE

(indicating man)

Mary, Mr. Mather has been a friend to our family since before you were born.

Mary has no response to this.

MR. MATHER

Before a man dies, Mary, if he owns any property, he leaves what we call a will. Do you know what a "will" is?

This is the stupidest question Mary has ever heard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MR. MATHER (cont'd)

Your father's will was very specific.
Although he died in a considerable amount
of debt...

Mary is waiting for him to get to the part she is supposed to
care about.

MR. MATHER (cont'd)

...one detail of the will relates
particularly to you, and might come as
quite a shock.

PHEBE

Mary, you know how much you mean to me.
And how much your father cared about you?

Mary begins to look a little worried. HOLD on her while this
next line is delivered, her face going through stages of
shock and anger, to overwhelmed bewilderment.

PHEBE (O.S.) (cont'd)

Mary, I am not your mother. I am your
grandmother. Your mother is my daughter
by my first husband. She died during
your birth. Your father-- well, he isn't
your father, but... He took you in and
raised you as his own because he loved
you, and he was a kind and generous man,
as you well know.

Mary gathers her skirts and runs from the room, SLAMMING her
bedroom door. Phebe and Mather look at each other, helpless.

INT. ROGERS HOUSE - NIGHT

Phebe stands outside Mary's door, hesitating before she
knocks. Her lips quiver. She raps lightly at the door.

PHEBE

Mary?

It is almost a whisper, and she clears her throat.

PHEBE (cont'd)

(louder and more determined)

Mary? Mary, I must speak with you.

The door opens and Phebe enters. Mary has changed into a
nightgown.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHEBE (cont'd)

It wasn't supposed to happen this way. I had hoped to prepare you somehow, but your father died so suddenly..

MARY

I thought you said he's not my father.

PHEBE

He's still your father, Mary; he'll always be your father.

MARY

Who *is* my father?

Phebe takes a deep breath and sits on the bed.

PHEBE

He hasn't been seen in New London since before you were born. A sailor. When Jane told him you were coming..

MARY

He caught the next ship to England.

PHEBE

Something like that. Your mother and I went to live with relatives in Massachusetts for a time, before she began to show, and I returned with you. I buried Jane there; it was... She was unmarried, so everyone assumed... It just seemed easiest...

MARY

And now? What's changed?

PHEBE

Your father apparently felt it right to tell the truth in the end.

MARY

You shouldn't have let this happen.

PHEBE

I know. But the Rogerses are very protective of their roots and bloodline, and now your aunts...

MARY

...Can't stand the thought of a bastard daughter in their family.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PHEBE

I imagine they're telling the whole town
right now.

MARY

You should have told me.

PHEBE

I know. I know. But it's too late, and
we can't stay here.

MARY

What? Why not?

PHEBE

You don't want to endure the scorn of
this town, Mary, I promise you. And we
have no money, nor land, nor prospects.
We take a steamboat for New York in the
morning.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STEAMBOAT - DAY

The tiny façade of lower Manhattan-- domes, cupolas, spires,
towers, steeples-- is visible over Mary and Phebe's shoulders
(they wear black) as they stand on the deck of the steamboat.
It sounds its HORN.

EXT. SOUTH FERRY - DAY

A forest of masts lines the docks below Maiden Lane. Mary
and Phebe make their way through a bustling crowd of sailors,
travelers, dockworkers unloading barrels and dry goods, etc.
They have employed a man to carry their trunks in a
wheelbarrow. The two of them have never seen such a loud and
disparate crowd.

A group of YOUNG MEN leer at the beautiful young Mary.

MARY

Oh, go back to work.

EXT. 155 DUANE STREET - DAY

A red-brick building two doors west of the Northwest corner
of Duane and what is today called West Broadway.

Mary, Phebe and their consort are looking tired from the
walk. Phebe looks at a piece of paper in her hand, then up
at the address. Etched into the glass front are the words
"John Anderson, Esq." She knocks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A tall, late 20s, light-haired man answers the door. This is JOHN ANDERSON. He looks at them quizzically.

PHEBE

John Anderson? My name is Phebe Rogers.

The name doesn't register.

PHEBE (cont'd)

Daniel Rogers was my husband.

Anderson snaps into recognition.

ANDERSON

Come in, by all means.

INT. ANDERSON'S HOME - CONTINUOUS

They enter. As Phebe speaks in voice-over, Anderson blatantly checks Mary out. At 17, she has moved beyond embarrassment, through annoyance, and is now (already) really tired of this.

PHEBE (V.O.)

My second husband had aided Mr. Anderson in setting up his business some years ago, and because of his indebtedness to Daniel, he agreed to help us gain employment.

Anderson's admiration of Mary shows that Phebe's explanation is not his only motivation.

INT. CIGAR STORE - DAY

Anderson familiarizes Mary (still in black) with the store, showing her the different kinds of cigars, how to display the newspapers, etc. She is a quick and studious learner.

PHEBE (V.O.)

Mr. Anderson had recently opened his cigar store on Broadway, and employed Mary to tend the counter there.

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - DAY

Anderson unlocks the door and the three of them go in; he shows them around.

PHEBE (V.O.)

Soon after, he purchased this boarding house, and in exchange for our operation
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHEBE(cont'd)

of it, we were allowed to reside here.
That was when we met Samantha.

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - KITCHEN - DAY

Mary and Samantha-- all dressed up-- come in as MALE BOARDERS pass them on their way out. Phebe, in work clothes and with sweat on her brow, is cleaning up.

MARY

Mother, Samantha and I are going to take
the promenade.

PHEBE

Have you finished the cleaning?

MARY

Yes, Mother.

PHEBE

And have you readied all the rooms? A
ship docks from Savannah in the morning;
I'm sure we'll be at capacity by noon.

SAMANTHA

Yes, ma'am.

Mary has one foot out the door, impatient.

PHEBE

All right, then.

They bolt. On Phebe:

PHEBE (cont'd)

(yelling after them)

And be back by dusk! Dusk! Do you hear
me?

MARY (O.S.)

Yes, Mother!

PHEBE

It's not proper for a woman...

She gives up when she hears the door SLAM.

EXT. NASSAU STREET/BROADWAY - DAY

Mary and Samantha make a left out the door. They are smiling and laughing, obviously pleased to be free of their chores and out among the crowd. Immediately, Mary sheds her cape to make her appearance more sexually provocative.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAMANTHA

You shouldn't be doing that.

MARY

Oh, hush. Why are you such a prude?

SAMANTHA

I'm not! I've seen what men do.

MARY

Northern men aren't like that, Sam,
you've told me so yourself.

SAMANTHA

Not as *much* like that...

MARY

And you're not on the plantation anymore;
you can afford to loosen up.

They arrive at the corner of Broadway and Ann.

Upper-class men and women, dressed their finest, saunter up and down the street, basically showing off. Besides Mary and Samantha, there are no unaccompanied women. The unfinished spire of Trinity Church is in the distance.

MARY (cont'd)

Come on, let's go to the Bowery instead.
It's so boring over here.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE BOWERY - DAY

Mary folds her veil back over her bonnet and expresses a clear change in attitude and body language-- instead of demurely looking down, she interacts with people, tosses her head up, and smiles-- when they turn the corner onto the un-Broadway, the anti-Broadway, the Bowery.

It's a much rowdier scene, and dirtier too. Poorer, essentially, simultaneously more fun and more threatening. A few single MEN stand on the sidewalk, checking out the chicks.

They pass a group of YOUNG MEN, working-class, that joins the pair, walking on either side.

YOUNG MAN #1

Look at this! Beauty and the beast!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

YOUNG MAN #2
The princess and the nigger!

Samantha is understandably nervous at this. Mary doesn't blink; they continue walking.

YOUNG MAN #1
(to Mary)
Are the white Hookers working with the blacks now?

Mary abruptly halts her stride and, taking Samantha by the hand, faces the rube, confronting him eye-to-eye.

MARY
Are you new in town? Because Corlear's Hook is some distance from the Bowery, and white and black are free to associate in New York. What's more, unaccompanied women on the street should be no indication of prostitution. And even if we were whores, we wouldn't seek our clientele among garbage like you. Let's go, Samantha.

They leave the men too stunned to react.
END FLASHBACK.

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - DAY

The scene of Mary and Samantha fades during Phebe's last voice-over to a CLOSE-UP of her staring blankly and finishing the line. She snaps out of it.

POE
She really said that?

Samantha suppresses a smile at the memory.

PHEBE
I'm sorry, Mr. Poe, I've suddenly grown quite fatigued. You'll have to excuse me.

She stands, and Crommelin and Poe do, too.

POE
Of course, Mrs. Rogers. I'm sorry if this has been overly exasperating for you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PHEBE

(as she exits)

You may come back another time, if you wish.

Crommelin looks at Samantha, as if to say, what are you still doing here? She scurries out behind Phebe.

CROMMELIN

You must take Mrs. Rogers' description of Mary's character with something of a grain of salt, it is my opinion; her generation doesn't regard social mores with the liberal attitude we take today.

This is somewhat ironic, considering.

CROMMELIN (cont'd)

And she comes from a small town. A rather Puritan, New England town, if I may be frank.

POE

A mother would naturally interpret things with a sense of protectiveness.

CROMMELIN

Quite. I'm not sure she would have described Mary thus just a fortnight ago.

POE

How would you describe her?

Crommelin is being drawn unwittingly into an interview he didn't want to give.

CROMMELIN

Rather the opposite, in fact. A girl of the utmost virtue. You should have seen the boorishness she endured at that cigar store, the sports that hang around there. An atmosphere with which you have some acquaintance? Journalists and so forth.

POE

Some.

CROMMELIN

Mary suffered many taunts from young men, and was quite a wit at resisting them, as you heard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE

How did you make the acquaintance of this family?

CROMMELIN

Oh, I stayed here, briefly, when I first moved down from Boston. Naturally I was struck by Mary's charm and beauty, as any young man would be. She had a way about her-- not like any woman I've known, I'd say. Some might-- well, some *did*-- take it as unbecoming of a woman.

POE

Take what?

CROMMELIN

As you heard, Mr. Poe, she would speak her mind in a way not typical of girls. I was rather taken with her, and she resisted my advances-- entirely honorable, I assure you. So, and especially considering her lack of husband or father to watch out for her, a young woman of utter gentility and virtue.

The arrogance of this implication is not lost on Poe.

POE

Certainly. One last thing, Mr. Crommelin: May I assume Mary never appeared at her aunt's?

CROMMELIN

You may. She was never even expected.

POE

You have no notion where she may have been headed?

CROMMELIN

Mrs. Rogers prefers not to speculate, and, I suppose, imagines the most inconsequential. Mary had no enemies, Mr. Poe, and no improper associations, indeed no concerns at all outside this house and the store. I assure you.

POE

Mrs. Rogers seemed anxious about her attitudes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CROMMELIN

Only in retrospect; she had no reason to be.

POE

Of course. If I may impose further, Mr. Crommelin-- Where might I find Mr. Daniel Payne?

CROMMELIN

Your guess is as good as mine. Probably hanging around Five Points or the Bowery, from what I know of him.

POE

And Mr. Crommelin, *can* you account for your whereabouts in the days Mary was missing?

CROMMELIN

Of course not, as I was some of the time alone. Most of the three days I spent searching for Mary. If I'd killed her, I'd have known where to look, and therefore found her sooner, wouldn't I?

POE

Indeed.

CROMMELIN

If I may inquire of you, now, Mr. Poe: How did you know about the boarder?

POE

Observation, Mr. Crommelin, and therefrom, deduction: A distinct scent of shellfish permeated the room. It seemed beyond the means of the boarding house to serve shellfish, and besides, it's too early in the day to prepare dinner. A glance at the morning papers would tell anyone who cared to look that the only ship that might have trawled the Grand Bank arrived this morning from Portsmouth; none from Boston, New London, Mystic, Newport, or Portland. Secondly, no sailor would bother to shave until after docking, and no ship would return from the Grand Bank before such time sufficient for its crew to grow a beard. There was condensation on all the windows upstairs, indicating occupation overnight, yet Mrs. Rogers had room for

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

POE(cont'd)

this fisherman-- hence, no window in his room. Familiar with the neighborhood, I am certain that other buildings about this one on all sides, including the rear. And if the man has just arrived, I'm certain he's cleaning up immediately, or else sleeping, so he wouldn't have yet left.

CROMMELIN

And the coins?

POE

Now, Mr. Crommelin, you must permit me one secret of the trade.

He offers his hand to Crommelin, and they shake: Poe's wit and wisdom have won him over.

EXT. HOBOKEN CORONER'S YARD - DAY

Behind the coroner's office is a small, enclosed yard. Dr. Cook and another man are digging in a soft rain. He is ASSOCIATE to a third man standing and waiting beneath an umbrella, DR. ARCHER, the Manhattan coroner.

COOK

I hope next time to take your company in more pleasant circumstances, Dr. Archer.

ARCHER

Mayor Purdy only notified me yesterday. Seems there's been quite a row in the papers over this girl.

COOK

So I've seen! Anyway, it's been so hot I thought it best to bury her in case the New York authorities cared to investigate.

ASSOCIATE

We appreciate it.

COOK

I think we're getting close. I'd cover up, if I were you.

Each puts a kerchief, tied around the necks, up over his nose and mouth.

ASSOCIATE

Yes, here we are.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Their shovels poke at a box eighteen inches under.

COOK

I've prepared a cart with some ice for
your trip across the river.

EXT. DR. COOK'S OFFICE FRONT - LATER

In front of the coroner's office, the men load the dirty pine
box onto a waiting horse-drawn cart. It's still raining.

Archer and his associate climb aboard.

COOK

Good day to you both! Let me know if I
can be of further assistance.

ASSOCIATE

Yes, of course.

ARCHER

(perfunctorily)
Thank you.

The two look at each other dubiously, like this small-town
buffoon could possibly be of any help to them.

The cart moves off. Dr. Cook stands in the background,
waving and looking stupid.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

MUSIC OVER:

A few peeks at daily life around the city:

PASSENGERS get on & off a horse-drawn railway car on 4th Ave.

WORKMEN pave over the dirt on Broadway, working northward
from a few blocks above City Hall.

MEN drive cattle through the rain past new tenements on the
Bowery.

VENDORS and CUSTOMERS haggle over merchandise at Centre
Market.

WEALTHY MEN AND WOMEN come in & out of their grand,
colonnaded houses on LaGrange Terrace at Lafayette Place.

Young working-class MEN enter "The Arena" on Park Row; the
marquee advertises "Boxing Tonight".

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MUSIC DOWN.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

The site where Mary's corpse was discovered. On a field edging the river, YOUNG MEN engage in a sport recognizable as an early version of baseball.

Poe walks around the area, poking things with a stick and looking plaintive, thoughtful. He looks up a path toward a field where couples stroll and children play. He looks up another road, the one the boy took to the inn. He gets down on the ground and scoops up some moist dirt, letting it fall through his fingers.

POE'S IMAGINATION:

EXT. RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Fuzzy borders, black & white photography, grainy film stock or some other means indicates the unrealness of these "imagination" scenes.

Mary stands at the riverbank with a heretofore unseen young male SUITOR. They ARGUE. He grabs her; she shakes herself free and starts walking away. He goes after her, grabs her and strikes her. She falls in the water and he walks off, leaving her there, unconscious.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

Poe, squatting on the ground where we left him, brushes the dirt from his hands, stands, and walks off.

EXT. DR. COOK'S OFFICE FRONT - DAY

ESTABLISH the New Jersey official's small office building.

INT. DR. COOK'S OFFICE - DAY

The coroner of dubious competence stands against a wall. Poe is in the middle of the room fingering the inquest documents.

POE

Your counterpart in Manhattan seems less certain of some of your conclusions. Indeed, he proposes an entirely different set of events.

COOK

Professionals can disagree about this sort of thing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

In your estimation, if I understand correctly, Miss Rogers was tied down, violated, then strangled until dead, whereupon the assailant transported her corpse to the river and disposed of it.

COOK

There was evidence of beating, as well.

POE

Strangulation to the point of death rather obviates the need for beating, wouldn't you agree?

COOK

What is Dr. Archer's conclusion?

POE

Dr. Archer cites considerable bruising of her head sufficient to render her unconscious, and from various angles; the marks on her extremities caused by cloth used to carry the corpse to the water.

COOK

The most pronounced bruises I discerned were on the neck.

POE

(looking at one document...)
...and none on the head considerably blackened by decomposition.
(...then the other)
Archer makes no mention of bruises on the neck.

COOK

That would correlate with his theory of multiple assailants.

POE

How so?

COOK

Well, only one man is needed to strangle someone by hand. Death by beating is usually at the hands of a group.

POE

A gang attack?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Cook shrugs and wrinkles mouth and forehead to indicate "could be."

COOK

But I don't know how, days later, he could have seen something that I didn't. Couldn't she have been tied at the ankles and wrists, then strangled?

POE

How could one man bind a conscious person presumably in resistance?

COOK

The binding might have been for the purpose of carrying the body, then.

POE

Why would a group of men need use of cloth or rope to carry her? Wouldn't the arms and legs be not only sufficient, but preferable?

COOK

But then what might you surmise would be the purpose of the cloth in the wounds?

POE

I don't refute that the cloth may have been used to carry her, only that such a device would be superfluous to the needs of a gang of men; indeed, such a method would only benefit a single assailant.

Cook has no answer to this reasoning.

POE (cont'd)

You are certain she was violated immediately prior to her murder?

COOK

Of the violation I am quite certain. And Dr. Archer?

POE

He feels the same.

COOK

At least we agree on something.

EXT. PARK ROW - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the two-story brick building on street, diagonal to Broadway, that with it forms City Hall Plaza. A sign reads, "Broadway Journal- A Literary Magazine."

Poe enters.

INT. BROADWAY JOURNAL - DAY

Poe walks over to Chambers, who keeps working.

CHAMBERS

He's not going to be happy to see you.
Been going on all week, wondering where
you've been.

(mocking voice)

"He'll never work here again!" That sort
of thing.

From an adjacent office emerges CHARLES FREDERICK BRIGGS, a small, agitated man dressed more as an artist, 50-ish.

BRIGGS

Chambers!

(seeing Poe)

Poe! Where the devil have you been?

POE

Uh...

BRIGGS

Chambers, where is the poetry for next
week!

(not waiting for an answer)

Poe, get in here this instant!

Poe doesn't relish what's to come as he walks into Briggs' office. As Poe passes him in the doorway, Briggs can barely contain his anger. He closes the door.

INT. BRIGGS' OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

BRIGGS

Do you think this is any way to carry on,
Poe?

Poe begins to stammer a reply, but Briggs, sitting down behind his desk, continues before he can get a word out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BRIGGS (cont'd)

I can't even count the days since you've graced us with your presence! Sit down, for heaven's sake.

Poe obeys.

POE

I've been working on something I think you'll find quite fascinating.

BRIGGS

I find that very hard to believe.

(Pause)

Well?

POE

Been following the Mary Rogers case?

BRIGGS

You can't be serious.

POE

I'm entirely serious.

BRIGGS

Poe, the scandals of the penny press are not the concern of our journal. I can't believe I have to remind you of this.

POE

But I think you'll find otherwise, if you'll permit me...

BRIGGS

All right, Mr. Edgar A. Poe, esteemed author and critic, you have two minutes.

POE

Well, a young beauty turns up dead. A mystery in life as well as death. Despite circumstances which caused her to interact with a wide range of people, those close to her seem not to have truly known her, and those less so could only imagine who she was-- because they've never known anyone like her, anyone who shared her station in society. They are attracted to her beauty, yet afraid of her uniqueness. A working woman-- two words that didn't go together even five years ago-- untethered by husband or father, practically alone in this city.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE(cont'd)

She was sociable with a number of unmarried men...

BRIGGS

Your time's up. Broadway Journal is not interested in the daily life of a young prostitute.

POE

I didn't say she was a prostitute.

BRIGGS

Poe, the drudgery of the common people is not our concern. You know the melodrama, the hysteria, the false indignation the newspapers fill their pages with these days. It's of no use to anybody! And certainly not to a literary journal such as this.

(pause)

In any case, the murder happened in New Jersey; we are a New York publication.

POE

How do you know it happened in New Jersey?

BRIGGS

The body had not decomposed enough at the time of its discovery to have sunk and then risen to the surface, where it was found; it had to have been disposed of near the site of its discovery.

POE

I thought you said the details of the case are of no use...

BRIGGS

I know what I said.

POE

If you'll permit me, sir: If murder was committed upon the body, it need not have sunk at all. Only a drowned body takes in water. The corpse would have maintained equilibrium with the water, floating-- especially a slightly briny water, such as the Hudson is near its mouth. It may have been floating for some time. Besides which, even if it was disposed of near where it was found, no deduction can be therefore made as to the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3) POE(cont'd)

location of the gruesome deed ravaged upon it.

Briggs contemplates this a moment, impressed.

POE (cont'd)
Ratiocination, sir. The science of detection.

BRIGGS
(changing his mind again)
The point is, if you hope to continue to draw a salary, I expect you to report to this office like everyone else. I don't pay you to go creeping about Five Points digging up dirt. Is this understood?

POE
Yes, sir.

BRIGGS
And I wouldn't go around educated circles telling what you've been up to, if I were you. You have a reputation to protect, I shouldn't need to remind you.

EXT. FIVE POINTS STREET - NIGHT

A dirty street with garbage and what looks like open sewers running down the gutters. Poe watches as a bucketful of ashes dropped from above fall on the head of a MAN; as he coughs and sputters and rubs his eyes, several BOYS appear, emptying his pockets and relieving him of his satchel. They run off.

Poe steps in something rank and, after wiping his boot, he starts to turn around when two PROSTITUTES emerge from a doorway just up the street and proposition him. He awkwardly declines and they leave him, but his mind is changed: he approaches the door they exited and goes in.

INT. FIVE POINTS BAR - CONTINUOUS

Poe is surprised at the liveliness of the smoky and loud environment. Musicians play an Irish jig for some dancers; a BARTENDER serves beer.

Poe pulls up a stool beside a MAN, rough-looking, smallish, about 19, wearing the uniform of a Bowery Boy: red wool shirt buttoned on the side, a black cravat in a knot around his neck, and black broadcloth trousers tucked into high-heeled boots. A hopeful tuft of whiskers grows on his chin; his hair is combed straight forward to his brow and glued down. This is FINNEGAN. He's chomping on the butt of a cigar,

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

surrounded by three similarly-dressed, slightly younger and smaller IRISH TOUGHS. They all speak in thick Irish brogues.

The bartender approaches Poe for his order.

POE
Good day, sir.

The Toughs chortle at his formality.

BARTENDER
(likewise amused)
Sir?

POE
I wonder if you can assist me.

BARTENDER
I can pour you a glass.

POE
Thank you.

The bartender pours.

POE (cont'd)
Actually, I was hoping you could give me some information; I'm looking for a man named Daniel Payne. I understand he may be familiar in this neighborhood.

BARTENDER
Don't know any Daniel Payne.

He moves off to the next customer. The young Toughs, who have been observing, now turn to Poe. The leader speaks.

FINNEGAN
I think I know one man *not* familiar in this neighborhood.

POE
I assume you refer to me, sir. Good day, my name is Poe.

He offers his hand. Finnegan declines.

FINNEGAN
Finnegan. Can't you see where you're out of place, pal?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE

Indeed, Mr. Finnegan, this is one part of New York into which I have not ventured. Perhaps you know Mr. Payne?

FINNEGAN

Never heard of him. Have we, boys?

TOUGH #1

Not I.

TOUGH #2

Nay.

POE

He was acquainted with the young woman recently murdered, Mary Rogers?

FINNEGAN

So?

POE

She was quite a beauty...

FINNEGAN

So I've heard...

POE

...Worked at the cigar store on Broadway?

FINNEGAN

Look, you're not welcome here. And your questions aren't making you any more popular. Why don't you go back to Perry Street, stay with your own kind?

POE

Well. I can see you have no knowledge whereof I speak...

FINNEGAN

And wouldn't tell you anyway.

POE

Good day, young sirs.

He takes a last sip of his beer and departs.

EXT. POE'S FRONT STOOP - DAY

Poe climbs the steps in the rain. Affixed to his door is a note.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INSERT: the note reads, "Third Avenue horseraces, tomorrow noon-- Daniel Payne"

EXT. THIRD AVENUE - DAY

Saturdays uptown on 3rd are given to hastily organized horse races. Upper-class MEN have their steeds tended by younger MEN in farm clothes. Male and female SPECTATORS line the street. Money changes hands as two horses finish their sprint northward.

Poe walks among the crowd, looking like he's just gotten out of bed, which he has, and not sure what he's looking for. A MAN approaches him. He has a furtive air about him; they speak quietly amid the crowd of spectators and gamblers. As they do so, various people approach from time to time to take bets, sell them food, etc.

MAN

Mr. Poe?

POE

Yes?

MAN

I was fiancé to Mary Rogers. My name is Daniel Payne.

POE

I've been looking all over town for you; you don't seem to leave much of a trace.

PAYNE

I heard you were seeking me. Mary's death was such a shock, I...Well, I haven't been going out much these last days.

POE

Nobody told me you and Mary were engaged.

PAYNE

I'm not surprised. Mrs. Rogers didn't quite approve of me.

POE

Is that why you left the boarding house?

PAYNE

I don't blame her. Higher ambitions for her daughter than a cork-cutter, I suppose.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Like Arthur Crommelin maybe?

PAYNE

Has he been making himself prominent at the boarding house these days?

POE

Quite. Am I correct in assuming there was some competition among you for Mary's affections?

PAYNE

I can't say that for certain, though it would seem to be the case.

POE

What do you mean?

PAYNE

Well, Mary is such a mystery. Was. Even those who should have known her best, she kept things from.

POE

Such as?

PAYNE

Such as, I was her fiancé and I never really knew the nature of her relationship with Crommelin. I could only guess, judging from how he treated me, that there was something between them at one time.

POE

You never demanded of her?

PAYNE

Part of what endeared me to Mary, I think, was that I let her keep her secrets.

FLASHBACK:

INT. 126 NASSAU - NIGHT

Payne leaves his room and walks down the darkened hallway to the kitchen.

PAYNE (V.O.)

The night I first arrived, I gathered that the old lady's daughter was missing, but she reappeared the next evening.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Entering the kitchen, he sees Mary seated at a table. She looks up at him.

PAYNE (cont'd)
You must be Mary.

MARY
(under her breath)
Must I?

PAYNE
Pardon?

MARY
Nothing.

Pause.

PAYNE
My name is Daniel Payne. Excuse me, I was just going to make some tea.

Mary says nothing. He looks around for a kettle.

PAYNE (cont'd)
Your family was quite worried about you this morning.

MARY
I wish they'd just leave me alone.

PAYNE
I'm sure they're entirely devoted to you.

MARY
Does that give them the right to constantly intrude? I'm a grown woman after all.

PAYNE
Are you?

MARY
I labor at a job all day, then come home and run this place, isn't that enough? Yet I'm disallowed to live my life freely, having to notify everyone I know of every move I make.

PAYNE
You can't blame them for wondering where you are if you don't come home for two days and nights.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MARY

I didn't ask for all of their attentions.

They share a glance. Loud HORSECLOPS.
END FLASHBACK

EXT. THIRD AVENUE - DAY

The HORSECLOPS are from two passing horses in a race.

Payne stares blankly, unphased by the close passing of the horses and the excitement of the crowd, obviously distraught at the memory of his first meeting with his love.

POE

Your romance commenced soon thereafter?

PAYNE

(snapping out of it)
She never offered to explain Crommelin to me, but she seemed upset when he called.

POE

And you never learned where she had been?

Payne shakes his head.

POE (cont'd)

Forgive me, Mr. Payne, but I must ask your whereabouts in the days Mary was missing. To dismiss suspicion, you understand.

PAYNE

Of course. She came to me that morning...

FLASHBACK:

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - DAY

This is Payne's perspective of Mary's intrusion on him in the bathroom. He is standing at a basin, nude, washing.

MARY (O.S.)

Daniel?

PAYNE

In here!

He sees the door is ajar but his hands are full. He gives an "oh, well" look in the mirror and tries to appear natural, like gorgeous teenage women burst in on him in the nude all the time.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Mary's reflection in the corner of the mirror glances down at his reflection, which raises the smile seen on her in the first recitation of this scene.

MARY

I'm going to my aunt's in Jane Street for the day. Will you meet me at the omnibus stop, around nightfall?

PAYNE

Broadway and Ann?

MARY

Right.

EXT. BROADWAY & ANN - NIGHT

Payne stands in the pouring rain. A sign behind him reads, "P.T. Barnum's American Museum"; window displays of various oddities line the sidewalk below it. An omnibus drives up and some PASSENGERS disembark and scurry off. No Mary.

PAYNE (V.O.)

Finally I figured she'd stayed at her aunt's on account of the rain.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. THIRD AVENUE - DAY

POE

And the interim that day?

PAYNE

I was with my brother all day, walking about. When it started to rain I went back to Nassau Street and remained there until I went to meet Mary.

POE

And the next day?

PAYNE

When I woke up rather late and learned she had not returned, or been to her aunt's at all, or even expected there, well, naturally I found this worrisome and so commenced a search.

POE

What was Mrs. Rogers's reaction?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAYNE

That's right, she made a comment I remember striking me as rather odd. She said she feared she'd never see Mary again.

POE

Her exact words?

PAYNE

Yes. I recall feeling that there was something about the situation she wasn't telling me. Hardly surprising; she never shared anything with me. But still.

POE

And your search led you where?

PAYNE

Harlem, Williamsburg, Staten Island, Hoboken-- all over. No one had seen her. Mary rather stuck out in a crowd. When I returned home I thought to place an advertisement in the Herald seeking information on her. I was so exhausted by then I went to bed.

POE

And Tuesday?

PAYNE

Tuesday I went to the cigar store to see if she had spoken to Anderson, which of course she hadn't. Have you?

Poe shakes his head.

PAYNE (cont'd)

Then I had to report to work, and I was nowhere besides there and the boarding house that day and the next.

POE

Have the police spoken with you?

PAYNE

No.

POE

Anyone from the newspapers?

PAYNE

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE

Is there anything else I should know?

PAYNE

Nothing occurs to me. But do let me know if you learn anything.

POE

Likewise.

EXT. OUTSIDE CIGAR STORE - DAY

Leaning against a wall outside the store is Finnegan, accompanied by his posse.

One of the Boys haltingly reads the *New York Post* to him.

TOUGH #1

(reading)

"The body of this unfortunate girl was yesterday disinterred and brought from New Jersey and deposited in the Dead House in the park. And difficult would it be for the most imaginative mind to conceive a spectacle more horrible or humiliating to humanity. There lay what was a few days back, the image of its Creator, the loveliest of his works..."

TOUGH #2

Aye!

Finnegan punches him and he recoils.

FINNEGAN

Shut up!

(to Tough #1)

Go on.

TOUGH #1

(an embarrassed smile creeps across his face as he reads)

"...Now a blackened and de-com-posed mess of pu-tre-fe-ca-tion. Her skin which had been so fair was now black."

As he reads, Poe walks up on his way into the store, hoping not to be noticed.

TOUGH #1 (cont'd)

"Her eyes so sunk in her swollen face as to have the appearance of being violently forced beyond the sockets..."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe overhears and looks at them, then away, nervous. They take no notice of him and he moves on into the store.

INT. CIGAR STORE - CONTINUOUS

Poe approaches the counter for a paper and some smokes. Thomas, Jessup and Ralph are all present and gossiping about the usual.

JESSUP

It's disgusting! There's no place for such description in the public prints. The poor girl cherished her privacy, and now she can't even have it in death.

THOMAS

I rather like the idea of her body-- and I do mean her body in particular-- described in such detail.

Poe takes a seat apart from them and removes some papers from his bag. The words (written in longhand), "Report of the Manhattan Coroner on the death of MARY CECILIA ROGERS, late of 126 Nassau Street," head the first sheet. He half-listens to the conversation.

JESSUP

Oh, Thomas, sometimes I really wonder...

RALPH

I don't much care for this speculation about her romantic life.

JESSUP

That's exactly what I mean! With whom she consorted was strictly her business, not mine, and certainly not anyone's who never even knew her, who can only read about her.

RALPH

I ain't worried about her so much-- the girl's dead, Jessup, after all-- I'm just sayin' that the newspapers ain't the place for such talk.

POE

What do you reckon the newspaper *is* for, Ralph?

RALPH

Aw, you know, presidents, senators, whaddayacallit...affairs of state. That

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RALPH(cont'd)

sort of thing. You didn't used to read about this stuff, it's all the new papers that do it.

THOMAS

I say they combine the two and tell about the romantic life of presidents and senators.

They all share a laugh as William Attree enters.

ATTREE

Mr. Poe?

POE

Yes?

ATTREE

May I have a word with you outside?

POE

(curious)

Certainly.

They step outside.

EXT. CORNER OF BROADWAY AND PEARL - CONTINUOUS

Poe and Attree stand in the foreground, the three Irish gangsters behind them, #1's READING ALOUD still slightly audible.

Attree glances in their direction to verify they aren't paying him any attention.

ATTREE

Forgive me, I didn't want the regulars there to know who I am.

POE

And that is?

ATTREE

William Attree.

POE

From the Herald.

ATTREE

Yes. I saw you come in to the store. My publisher would like a word with you.

POE

Now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ATTREE

Mr. Bennett enjoys the company in the third tier at the Vauxhall Gardens.

POE

I would have figured him more at ease at the Opera House.

ATTREE

Mr. Bennett surprises us all.

(pause)

The program begins at eight. You will be anticipated.

He walks off. Poe remains, looking at Attree as he walks away, then back at Finnegan and his posse.

EXT. WEST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY

In the yard beside a modest church at the top of Varick Street, a coffin is laid to the ground as a PREACHER reads from a prayer book.

Poe watches stealthily from across the street, looking sympathetic.

Only Phebe, Samantha and Aunt Rose are in attendance at Mary's funeral.

INT. VAUXHALL GARDENS - NIGHT

A MINSTREL SHOW performs as Poe enters.

It's a gaudy theatre-- trying to look fancy, and failing-- with three levels of seating. Poe makes his way upstairs.

The third tier is filled with boisterous MEN in small groups, with WOMEN sitting on their laps and leaning against the walls nearby, waiting to be summoned and occasionally making forays to proposition someone.

Poe finds Bennett with a GIRL of about 16 on his lap and Attree seated beside him, exceedingly uncomfortable. Bennett gets the girl to stand and leave when Poe walks up to Attree, who stands and shakes his hand. He introduces Poe to his boss and Poe is motioned to sit.

BENNETT

Mr. Poe, let me first state that when I started the Herald, not for a moment did it occur to me that it might one day enable me to meet a man of your intellectual weight and literary repute.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe suppresses a smile and blinks at this backward admission.

POE

Thank you.

BENNETT

Your prose is an inspiration to all who write for these pages, including, if I may say so, Mr. Attree here.

Attree nods his agreement.

BENNETT (cont'd)

I believe I've read most of your fiction; I'm particularly an admirer of Monsieur Dupin.

POE

I appreciate that, Mr. Bennett. When I embarked on the journey of creating this type of fiction-- I call it "detective" fiction-- I was somewhat wary of how my readers might react.

BENNETT

It is with the greatest appreciation, I assure you.

POE

Thank you again.

The minstrel show finishes its act to applause and exits the stage. A curtain falls.

BENNETT

I wonder if you might be researching a new case for Msr. Dupin; you'll not be surprised, I'm sure, to learn that people are talking about your inquiries.

POE

Are they?

BENNETT

Quite. I commend you for your it, in fact. This Rogers affair indicates much that is wrong in our city, and I'm glad to hear of anyone dedicating themselves to bringing the killers to justice.

POE

Or killer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BENNETT

Certainly you agree with our coroner's report that this must be the work of more than one man-- deducing from the ravages visited upon her body.

POE

I haven't had the opportunity to review the findings myself.

BENNETT

But you read of his report in my paper, I presume?

POE

Yes, but... Well, I prefer to trust my own interpretations.

BENNETT

Of course.

ATTREE

My research has indicated in that direction as well.

POE

(to Attree)

With whom have you spoken?

BENNETT

We don't discuss sources.

The curtain rises on an act of ACROBATS. This is no Cirque du Soleil; their feats are at the level of street performers in the touristed area of a contemporary European city.

ATTREE

It should be no secret to you, Mr. Poe, that the youth gangs--

BENNETT

The Irish gangs, in particular...

ATTREE

-- that their crimes have been getting more frequent, and more brutal, in New York.

POE

I've only recently come from Philadelphia, you see...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BENNETT

In any case, you can see from the Rogers murder that this is so, and that her murder represents a natural progression from the crimes they've already committed.

POE

(skeptical)

I know they have that reputation.

BENNETT

Indeed, public opinion is quite solid on this. And taking Dr. Archer's report into account, our position at the Herald is that there is little doubt as to the...element of society responsible.

ATTREE

What we're trying to do, of course, is find out exactly who violated and murdered Miss Mary Rogers.

POE

We share that ambition, then.

BENNETT

Now, if necessary-- and I don't need to remind you how likely that it become necessary, given the incompetence of our police force and the intransigence regarding the case at City Hall thus far-- but I intend to prove conclusively, in the pages of the Herald, who is guilty. Once we've found them.

POE

I see.

BENNETT

I imagine you hope to do the same?

POE

Msr. Dupin is intrigued by the case, yes.

BENNETT

And what does Msr. Dupin think, so far?

POE

He has no idea.

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

ATTREE

Well, I have an idea.

POE

So you've said.

BENNETT

The power of public opinion one mustn't underestimate, Mr. Poe. Of course the publication of the Herald's determination of the Rogers killers will be far in advance of your own.

ATTREE

The nature of the medium, you understand.

BENNETT

And once the killers' identity has been soundly established, it will be difficult for contrary points of view to emerge.

POE

I can imagine that being so.

BENNETT

What I'm trying to say, Mr. Poe, is that it would be most unfortunate to propose in public, that someone might be guilty other than the perpetrators we identify in the Herald.

POE

Unfortunate for whom?

Bennett simply smiles at him.

One of the acrobats falls to the ground from a tightrope 12 feet above the stage. The other performers don't know whether to continue or tend to his obvious injury. Spectators in the third tier jeer; those on the first rise from their seats in concern.

POE (V.O.) (cont'd)

I'm still not sure what he meant. I was so uncomfortable I just stood to leave, and they seemed to have made their point.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. POE'S FRONT STOOP - DAY

Poe delivers that last line in conversation with Claire, seated together on the stoop.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIRE

What are you going to do?

POE

I'm going to try and find out what happened to that girl on Sunday.

CLAIRE

Oh, where could she have been going?

POE

I'd think a woman would have better insight into such a question than a man.

CLAIRE

Are you asking me?

He's asking her.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

Naturally I'd think an assignation.

Poe's eyes flutter to her awkwardly; this is a subject not easily broached, even between close and intimate friends.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

(moving on, avoiding)

Of some kind. Sunday morning, not a soul on the street, she's not likely to be seen by anyone she knows.

POE

You think it's significant that it was Sunday in particular?

CLAIRE

Well, not if you think what happened to her was indiscriminate. Do you?

POE

I don't know. The Herald seems to believe so.

CLAIRE

(recounting; a statement)

She encountered some group of young men, on the way to wherever she was going.

POE

But where was she going?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIRE

What does it matter where she was going if it was just a random encounter?

POE

It doesn't. But you don't seem to think it was random.

CLAIRE

Well, she was an extraordinary girl, from what I understand. She probably got into some kind of trouble.

POE

Extraordinary how? You mean because she was beautiful?

CLAIRE

No. Well, yes. But more-- I don't know, she was...unusual? How many girls operate a business with their mother? Or aren't married by that age, if without a father? Or work in such a place as that cigar store? I rather think few women possess the fortitude to go in there at all.

POE

But she worked there.

CLAIRE

Exactly! When I was her age I never could have taken a job like that. It just wasn't a thing young women did.

POE

You think it was someone from the cigar store?

CLAIRE

That's not what I'm saying. But certainly she had an adventurous streak.

POE

How can you say that? She didn't have a choice but to hold jobs.

CLAIRE

I'm not saying it was her personality that led to her working; I'm saying her working shaped her personality.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

POE

So why might a beautiful young woman with a-- what was your word?-- an adventurous personality wait until a quiet Sunday morning to skip off and disappear for?

CLAIRE

(again uncomfortable)
Probably a ... a boy.

POE

I don't think so. Daniel Payne seems quite confident in their engagement.

CLAIRE

Of course *he* does.

Sexual tension between them here: They're talking about sex, and because it's about people other than them doesn't make it any easier.

POE

So, who?

CLAIRE

Well if she planned it for a Sunday, she probably didn't want to be seen, meaning she had to keep it a secret from someone besides Daniel Payne. Could be someone well-known.

POE

Or she could have just met someone that day.

CLAIRE

That doesn't explain where she was going; I mean, why lie about her aunt's?

POE

It could have been some unrelated secret.

CLAIRE

Not likely. People don't lie about their plans, then disappear for some other reason. Come on, who's the writer here?

POE

No, you're right. Maybe there was some problem with another man she had been seeing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

CLAIRE
Always problems.

POE
Maybe she was going to break it off with
him, and...

CLAIRE
Crommelin?

POE
I don't know. I think he lacks certain
capabilities in that regard.

CLAIRE
Love makes you do crazy things.

POE
Indeed it does.

At this moment, a magnificent carriage drawn by a team of
white horses comes toward them down the street.

Inside the carriage, an elegantly dressed woman in her mid-
thirties rides alone. She looks at the pair on the stoop as
she goes by. Poe and Claire pause at the sight.

The woman inside looks at them as she passes.

Poe and Claire regard each other a little uncomfortably, a
little knowingly.

Poe suddenly stands.

POE (cont'd)
I'm going inside. I have some work to do
before I go over to Hoboken tomorrow.

He goes up the stairs and she rises.

CLAIRE
All right.

POE
I'll see you soon.
(turning around to her as he
enters)
The coroners both said...said there was no
child due.

Claire looks up at him, then away as she purses her lips.

EXT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the inn seen in the opening sequence. Poe approaches.

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - PUB- DAY

Poe stands before OSKAR LOSS-- the man of the inn from the opening sequence, 30s, tall and gaunt with long hair and dressed in work-clothes-- and FREDERIKA KALLENBACK LOSS, 50s, a widow, and a German immigrant with an accent. Each has a rather austere manner. A couple of GUESTS of the inn drink tea and beer.

POE

I wish to inquire about a young woman of my acquaintance. I understand she may have visited on a recent Sunday.

FREDERIKA

I know what you want. You're from one of those newspapers. You want to know about the dead girl they found.

POE

I'm not from the newspapers. I wouldn't talk to them either. They're as likely to print a lie as not. I'm a friend of the girl's family, and they want to know what happened to her. They can't afford a reward. Please.

Frederika and Oskar look at each other, somewhat warily. With a glance she gets rid of him.

FREDERIKA

There was a girl here...

FLASHBACK:

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - DAY

Mary is seated at a large round table with Finnegan & co., flirting with the boisterous group.

FINNEGAN

Barkeep! A glass of ale for the lassie.

MARY

Lemonade, Mr. Finnegan! Do you think I'm foolish enough to be seen drinking ale with the likes of you?

Frederika overhears this and looks disapproving.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Finnegan shoots Mary a glance-- nobody talks like this to him-- but sees she is joking (though she really isn't) and ignores it.

FINNEGAN
Lemonade, barkeep! And an ale for me!

FREDERIKA
Aye.

She walks to the bar.
END FLASHBACK

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - DAY

Frederika has taken a seat at Poe's table. Oskar is checking them out from behind the bar.

FREDERIKA
She left with the boys after perhaps an hour, and that is all I know.

POE
Have you spoken to the police?

FREDERIKA
I trust them no more than the papers.

EXT. STEAMBOAT - EVENING

Poe stands aboard the same steamboat Crommelin rode in the opening sequence.

His expression is approaching the one Crommelin wore; the mysterious death of Mary Rogers is at last having an emotional effect on him.

POE'S IMAGINATION:

EXT. RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Finnegan and his gang walk along the riverbank with an intoxicated Mary Rogers as dusk falls. She's not resisting yet; she leans on Finnegan who supports her with an arm around her waist.

The "toughs" ahead discover a thicket of bushes with a small opening. They climb through. Finnegan drags Mary into the clearing within.

MARY
Where are we going?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FINNEGAN
Never you mind that, miss.

MARY
But I want to go home.

FINNEGAN
We'll take you home.

He deposits her on the ground as the others remove their pants. Mary wisens up.

MARY
What are you doing? No!

FINNEGAN
Hush now, love.

He drops his drawers; one of his friends holds Mary down by the arms, the other lifts her skirts. Finnegan mounts her as she screams in resistance.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RIVERBANK - LATER

Mary Rogers, beaten to within an inch of her life, can barely muster the strength to cry as the Irishmen drag her from the thicket by her feet. They lift her at the arms and legs and carry her to the water. A small skiff is tied to a tree there. They put her in it.

FINNEGAN
You know what to do.

TOUGH #1
Aye.

Finnegan releases the line as the others climb in the small boat and begin rowing to the middle of the river.
END IMAGINATION.

FADE TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN DOCK - EVENING

Poe disembarks the ferry at the pier at Barclay and West streets. Rain has begun to fall. He starts southward, then remembers something and turns east suddenly. He looks at his watch and quickens his pace.

EXT. IRVING PLACE - LYNCH HOUSE - NIGHT

Soaked, Poe approaches a town house and knocks on the door.
A servant answers.

POE
(out of breath)
Good evening.

SERVANT #1
Please come in, Mister Poe.

Which he does...

INT. LYNCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

...and walks tentatively into the drawing room, where a group of very well-dressed MEN AND WOMEN are seated in overstuffed Louis XVI chairs, more or less in a circle. Tea and dessert-wine trays occupy a couple of tables; one of the men smokes a pipe. Their composure stands in marked contrast to the unkempt Poe, dripping on the Persian rug.

One man reads from a notebook; he stops abruptly upon Poe's appearance, displeased at the interruption. A middle-aged woman, ANN CHARLOTTE LYNCH (a society matron who conducted literary salons in the period) commands the floor.

MRS. LYNCH
Mister Poe, how gracious of you to accept our invitation. We took the liberty of commencing in your absence.

POE
I beg you to excuse my tardiness, Mrs. Lynch, and to accept my apology at the interruption.
(to reader)
I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Jennings.

The discontinued reader nods in his direction. The servant reluctantly moves to remove Poe's coat, to which he accedes, and she places it atop the others on a rack by the door.

MRS. LYNCH
I was afraid our salon had begun to bore you, Mr. Poe; or perhaps that you no longer valued our discussions.

POE
(faking)
To the contrary, Mrs. Lynch; I have been most grateful and fortunate to
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE(cont'd)

incorporate the comments of the group
into my successive drafts.

MRS. LYNCH

Your success flatters us more than your
remark, or even your presence here now.
Please join us.

POE

Thank you.

Placing his bag on the floor, he takes the seat nearest the
wine, and helps himself. The reader resumes.

READER

(haughtily)

On mounts of Thrace, doth gods gently
tread...

Poe finishes a glass and pours another, not unnoticed.

READER (cont'd)

...and mortals strive yet in time are dead...

FADE OUT.

INT. LYNCH HOUSE - LATER

Poe has nodded off.

MRS. LYNCH

Mister Poe!

She has evidently been trying to wake him. He startles.

POE

Yes! Of course! Wonderful, sir, thank
you!

MRS. LYNCH

We anticipate your reading, now.

POE

Yes, of course. Thank you.

Clearly he knows he has nothing to read, since he had
forgotten about the whole thing; nevertheless he reaches into
his bag, rummaging for something. It's stuffed with Mary
Rogers newspaper clippings and the inquest documents, which
drop on the floor beside him.

POE (cont'd)

My most recent poem is in here somewhere...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The group notices the Mary Rogers headlines on the floor and looks around at one another in snooty disdain and disbelief.

POE (cont'd)
 (still shuffling)
 I'm quite proud of it and look forward to
 your comments...

At last he reaches the bottom of the bag.

POE (cont'd)
 I appear to have forgotten it.

Uncomfortable pause. Someone clears his throat. A match STRIKING is way too loud.

MRS. LYNCH
 Perhaps you could recite us another
 piece, from memory?

POE
 Yes!

He pauses. He looks at everyone individually. The insupportable snobbery of these middlebrows is unbearable.

POE (cont'd)
 Actually, to hell with it. I really
 couldn't care less what any of you think
 about anything, to tell you the truth.

He hastily stuffs the papers back in the bag. They are too shocked to retort. He rises, walks to the hall, grabs his coat off the rack, and leaves without bid of good night.

EXT. IRVING PLACE - CONTINUOUS

Poe walks out and down the steps, glad to be free of the oppressive atmosphere. The rain has let up somewhat. Once on the sidewalk, he pauses, thinking of where to go next. He decides on a course and sets out in a southerly direction.

EXT. FIVE POINTS STREET - NIGHT

A DRUNK CRIPPLE grovelling on the street almost trips Poe as he nears the Five Points bar where he met Finnegan et al. Startled-- a bit put off and afraid-- Poe ignores the man's MUMBLED plea for a hand-out and enters the bar.

INT. FIVE POINTS BAR - CONTINUOUS

The raucous atmosphere of before is somewhat diminished, the crowd somewhat thinner. A lone unaccompanied FEMALE sits at the bar; a couple of other WOMEN consort with men at tables.

Poe gets some sideways glances and becomes conscious of his bourgeois attire-- he can't fit in here either.

BARTENDER

Sir?

POE

Ale, please.

He serves him a glass. Poe looks toward a door in the back he didn't notice before; indeed, he is (as are we) nearly certain it wasn't there at all. A couple of down-and-out types go furtively through it.

A trio of shabby, unshaven DRINKERS occupies a table behind him. As Poe reads, their voices become audible.

DRINKER #1

She often walked out with young men.

DRINKER #2

Not just young men.

DRINKER #1

I've heard that too.

DRINKER #3

A young woman should be more careful.

DRINKER #1

Why? A woman ought to be able to walk out on a Sunday morning without fear for her life.

At these familiar words, Poe takes notice. He turns his head slightly to eavesdrop.

DRINKER #2

I heard she was involved with the engraver that worked on her street.

DRINKER #3

Nassau, right?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DRINKER #2

Aye. And a mate of mine saw him fighting with his wife the day after the girl disappeared.

DRINKER #1

He's a fine engraver-- a gentleman; I couldn't see him..

DRINKER #3

You never know what such a beauty can drive one to.

DRINKER #1

Fair enough, but still..

DRINKER #2

My friend says they met on the street Sunday morning, he didn't return home that night, and his woman was irate.

DRINKER #1

Was she violent?

DRINKER #2

Not violent enough, apparently; he tore a ring right out of her ear!

DRINKER #3

What's his name?

DRINKER #2

Morse. Joseph Morse.

Poe turns around and regards them, thinking of approaching. They look at him and immediately get up and walk to the mysterious door.

Poe waits an appropriate moment, then follows.

INT. BACK ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It's extremely dark and smoky. The drinkers are strangely non-apparent, though the first pair that entered Poe can barely make out seated in a corner, sharing a hookah. This is an opium den.

A SMALL MAN with a filthy face and few teeth holds a small draw-string satchel out to Poe. Confused, his hand reaches for it. The man snatches it away. Now understanding, Poe fishes in his pocket for a few coins, which he offers the man, who now releases the satchel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe takes it to an unoccupied hookah. He looks around at other users for a clue on how to proceed, then follows their lead. He gets the thing lit and takes a few puffs. He waits a moment, then takes another huge hit. He leans back.

FADE OUT.

INT. BACK ROOM - LATER

He's nodded off again. The room is nearly empty now. The opium-seller looks at him and laughs. Self-conscious and high as hell, Poe gets up.

He steadies himself against a wall, blinks a few times and takes a deep breath before moving to the door.

His POV is blurred, distorted, as he walks. He remembers his bag in the corner, and turns to retrieve it, but he misjudges the distance and stumbles. Correcting himself, he picks it up and turns back toward the door.

INT. FIVE POINTS BAR - CONTINUOUS

Poe walks slowly to the bar. The bartender looks at him knowingly. He sits. Looking up, he can't believe what he sees: his blurred-distorted POV shows him, unmistakably, unbelievably, Mary Rogers-- just a flash as she walks out the door to the street. Poe follows.

POE

Mary!

EXT. FIVE POINTS STREET - CONTINUOUS

Poe rushes out the door, looks left, then right, where his POV shows the figure slipping around a corner. He goes.

POE

Mary! Wait!

Rounding it, he's SMACKED in the face by Finnegan, and drops immediately. Finnegan's surrounding posse continues the beating as he stands and gloats, rubbing his fist.

FINNEGAN

This isn't the place for you. Can't you see that?

Poe gurgles through blood what might be "Mary," or might not. The young Toughs rifle through his pockets and bag.

TOUGH #1

Let's see what we have here!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TOUGH #2

Here it is!

He displays some bills, and some coins fall out of his hand and Poe's pocket onto the wet brick street.

FINNEGAN

Give it.

The cohort obeys, and the group flees, leaving the ragged and defeated Poe on his hands and knees, vomiting in the street.

INT. POE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Claire tends to Poe's injuries, leaning over him and gingerly dabbing a wet compress to his bruised face.

CLAIRE

What were you *doing* down there? You know you don't belong in Five Points.

POE

Investigating.

CLAIRE

This Rogers affair still? Edgar, what did you expect to learn there? Why don't you talk to the police or something, go through the normal channels?

POE

There are no normal channels. And--
Ouch!

CLAIRE

Sorry! What?

POE

I saw her. Mary. Mary Rogers.

Claire stops what she's doing.

CLAIRE

You were drinking, weren't you.

POE

I wasn't.

CLAIRE

Edgar, the woman is *dead*. Do you hear me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Not as of last night.

CLAIRE

The corpse was identified. There was an autopsy, remember?

POE

It was someone else's corpse.

CLAIRE

Will you stop and listen to yourself a moment? Why would that man-- Crommelin? - - say it was she? Her own mother said the clothing was hers.

POE

Crommelin could have acquired the clothing previously. Maybe they ran off together. But I know I saw her. I recognized her from the portrait.

CLAIRE

Oh, please...

POE

She ran away when I called her. I know it was she.

CLAIRE

Edgar, you are obsessed with a dead woman. A dead woman is consuming you.

POE

She's not dead.

CLAIRE

I can't abide this.

She puts down the compress, collects her things, and starts to exit.

POE

Claire, don't. Please. I'm getting so close, I know it. I know that if I find this woman--

CLAIRE

If you find her killer, you mean.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE

Or, if I find her killer...if I solve this I'll be alright. Everything will be different, I promise.

CLAIRE

(softening)

No it won't, Edgar. Events can't change you. Only you can change you. You're destroying yourself trying to save yourself, don't you see that? You imperil your career trying to revive it. Solving the mysterious death of Mary Rogers won't make you happy; you will make you happy. Or, you won't.

She leaves.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE A WAREHOUSE - DAY

Poe follows an industrial street near the docks, checking addresses of identical warehouses against a sheet of paper. Finding his destination, he enters a particularly noisy one.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Walking past rows of men cutting cork, he stops to ask a WORKER something. The man points, and Poe proceeds until he finds Daniel Payne.

Seeing Poe, Payne stops working his machine and wipes his brow with a handkerchief from his pocket. The sound of the primitive machinery all but obscures this conversation; Poe becomes more hostile and confrontational as it progresses.

PAYNE

Mr. Poe! I hope it's good news you bring.

POE

I think instead you have some for me.

PAYNE

Whatever do you mean?

POE

She's alive, isn't she.

PAYNE

What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE

Mary. I've seen her. She's alive and you know it.

PAYNE

Mr. Poe, I don't know where you could get such an idea. No one wants to see Mary alive more than me...

POE

And so you have. You collected her at the omnibus on Sunday. You've been hiding her somewhere.

PAYNE

What are you saying?

Poe produces a torn piece of newspaper.

POE

I've seen the ad you placed. You describe her dress on Sunday precisely.

PAYNE

So?

POE

There's no way you could know such detail in the fleeting moment you saw her.

Payne scoffs.

POE (cont'd)

In the mirror? In the bathroom? You claim you only exchanged a few words, so how could you know the color of her stockings? Or the hat she carried?

PAYNE

(returning to work)

This is absurd.

POE

Why? To get away from Crommelin?

PAYNE

I told you already, I have not seen Mary since that morning.

POE

Then how could you know all this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Other WORKERS begin taking notice and crowd around, concerned.

PAYNE
(suddenly agitated)
Because that's what I saw!

Poe gets all up in his face.

POE
At the omnibus stop that night!

PAYNE
No! What other color stocking would a woman wear in summer? And Mary only had one hat. Now leave me alone.

Poe suddenly grabs him and in so doing inadvertently bangs Payne's face against the ironwork.

POE
She's alive, dammit! I've seen her! You can't keep it from me!

The other workers intervene and pull Poe off him. Payne's forehead is cut and bleeding.

PAYNE
You're insane! Mary is dead! The whole city knows it! What's wrong with you?

POE
(being restrained)
Where are you hiding her? I must find her!

WORKER
I think you'd best be moving on, mister.

POE
(resisting)
I won't! Answer me! Where are you hiding her?!

Payne's grief-- or maybe his guilt-- is suddenly incensed. He punches Poe in the stomach as the other workers hold him.

PAYNE
Get the hell out of here.

Poe is doubled over, helpless. The others let him go now that he's no threat. He COUGHS. The workers surround Payne, who has recommenced his work on the cork-cutting machine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Seeing he's not going to get an answer, Poe dejectedly walks off. The others stare at him, half with disdain for the bourgeois, half with pity for the crazy fool.

EXT. BROADWAY JOURNAL - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of Poe's place of employment.

INT. BROADWAY JOURNAL - BRIGGS' OFFICE - DAY

Poe sits before Briggs, standing behind his desk and fuming.

BRIGGS

I don't know why I'm so angry; I should be glad to be rid of you.

POE

You're firing me? I'm getting close with this Rogers story...

BRIGGS

Really? First you were looking for who killed this woman, now you're convinced she's alive and you're looking for *her*.

(changing tone)

Your name, Mr. Poe, doesn't carry quite the eclat it once did. "The Raven" was nearly a year ago, and you've produced merely a few bilious works of criticism since then.

POE

This Rogers story will change that...

BRIGGS

You don't produce, then what you want to produce is unprintable. You're finished here.

Long pause. Poe rises, opens the door. He turns for one last word, then, realizing it would only be wasted, walks out.

INT. MASSACHUSETTS INN - DAY

SUPERTITLE: AUGUST 14, WEST BOYLSTON, MASS. SEVEN MILES FROM WORCESTER

In a pub sits a MAN, 35, dressed as something of a dandy-- loud wide-checked pants, meticulously groomed side-whiskers, and a fashionable coat. A glass of ale waits before him.

Over his shoulder, Officer Hilliker approaches.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HILLIKER

Your name, sir, is Joseph Morse, I believe, and you are under arrest.

MORSE

On what charge?

HILLIKER

On the complaint of your wife.

MORSE

Oh, is that all?

HILLIKER

That, and for the murder of Miss Mary Rogers.

Morse is shaken.

EXT. NASSAU STREET - EVENING

Hilliker and Morse ride in the back of a horse-drawn cart up Nassau Street.

As they pass the *Herald*, Dr. Archer can be seen walking out the front door. He pauses, looks both ways, puts on his hat, and walks off.

EXT. POLICE STATION - EVENING

Hilliker and Morse approach the station on Park Row and disembark from the cart.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

The DISTRICT ATTORNEY and MAYOR PURDY await the duo. As Hilliker forces Morse into a chair and commences binding him to it with rope, they fire questions:

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Is he ready to confess?

MAYOR PURDY

Did he tell you anything?

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

He admits it, does he not?

HILLIKER

All right, Morse, why don't you tell the District Attorney and the Acting Mayor your story.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MORSE

I was at the Astor Theatre the night of
the riot...

FLASHBACK:

EXT. ASTOR PLACE - NIGHT

WIDE: Outside the Astor Place Opera House, a Rococo monstrosity of recent construction that is the focus of fashionable culture and located on a small plaza at a tangle of narrow alleys and side streets, an ANGRY MOB shouts and jeers at a small MILITIA protecting the building. The rioters throw stones and bricks at the nervous garrison, and break streetlights in the area, starting several small fires.

CLOSE: Separately, Morse and Mary Rogers exit the theatre in haste. Some of the RIOTERS (poorer types) are among the RICHER PATRONS; the chaos appears to have started within.

MEDIUM: Fancy theatre patrons among Mary & Morse disperse in fear, going around the militia with its back to the entrance, and running frantically down side streets. Packs of rioters chase some of these, waving sticks and YELLING obscene threats.

MEDIUM: Mary, at the edge of the madness, SCREAMS a man's name. She looks around, lost. Militiamen and rioters block her escape.

CLOSE: Morse appears by her side just as a brick falls and breaks apart at her feet.

MORSE

(offering his hand)
Come with me!

Instinct prevents her from following a strange man twice her age, but Mary doesn't feel like sticking around, either. A volley of FIREARMS is heard and the crowd surges, bum-rushing the militia and almost knocking over Mary and Morse.

MORSE (cont'd)

I know how to get out of here! Come with
me!

Mary consents, taking his hand and following him down an alley.

EXT. ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

No one has gone after them. It's pitch dark. NOISE from the riot may yet be heard in the near distance. Mary looks nervous; she still holds Morse's hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MORSE

Don't worry. I'll not harm you.

MARY

I'm not worried.

The crack in her voice betrays her.

MARY (cont'd)

But where are you leading me, sir?

MORSE

Broad Street is just around the corner.
From there I'll take you wherever you
like, or leave you; we should be out of
danger then.

Mary SHRIEKS. She's stepped on something. It's a dead dog.
She keeps following Morse, and sure enough there's light
ahead. The alley opens onto a wide, bright street.

EXT. BROAD STREET - MOMENTS LATER

They look at one another. Morse is admiring, naturally.

MARY

I...I know my way from here.

MORSE

Well then, I'll be off...

MARY

I'm much in your debt, sir. Thank you.

MORSE

You're quite welcome, Miss...

MARY

Mary.

MORSE

Mary. I am Joseph Morse. May I convince
you to meet me on Sunday, to redeem you
of your debt?

She smiles a bit too coquettishly...

FADE TO:

EXT. BLEECKER & MORTON - DAY

Morse waits on the corner, Mary appears and they exchange
greetings, then start off together as Morse VO's:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MORSE (V.O.)

Then on the 25th of July, I met her about noon, in Bleecker Street, near Morton. I persuaded her to go with me to Hoboken; we went there, to the Elysian Fields, and had some refreshments, and I kept her mind employed until after the last boat departed...

EXT. HOBOKEN FERRY DOCK - EVENING

Morse and Mary Rogers stand at the dock in the pouring rain. Night is falling, and the ferry boat CAPTAIN and CREW are hurriedly de-rigging the boat.

MARY

But it's not yet eight o'clock!

CAPTAIN

Half-past eight, miss.

Mary looks at Morse, confused.

MORSE

My watch must have stopped.

He pulls his watch-- gold, with a fake-fancy design on the cover-- from his pocket and opens it.

It reads 7:45. A drop of rain splatters on the watch and Morse wipes it off before closing it.

He shrugs; Mary is suspicious.

CAPTAIN

In any case, we cancelled the last departure on account of the rain. You don't see any other boats in this storm, do you?

MORSE

Certainly not. Thank you, gentlemen!
(to Mary)
We'll have to stay the night, then.

Mary folds her arms, dripping, beyond skeptical: incredulous, nearly furious.

MARY

Two rooms.

MORSE

Of course, my dear, of course.

EXT. ELYSIAN FIELDS HOUSE - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING SHOT of a more upscale inn: The eponymous Elysian Fields House borders the popular rural retreat.

Morse and Mary approach the inn, rushing to get out of the rain. He lags behind slightly.

Morse checks to see she isn't watching, then reaches into his pocket and pulls some cash from a red leather wallet.

He separates some bills and puts them back in the wallet, the rest in another pocket, then smiles craftily.

MARY

Hurry up! I'm drenched!

MORSE

Coming!

INT. ELYSIAN FIELDS HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The couple approaches the reservations desk.

CLERK

A room?

MARY

Two.

CLERK

Very well. That will be twelve dollars.

MORSE

(producing wallet)

Twelve dollars, a fair price.

He counts singles out on the desk.

MORSE (cont'd)

Look at that. I must have lost track of my spending; I have only nine.

He shrugs, identical to the one he gave at the dock.

Mary rolls her eyes, not falling for it for a second.

CLERK

One, then?

MORSE

I'm afraid so.

INT. ELYSIAN FIELDS HOUSE - HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Mary stomps ahead of him down the hall. They're both dripping wet.

MORSE

I'm very sorry about this, my dear; I assure you I had no intention...

MARY

Yes, yes, it was entirely an accident, just like our missing the ferry.

They stop outside a door. He takes the key and opens it.

MORSE

You saw the storm! There's no way...

INT. ELYSIAN FIELDS HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

MARY

The storm had only just come up, I don't need to remind you.

Morse lights the lamp.

MORSE

Well, we'll be much happier here than if we'd been on the river right now.

MARY

Turn that lamp off, I'm getting undressed.

He (reluctantly) does as instructed.

In the shadows, we can see Mary disrobe to her underclothes. SOUNDS of Morse taking off his boots are heard.

INT. ELYSIAN FIELDS HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

Through the darkness, occasionally interrupted by flashes of lightning from the storm outside, we can see tossing and turning in the double bed, accompanied by the RUSTLING of sheets.

MARY

Stop it! Stop it, I said!

MORSE

Just a kiss...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARY

You're not the just-a-kiss type; I'm no fool.

MORSE

Please...You're such a beauty...

MARY

And flattery will get you nowhere, Mr. Morse.

More RUSTLING.

MARY (cont'd)

Stop it!

Exasperated, she gets out of bed.

MARY (cont'd)

I'm not sleeping in that bed.

MORSE

I'll obey you, I promise!

MARY

I don't trust you for a second. Go to sleep.

MORSE

Where will you sleep?

MARY

I won't.

She sits in a chair by the window, looking out it.

Shadows shroud her beautiful face. She puts her feet up on the chair and hugs her knees, sighing.

END FLASHBACK

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Hilliker, the D.A. and Mayor Purdy stand above Morse as he finishes his tale.

MORSE

On Monday morning I came to the city with her, and left her in good friendship at the corner of Greenwich and Barclay Street. I have not seen her since.

HILLIKER

Nor has anyone else!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYOR PURDY

Let him finish, Officer.

MORSE

She said her name was Mary, but I don't know her last name. I think she lives in Morton Street with her mother.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Nassau.

MORSE

No, my office is in Nassau Street, and I feel certain I'd have recognized such a girl. I think the house where she lives has a brass plate on the door, with cyphar letters on it. I don't know the name on it. Her name might be Mary Rogers; if it is I had no hand in murdering her, as I left her in good standing.

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

Describe her, please?

MORSE

Her hair was rather light, her complexion fair. She was slender made, of very genteel appearance; rather tall and thin. She told me she was seventeen years old; she had a very long, delicate hand, but no rings on her fingers. That is all I know about her.

HILLIKER

Why did you abandon the city if you had nothing to fear?

MORSE

I'd heard a beautiful young girl was found dead, and thought she might have killed herself after our dalliance. Everyone seemed convinced she'd been murdered, so I thought New York might not be the best place for me.

MAYOR PURDY

But you said you left her in good standing.

MORSE

And I did. However, one cannot account for the emotions of a young girl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

By their expressions it's clear they can't argue with him there.

INT. CIGAR STORE - DAY

The usual crew is reading the *Herald* aloud, literally fighting over it like children.

THOMAS

(reading)

"Mister Morse, of Broome Street, Manhattan, said at his interrogation, that during the night, he tried to have connection with her but did not succeed."

JESSUP

(grabbing for the paper)

It doesn't say that!

RALPH

Oh, lordy.

JESSUP

The man's poor wife.

THOMAS

As if she didn't know what he was up to.

JESSUP

She doesn't need all of us knowing, too!

INT. BENNETT'S OFFICE - DAY

Bennett is flinging himself about the room in an outrage. Attree stands by the closed door, withstanding this tirade as he's done a hundred times before.

BENNETT

This is intolerable! Unfathomable! I told you what I wanted: a gang! Plug Uglies, Dead Rabbits, I don't care! But the police nab a dandy!

ATTREE

I--

BENNETT

How am I to speak for police reform when the police are ready to charge someone they discovered themselves? Two hundred miles away! Who cares about the fire rowdies and butcher boys when a

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BENNETT(cont'd)

professional is accused of the most
heinous crime in this city's memory?

ATTREE

But--

BENNETT

Our efforts to this point are now wasted.
How could you let this happen, William?
The man's office is across the street!

INT. BAR - DAY

Poe sits dejectedly with his elbows on the bar, a bottle
before him.

The *Herald*, *Tattler* and *Post* rest on the bar nearby, their
headlines reading: "MURDER OF CIGAR-STORE GIRL: AN INQUEST ON
JOSEPH MORSE, LOCAL ENGRAVER"; "MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF MARY
ROGERS: SUSPECT INTERROGATED" and "MARY MURDER MYSTERY MAN."

He squints as light pours in from the opening door; there's a
figure silhouetted there. It's Chambers.

CHAMBERS

Thought I'd find you here.

POE

I am an open book.

CHAMBERS

Beaten to it, eh?

POE

Rub it in, why don't you?

CHAMBERS

Sorry. Look, you mustn't let this get
you down. You can still write this.

POE

That's not what I'm upset about.

Chambers waits for him to elaborate. He's not going to. So
Chambers picks up a newspaper and starts to read. A moment.

CHAMBERS

Poe, I don't profess the familiarity with
this affair that you must have, but from
what I can glean, no one has established
with any certainty that the girl Morse
was with that day was in fact Mary
Rogers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Poe recognizes that this is indeed the crucial fact. He quickly collects the papers and his bag, drops some coins on the bar, and walks out without a word.

CHAMBERS (cont'd)

You're welcome.

He regards the bottle, shrugs, and pours himself a glass.

EXT. WEST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - CEMETERY - NIGHT

In a soft drizzle (avoiding the thunder-and-lightning cliché of graveyard scenes), a silhouetted figure, half-underground, works with a shovel, a kerosene lantern on the ground beside.

It's Poe, exhuming Mary's grave. He gets to the pine box and falls to his knees, prying open the coffin. The stench doesn't phase him; he's in a zone.

He reaches for the lantern and brings it down. He removes some ribbon from his jacket pocket; it's marked at one-inch and one-foot intervals. He starts measuring portions of the corpse: upper arm, forearm, middle finger, and across the metatarsals of the hand.

Suddenly it's brighter-- there's a light from overhead. Poe looks up but can't see who it is.

Poe's POV beneath the ground: a cop holds a lantern in front of him and, astonished at what a sick bastard it must be down there, asks:

COP #1

What in the name of God are you doing?

INT. POLICE STATION - LATER

The police officer (one of those seen with Hilliker earlier) leads Poe, his hands bound, through the door into the station house. He speaks with another (#2) at a desk.

COP #2

What's his story?

COP #1

You won't believe it. Walking up Varick Street, I saw a light in the yard of the church there.

COP #2

Right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COP #1

So I went in and found a lantern, which is a good thing because it was a bit frightful, don't you know...

COP #2

Aye...

COP #1

I ain't afraid to say it. So what do I find but this bugger down in one of the graves! He's got the box open, and he's doing something with it, with the dead person!

COP #2

Doing what?

COP #1

I couldn't tell, but what's the matter? So I pull him out and he's got a measuring tape in his hand. Starts bleating out figures-- two-and-an-eighth, three-and-a-half, thirteen, eleven-and-a-quarter. I ask him what's up and he won't tell me. Just keeps repeating the figures: two-and-a-half, three-and-a-quarter, eleven, thirteen-and-a-half, over and again.

COP #2

(to Poe)

On a bit of a bender are we?

POE

Two-and-an-eighth, three-and-a-half, eleven, thirteen-and-a-quarter. May I borrow a pencil? Two-and-an-eighth, three-and-a-half, eleven, thirteen-and-a-quarter.

COP #2

Not for you, you loony.

COP #1

What should I do with him?

COP #2

Lock him up.

COP #1

What's the charge?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

COP #2

I don't know, what's the difference?
Lock him up and ask Hilliker in the
morning.

COP #1

Right. Let's go, you.

POE

Two-and-an-eighth, three-and-a-half,
eleven, thirteen-and-a-quarter.

FADE TO:

INT. POLICE STATION - JAIL - DAY

Poe sits on the floor of the dingy cell in about two inches
of water. There's a constant hollow DRIPPING sound. The
numbers he was reciting are scratched into the wall. A few
BUMS lie on benches and cots, sleeping it off.

A gate down the hall is heard opening and FOOTSTEPS approach;
it's Claire.

CLAIRE

Look what the cops dragged in.

No response from the prisoner.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

I hear you've lost your mind.

POE

I've never been more rational.

A dubious and pathetic claim, from the looks of him.

CLAIRE

Is that what rational people do? Dig up
graves? Defile corpses?

POE

It's the only way to prove it's not her.

(slowly)

The subjectivity of human perception
requires the application of rational
principles of material evidence. Science
must be part of a system of law, not
tradition, or habit, or hearsay.

CLAIRE

I didn't come to hear your thoughts on
reforming the justice system..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

One of the cops comes and opens Poe's cell; Claire is bailing him out.

EXT. POLICE STATION/CITY STREETS - LATER

Poe and Claire exit the building together and begin walking.

POE

Thank you, Claire.

CLAIRE

It's unfathomable, what you've done. But no one else was going to get you out of there.

POE

I am grateful. Did I miss anything?

CLAIRE

Arthur Crommelin came around to tell you the Rogers family would no longer be cooperating with your investigation. I can't say I'm surprised. The Herald doesn't seem to know how to proceed; the Morse development doesn't fit the preferred outcome.

Nor Poe's, from the looks of him.

CLAIRE (cont'd)

Bennett wants an Irish or a black. Says there's theories they're predisposed to criminality.

POE

(scoffs)

The correlation of physical characteristics to one's thoughts or deeds has no basis in science.

(brightening)

However, I have come up with a way -- a scientific way -- to learn whether the woman buried at West Presbyterian Church is or is not Mary Cecilia Rogers.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. 126 NASSAU STREET - NIGHT

It's the middle of a foggy night and not a soul is out but Poe, dressed in black. He tries the door to the boarding house and it's open. He goes in.

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - PARLOR - NIGHT

Pitch black. Poe sneaks in and moves straight for the portrait of Mary on the wall. MUSIC over his POV approaching. He reaches for the painting and pulls it down off the wall.

He gingerly places the portrait on the floor, kneeling beside it and removing from his pocket the measuring tape.

CROMMELIN (V.O.)

Mary always wanted to be photographed, but it was too costly. So the artist painted her perfectly to scale.

Poe begins measuring the upper arm, forearm, middle finger, and across the metatarsals of the hand of the portrait of Mary (seated with her hands on a leg).

C.U.'s of the measuring tape against the painting: the body parts are matching exactly the measurements he made of the corpse.

Poe places the tape down on the floor. He droops his head into his hand, his fingers massaging his forehead.

A teardrop falls on Mary's face in the painting.

EXT. ANTHONY STREET & EAST BROADWAY - NIGHT

ESTABLISHING of a tenement on a street full of them. YOUNG MEN exit the building together, putting on jackets and hats and slapping each other on the back.

INT. BORDELLO - NIGHT

Poe is in the entryway and a fortyish MADAM greets him, taking his coat. She RINGS a bell and several YOUNG GIRLS/WOMEN (ages 15-35) appear in the front room. One of them is Samantha. She and Poe are surprised to see each other but don't let on that they're acquainted.

Poe selects a TEENAGED TALL BLONDE -- a Mary Rogers lookalike -- and leads her down the hall.

INT. BORDELLO - BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The blonde is nude, astride a nude Poe on the bed. He weeps softly.

BLONDE

What's the matter?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She bends at the waist and clasps his head in her hands, soothing him.

POE

Nothing. Everything.

MUSIC OVER:

EXT. BROOME ST. - DAY

From a C.U. of the street sign being stencilled at eye level by a WORKER on a corner tenement, PULL BACK and MOVE to see Poe staking out the block. He reads the paper and watches WOMEN entering and exiting their residences.

DRINKER #2 (V.O.)

A mate of mine saw him fighting with his wife...he tore a ring right out of her ear!

CHAMBERS (V.O.)

No one has established with any certainty that the girl Morse was with that day was in fact Mary Rogers.

Poe's POV on a series of women: various modes of dress, carrying different stuff-- empty shopping bags when leaving, full when returning, etc.-- all middle class, mostly white.

But there's none with what he's looking for: C.U.'s on the ears of a couple of the women. They all appear normal.

He moves down the street a couple of blocks. It's narrow and uncrowded enough that he's able to view a sizeable length of the street from a single vantage point.

TIME-LAPSE of Poe under the light changing. He's still while the city moves by him in fast-motion.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BROOME ST. - DOWN THE BLOCK - DAY

Poe stakes out some more, checks out the ears of some more WOMEN. (All of Broome is about 1/2 mile long so it's conceivable that he could cover the length of it in a couple of days.) Nothing. He moves along.

Finally, he sees what he's been looking for. It's Mrs. Morse. The bandage is off her ear but the appendage is considerably damaged at the lobe. He approaches her.

MOS, seen from some distance, Poe speaks to Mrs. Morse. She alternately shakes and nods her head, saying a few words. She points uptown.

EXT. MORTON STREET - DAY

Now Poe stakes out Morton. Among the people passing by his POV closes in on the young women.

The TIME-LAPSE effect again.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MORTON STREET - DAY

Poe waits.

A tall, beautiful blond fitting Morse's description is about to go into a building. Sure enough, the house has a brass plate on the door with the address written on it in cursive, just like Morse recounted.

Poe approaches her.
MUSIC DOWN.

TELEPHOTO of the two talking from across the street. She turns away. He persists. She tries to go in the door. He blocks her. He shows her the newspaper. She softens. He pleads, shaking the paper. She nods her head. He sighs, relieved.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Poe leads the young woman, Mary Havilland, and her middle-aged MOTHER to the station.

A small though boisterous CROWD is outside and the three struggle a bit to fight their way through.

POE

Clear the way, please! Clear the way!

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

The trio comes to the desk, tended by Cop #3.

POE

We wish to speak to Officer Hilliker.

COP #3

About?

POE

The young lady is prepared to speak to the innocence of Joseph Morse.

Cop #3 is taken aback.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

In the room where Hilliker met with Mrs. Morse, the trio sits around a desk. Hilliker stands. Cop #1 is by the closed door. The Havillands are treated as hostile suspects.

HILLIKER

Why did you agree to meet him? Did you know he was married?

MARY HAVILLAND

Not at the time.

HILLIKER

How did you learn he was married?

MARY HAVILLAND

The Tuesday following, I heard shouting outside my bedroom, then a door slam. I looked out the window and saw Mr. Morse leaving his house. The street was nearly empty. A woman followed, calling after him in harsh tones. She caught up to him and put her hand on his shoulder. He turned and struck her, then took ahold of her ear and pulled on it. She screamed and turned toward my window, at which point I stepped back.

POE

Sir, are these details essential to your investigation?

HILLIKER

(conceding the point)

On Sunday, he persuaded you to go to Hoboken?

MARY HAVILLAND

He made the suggestion as we approached the ferry dock at Barclay.

HILLIKER

And when you had crossed the river?

MRS. HAVILLAND

The day and night progressed as has been reported.

HILLIKER

I'd like to hear it from the girl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARY HAVILLAND

(demurely, embarrassed)

The day and night progressed as has been reported.

HILLIKER

Thank you. Based on your statement, we will hold Mr. Morse on the charge brought by his wife while continuing to investigate his involvement in the murder.

POE

But clearly the man knows nothing of the death of Mary Rogers!

HILLIKER

I have no way of knowing if this girl be truthful until--

MRS. HAVILLAND

Officer, if I may interrupt: do you require anything further from us?

HILLIKER

No, thank you, Mrs. Havilland.

Mother, daughter and Poe exit.

INT. PUBLIC HALL - NIGHT

In a large and plain public hall, Bennett, Mayor Purdy, the District Attorney, Dr. Archer (the Manhattan coroner) and a few other male NOTABLES are seated at a table on a raised platform at one end of the room.

About forty MEN-- mostly white, representing all classes-- comprise the audience of concerned citizens. Some sit in chairs in rows facing the platform; others stand and confer. Attree stands in the back by the door, arms folded.

Bennett bangs a gavel to gain the floor; the audience quiets down and everybody finds a seat.

Poe furtively enters, standing on the side of the doorway opposite Attree.

BENNETT

Hear, hear. Let's call this to order. Gentlemen, Mr. Mayor, Dr. Archer, Governor Seward: I believe that the large number of citizens who have taken time to be here is fair testament to the

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BENNETT(cont'd)

concern which the good people of New York have for law and order. And I further believe that it demonstrates their desire not only to see this horrendous crime solved, but to formally reform the agency charged with such discovery, namely the office of the police. As you all know by now, Mr. Morse's young companion was not Mary Rogers at all, but rather a Mary Havilland. That this was discovered by a - a non-professional...

Attree glances bitterly over at Poe, who can barely withhold a satisfied smirk.

BENNETT (cont'd)

...only emphasizes this point.

GRUMBLES of affirmation from the table and the crowd.

BENNETT (cont'd)

While we cannot with certainty say that crime is on the increase in New York, reports by the Herald and its competing newspapers amply demonstrate that public concern about crime and criminals obviously is, and that is the important thing. The current police system is vicious, deplorably defective, and in need of immediate reform. Therefore, with utmost respect, I hereby call upon the Governor to introduce legislation in Albany which would mandate police patrols for protection of our citizenry.

The crowd is impressed by the originality of this idea.

BENNETT (cont'd)

Now that we agree on the steps that must be taken in the fullness of time, let me address the issue which today confronts us: the continuing mystery as to the murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers.

GOV. SEWARD

I have something I'd like to say on that, if I may.

BENNETT

Of course, Governor.

The stodgy governor stands and clears his throat, removing from his pocket a prepared statement.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GOV. SEWARD

Whereas Mary C. Rogers, a young woman residing in the city of New York, was lately ravished and murdered in said city, or in the portions of New Jersey contiguous thereto; and whereas the efforts made by the police of the city of New York to discover the perpetrators of these crimes have, as appears from the public record, proved altogether unsuccessful; and whereas the peace and security of society require that such atrocious crimes should not go unpunished: I do hereby enjoin upon all magistrates and other officers and ministers of justice, that they be diligent in their efforts to bring the offender or offenders to condign punishment.

Both sections of the assembled audience look around at each other, somewhat bewildered at the weakness of the statement.

Bennett rises again as Gov. Seward sits back down.

BENNETT

Thank you, Governor. With regard to the Rogers case, and understanding the time it may take for the police office to be reformed to our satisfaction, the Herald is prepared to offer the first \$500 of a reward for information leading to the capture of the criminals.

A ROAR of approval erupts from the crowd.

BENNETT (cont'd)

(shouting over the crowd)

And I call upon the citizens and elected officials assembled here to join the Herald and contribute to the reward fund!

AUDIENCE MEMBERS begin standing and SHOUTING.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1

I offer fifty dollars!

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2

I offer fifty dollars!

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3

I'm not a rich man, but I'll contribute ten dollars!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

AUDIENCE MEMBER #4

Ten more dollars here!

Mayor Purdy is a little flustered, then grabs Bennett's gavel and bangs it as he stands.

MAYOR PURDY

The office of the Mayor of the City of New York contributes six hundred dollars to the reward fund!

CHEERS from the crowd.

An AIDE to Gov. Seward whispers in his ear. He stands.

GOV. SEWARD

The state of New York contributes seven hundred and fifty dollars!

More CHEERS from the crowd.

Bennett is exceedingly pleased at the hysteria he has ignited. Some of the ecstatic crowd now approach the desk waving money. In back, Poe exits, baffled.

FADE OUT.

INT. 155 DUANE - DAY

A SERVANT directs Poe to a large salon with an elegant picture window, just to the left of the front door. It's the house Phebe & Mary arrived at when they first came to New York.

Waiting, Poe looks over the autopsy report again. Visible are the words, "two large bruises beneath each earlobe strongly suggest strangulation as the means of death." He stares off into space...

POE'S IMAGINATION:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Crommelin and Mary are in bed together engaging in somewhat violent sex. She is resisting, trying to push him off of her. He gets off her and strikes her in the head. The force sends the other side of her into the bedpost, striking it with her temple. She lies motionless. He turns her over and she's dead.

Crommelin scrambles, trying to think of what to do as he's doing he's not sure what. He dresses her and tries tying her up, then gives up and wraps her in the bedsheet.

EXT. STREET - LATER

Outside, Crommelin carries the bundled corpse and puts it in a carriage. He pays the driver, gets in, and they drive off.

EXT. RIVERBANK - LATER

In a wooded section of the Manhattan riverbank uptown, Crommelin unwraps the body, dumps it in the river, and prepares to burn the sheets she was wrapped in. The carriage waits nearby.

END "IMAGINATION"

INT. 155 DUANE - DAY

His reverie is interrupted by Anderson's entry. He is young, attractive, tall, and the epitome of smoothness.

ANDERSON

Mr. Poe?

POE

Yes.

ANDERSON

A pleasure.

They shake.

ANDERSON (cont'd)

I expect you're here regarding Miss Rogers.

POE

You have excellent instincts.

ANDERSON

Not instinct, I admit; I learned of your inquiry some days ago. A man such as myself has some contacts, you understand.

Poe affirms with a nod.

ANDERSON (cont'd)

I was in Albany attending to some business when I heard the news, and have only just returned. Such a tragedy.

POE

Indeed. Mrs. Rogers told me of your relationship--

Anderson is startled by the ambiguous implication.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE (cont'd)
(seeing this)
--your employment of Miss Rogers, at the
cigar store on Broadway.

ANDERSON
(recovering)
Yes, of course.

POE
I wonder if you know anything about her
disappearance. May I ask when you
learned her fate?

ANDERSON
An acquaintance upstate told me she was
missing, said he'd read it in the paper--
they get the New York papers up there a
day or two in arrears. I suppose that
was the day she was discovered. About
that, naturally, I read myself a day or
two later. I gave a full statement to
the police.

POE
When was that?

ANDERSON
Oh, several weeks ago.

POE
They sought you in Albany specifically?

ANDERSON
No, they came around here.

POE
I thought you said--

ANDERSON
Yes, excuse me. I implied I had been in
Albany for the duration; in fact I was in
New York for a day or two since Mary's
death, then returned north. It was on
one of those days the police questioned
me.

POE
I wonder why this wasn't reported?

ANDERSON
As I mentioned, Mr. Poe, I have some
connections in government and the press.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANDERSON(cont'd)

Due to the public nature of my businesses, I thought it prudent to persuade them to omit my name from the narrative of the various investigations.

POE

Of course. Might you share with me what you told the police?

ANDERSON

I related where I was in the days of her disappearance, and whom to contact in Albany to verify my presence there at the time. It was an altogether unpleasant experience, their interrogation: rather blameful, almost hostile. And not a query as to what I knew of Mary-- odd, I recall thinking, considering my lengthy employment of her. In any case, nothing I told them will help you much, I'm afraid.

POE

Mr. Anderson, forgive me, but that sounds like an invitation to ask what you know that *will* help me.

ANDERSON

Mr. Poe, I had a great fondness for Mary. She was a remarkable girl-- not really like a girl at all, in truth.

POE

How well did you know her?

ANDERSON

Quite well...

FLASHBACK:

INT. ANDERSON'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Anderson lies bare-chested in bed. Men's and women's clothes are strewn carelessly on the floor, over furniture, etc.

He removes the covers, sits up and puts on some undershorts. Standing, he starts to collect the clothing from the floor. He picks up Mary's indigo-dyed blue dress.

He stops, noticing something on the dress. C-U of a stain on its inside: a small amount of a dried and crusty, milky-white substance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He's surprised. We can see him trying to recollect when he might have caused this stain, but he can't. His expression turns to disappointment as he realizes the implication.

The door opens. It's Mary, nude. Anderson conceals the stain as she approaches him and playfully pecks him on the cheek.

MARY

Picking up after me? Aren't you nice.

She takes the dress and places it on the bed, then starts to dress. No answer from Anderson.

MARY (cont'd)

What's the matter?

ANDERSON

Nothing.

He turns away.

INT. CIGAR STORE - DAY

Anderson and Mary are preparing the store for opening in the early morning. She is wooden, businesslike; he looks uneasy.

ANDERSON

You could have told me you'd be missing work.

MARY

You might have assumed.

ANDERSON

How could I--

MARY

It's not like a trip to the dressmaker.

ANDERSON

Mary, I have been most understanding of your predicament; why are you upset with me?

MARY

I'm not.

ANDERSON

Perhaps you're distressed over another, less sympathetic?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARY

I can't believe you! Has it occurred to you that I might have reason to be less than euphoric this morning, considering? And even if your conjecture is correct, why would I even need to tell him? You're obviously the only person I know who could afford it-- though I suspect it was only because a cigar-store girl of a certain size would be bad for business.

ANDERSON

No need to be cruel.

MARY

No one knows but you, if that's what you're worried about.

END FLASHBACK

INT. ANDERSON'S HOME - DAY

Poe is now utterly confused.

POE

(thinking aloud)

So Claire may have been right about Daniel Payne.

ANDERSON

Sorry?

POE

If Mary was capable of deceiving you, with whom she was so intimate--

ANDERSON

In her defense, Mr. Poe, she *did* deny it.

POE

I assume only that she *might* have been untruthful. To do otherwise all but eliminates the possibility that it was some secret someone that she was going to meet when she left Sunday morning.

ANDERSON

If she had another involvement, you mean, it might have been he whom she was meeting Sunday morning.

POE

Not another romantic involvement, necessarily, but someone whom for

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

POE(cont'd)

whatever reason she didn't want Payne to learn she was acquainted with. And the same with regards to the...procedure. If she was capable--

ANDERSON

--Of something once, she was capable of doing it again.

They pause a moment, mulling it over.

POE

(lightbulb)

Suppose the would-be father, this second time, found out afterwards, and was so outraged--

ANDERSON

--disposing of the corpse in the river--

POE

--where it washed up near Hoboken. Then the identification of Mary that day is mistaken.

ANDERSON

I thought you had already established that-- the Havilland girl.

POE

I spoke with someone who claimed to have seen her with a group of Irish boys on that Sunday.

ANDERSON

Possible, I suppose, though not if we follow the secret lover scenario.

Another moment to consider.

POE

Do you think Mary would have discussed such matters with anyone?

ANDERSON

Perhaps. These are very delicate affairs... I imagine one would need to, though. What a vexing...I can't even imagine.

POE

Her mother?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ANDERSON

Certainly not her mother.

Suddenly realizing a crucial oversight, Poe leaps up.

POE

Samantha! How could I be so stupid?

...and bolts to the door.

ANDERSON

Mr. Poe!

But he's already gone.

EXT. ANTHONY STREET & EAST BROADWAY - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of Samantha's new place of employment.

INT. BORDELLO - BEDROOM - DAY

Samantha and Poe sit on a small bed together. She is done up in the manner of a contemporary whore, having fallen down a social rung. Noises of CARNALITY and ARGUING leech in from the rest of the house.

SAMANTHA

Still trying to find Mary? That *is* why you're here?

POE

It is.

Silence. She looks at him. Understanding, he reaches into his pocket and hands her a few bills.

SAMANTHA

I wondered how long it would take someone to think of asking *me* about Mary. And who.

POE

So the police haven't spoken with you?

SAMANTHA

You know how they are: What could *I* know?

POE

That's what I was wondering. What you could know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAMANTHA

I know Mary. Better than anyone, I'd think. Mary wasn't forthcoming by nature, Mr. Poe. She kept things from people. And different things from different people.

POE

What kind of things, Samantha?

SAMANTHA

Mr. Poe, I don't know who killed Mary any better than anyone who reads the penny press. And I'm not bothered by that; when one is reared in circumstances such as I was, one can adopt a certain, fatalistic attitude toward injustice.

The allusion discomforts him.

SAMANTHA (cont'd)

But I've been amazed at the ruckus this is causing. Mary, she always had an influence on people, but this...

She looks off and laughs a little at the craziness of it all.

SAMANTHA (cont'd)

People seem to want an answer. You included. I don't have any. I do know that Mary was mixed up in some things, things difficult for anyone to handle. And she, just a girl from the country. Mary was always ahead of herself in terms of what she brought on. Do you understand?

The allusion is almost too tempting for Poe to bear. He tries an appeal to her sympathy:

POE

Samantha, if you know something that could help find who killed Mary, why haven't you come forward? Mrs. Rogers wants--

SAMANTHA

I know she does. I haven't said anything for two reasons: One is that discussion of the situation Mary was in at the time of her death doesn't make one popular to the public. That's just the way it is. And the other, you just have to look at

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAMANTHA(cont'd)

me to understand that. Don't you see? They're about ready to hang the first Irishman they come across for this, and they still white! If some little nigger girl starts talking about the things I know, either it'll be dismissed as irrelevant because of its source, or I'll be vilified.

The inquisitor is impressed by her wisdom. She waits. He hands her some more money.

SAMANTHA (cont'd)

But you've come to me, so I'm prepared to tell you. Long as it doesn't come from me, I don't care who knows.

FLASHBACK:

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - NIGHT

Samantha walks the darkened hallway of the boarding house in her nightclothes. She hears VOICES in the kitchen.

Hiding in a doorway, she eavesdrops on Mary and Payne, talking quietly and uncomfortably in the dim lantern-light of the kitchen. He paces, she sits, barely looking at him through this exchange.

PAYNE

What about Anderson?

MARY

I can't go to him.

PAYNE

Why not? He must have the money.

MARY

I just can't.

PAYNE

Worried he would dismiss you if he knew?

Mary looks up and nods, grateful for the reasonable (though false) excuse he has provided her.

PAYNE (cont'd)

Well I give up. You'll understand if I'm less than enthusiastic in assisting you with this.

MARY

Not this again...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAYNE

I do have a say, you know.

MARY

And I'm considering it, Daniel, but the final say is mine. You must recognize that.

PAYNE

The final say is *ours*.

MARY

Why are you so against this? Have you thought how a child might affect us?

PAYNE

Of course. And it only appeals to me. Besides, to do what you want...

MARY

I don't relish it, believe me.

PAYNE

A necessary evil, then? I won't abide it. I can't stand the thought.

MARY

I'll have to go to Arthur then.

Payne knows she introduces this option partly to annoy him. He doesn't want to fall for it.

PAYNE

You really think he'll help you, considering?

MARY

He said I could always come to him, no matter what.

PAYNE

I doubt he imagined this situation.

She is silent. He gets up.

PAYNE (cont'd)

Just don't you do anything without telling me first, understand?

Mary ignores him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PAYNE (cont'd)
 (more threatening)
 Understand?

She looks up at him and nods, just barely. He exits, oblivious to Samantha's presence.

Samantha remains in the wings, peering forlornly at her friend. She wants to reach out to her, but is unsure how she'd feel about her having overheard.

So she tiptoes back to their room, leaving Mary Rogers alone with her impossible dilemma.

INT. 126 NASSAU STREET - DAY

Samantha and Mary are making the beds in a guest room.

MARY
 I don't know *what* to do. What's more,
 now Mother has forbidden me to see him.

SAMANTHA
 What?!

MARY
 You knew she can't stand him.

SAMANTHA
 But that's-- Does she know?

MARY
 Certainly not!

SAMANTHA
 What are you going to do?

MARY
 I told you, I don't know!

SAMANTHA
 I meant--

MARY
 I know what you meant.

SAMANTHA
 What did she say?

MARY
 I have a week to end it, then he's out.
 He's out either way, actually.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAMANTHA

What if-- ?

MARY

She'd be through with me.

Samantha can't believe it.

MARY (cont'd)

That's what she said.

SAMANTHA

You could still--

MARY

But at the risk...I don't know if I can face it. Besides--

SAMANTHA

--It's hard not to heed your mother.

MARY

Still, there comes a time--

Suddenly Mary drops the linens she holds and sits on the mattress, burying her face in her hands and starting to cry.

MARY (cont'd)

Oh, Samantha, I don't know what to do! The one thing, I can handle, but...

SAMANTHA

Can you live without her?

MARY

I can survive. I don't know if I can live.

SAMANTHA

And him? Do you love him?

MARY

Yes...Oh, I don't know! How is one to know?

SAMANTHA

I think you're just supposed to know.

MARY

I've thought I've known before, I mean...with others, but now...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SAMANTHA

Yes?

MARY

(resolute)

It's different.

(reconsidering)

But so were they all.

Samantha sits beside Mary and puts a consoling arm around her.

SAMANTHA

I worry about you sometimes.

Mary laughs a little through her tears.

MARY

Now you sound like her!

END FLASHBACK

INT. ANTHONY STREET & EAST BROADWAY - BEDROOM - DAY

Samantha is strong like Mary and doesn't let the intimate memory get to her.

POE

Samantha, when was this?

SAMANTHA

Maybe a week before...

POE

Do you know if she ever came to a decision?

SAMANTHA

No, sir, we never discussed it again.

POE

But she remained on good terms with Mr. Payne, as far as you could tell?

SAMANTHA

Nothing seemed to change between them. She told me she would ask him to meet her at the omnibus stop that last day.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - DAY

Poe walks dejectedly through the relentless drizzle.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CROMMELIN'S APARTMENT - DAY

The decorative effect of Crommelin's flat doesn't quite meet the comfort of Anderson's. Loud BANGING on the door.

Poe barges in when Crommelin answers the door. He starts opening closets and rattling locked doors, frantic.

POE

Where is she?

CROMMELIN

Excuse me?

POE

You've got her hiding somewhere here, haven't you?

CROMMELIN

Who?

POE

You know damn well who! I've seen her! Mary Rogers is alive and you're hiding her!

CROMMELIN

Mr. Poe, this is quite an accusation!

POE

You falsely identified a woman in Hoboken so you could squirrel Mary away somewhere! Until she bore her child...

CROMMELIN

Bore a child?

POE

...just like Phebe did with Mary's mother! Your search was a charade! Did you kill that woman yourself, or hire someone? Perhaps it was a fortunate coincidence?

He finally grabs Poe, who breaks down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROMMELIN

Mr. Poe, this is preposterous. To burst into my home, accuse me of murder and lying to authorities...

He places Poe, now in tears, into a chair.

CROMMELIN (cont'd)

My good man, I want to help you, but this condemnation...

POE

I know, I apologize. Oh, God, I don't know what to believe anymore.

CROMMELIN

It seems you are no closer to finding Mary's killer than you were the day we met.

POE

Who is she? I ask about her and only learn about the people I'm asking.

CROMMELIN

I believe I warned you about the complexity of Mary's nature.

POE

I believe you did.

CROMMELIN

What's this about bearing a child?

POE

Samantha told me; said Mary had a disagreement with Payne and wanted to terminate. He didn't.

(looks at him)

Did she ever come to you for money? Just before her death?

Crommelin's not sure if he's telling him this because he's so pathetic it couldn't possibly matter what he knows or thinks he knows, or because he thinks doing so will actually lead to solving the mystery.

CROMMELIN

As a matter of fact she did.

Pause.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

POE
(anxiously)
And?

CROMMELIN
A few days before she disappeared. I had offered the family assistance, I recall telling you.
(pause)
Quite a sum, too.

POE
She made no suggestion of being in danger?

CROMMELIN
Certainly not. If Mary Rogers was anything, it was fearless.

POE
Any mention of Payne?

CROMMELIN
Mary knew that to mention him in my presence wouldn't help her cause. Nonetheless, Mr. Poe, I believe you have your killer.

POE
And she wouldn't tell you what the money was for?

CROMMELIN
My offer of assistance to Mary and her mother had been unconditional, Mr. Poe, and I kept my word as a gentleman.

POE
Of course. Mr. Crommelin, I apologize for casting suspicion on you. But why didn't you volunteer this information at the investigation's outset?

CROMMELIN
It would only have invited accusations. And at the time I had considerably more confidence in the ability of the police than they have demonstrated themselves worthy of.

POE
And that was the last contact you had with Mary?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

CROMMELIN

Not quite.

He turns to a dresser and opens its top drawer, removing a book. From a page within he lifts a dried, pressed, rose.

CROMMELIN (cont'd)

The following day, when I returned home from work, I found this in the keyhole.

C-U on the rose held in his fingers. The image falls out of focus, and when we return to focus, we are...

INT. UPSCALE HOUSE - DAY

...and the single, dried rose is replaced by a full, living bouquet on a table before a mirror. RACK FOCUS to Poe's image in it. From behind him, a VOICE says his name.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. Poe?

It's MADAME RESTELLE, the woman who passed Poe and Claire on the stoop in her white horse-drawn carriage, descending a red-carpeted, curving stairway with an elegantly carved bannister. The house is obviously the province of the very rich.

Poe looks up to her. She is in late middle age, dressed in white lace, with a mother-of-pearl hair-clasp holding her graying-from-blond hair. Her face is taut, refined, WASPy.

RESTELLE

We can speak privately in the salon.

She leads him from the hallway through large double doors. A servant closes the doors behind them.

POE

I appreciate that.

RESTELLE

I'm sure you do. And in my business, it's of the utmost importance, as you also can appreciate.

POE

I can, though I'm not sure why. There are no laws against your procedure, after all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RESTELLE

The law is hazy at best on the issue.
Typical, really, if nonetheless ironic.

Poe doesn't catch her drift.

RESTELLE (cont'd)

The men who make the laws are the same who make the children they won't have. A gentleman might go to considerable expense to maintain a favorite courtesan in the condition in which he grew to favor her. Others have young mistresses, with whom the contract is not so explicit, but who are equally not their wives. Still others may even find a daughter in an unwelcome predicament. In any case, the procedure-- so long as it remains private-- they don't want threatened, even as what precedes it they publicly disdain.

Poe only nods grimly.

RESTELLE (cont'd)

Your Mary Rogers, she was one of mine.

Poe brightens.

RESTELLE (cont'd)

Several months ago. One of John Anderson's boys accompanied her. Of course, he couldn't risk being seen darkening my door.

POE

But you haven't seen her lately?

RESTELLE

Not lately, no. But I'm not the only person in New York providing this service. Only the best.

Pause.

RESTELLE (cont'd)

You know, Mr. Poe, not all the gentlemen are as helpful as they ones I describe. If it's a girl on the town, that's one thing. But some men get very upset when they learn what their dear girl has done.

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

Poe is reading Cook's autopsy report as he walks down the sidewalk, paying no attention to where he is going.

The words, "blood covers the inner thighs" catch his eye, then he literally bumps into Attree.

ATTREE

Poe, where are you going?

POE

Uh...

ATTREE

Well you ought to be headed for the Hoboken ferry. Payne's tried to kill himself.

EXT. HOBOKEN FIELD - DAY

Poe and Attree follow their noses from the ferry to a gathering of ONLOOKERS nearby, at river's edge.

POE'S IMAGINATION:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

In a plain, dirty bedroom, Mary lies in a state of distress on the lone cot. A WOMAN tends to her. Payne bursts through the door, irate. He pulls her from the bed and begins beating her, making the marks seen in the autopsy scene.

EXT. HOBOKEN FIELD - DAY

Attree shoves his way into the center. He becomes progressively more frantic through the scene. Poe lags in the fringes of the assembled.

ATTREE

Stand aside! Press!

Two middle-aged DOCTORS kneel beside Payne, who is in bad shape but still living.

ATTREE (cont'd)

(seeing this)

Has he said anything? Will he live?

DOCTOR #1

Stay back! He might yet.

ATTREE

What happened?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOC #2

My friend and I were out for a walk.
We're both doctors. We saw a man walking
along the shore, then fall suddenly, and
we came to his aid.

ATTREE

What happened to *him*?!

DOC #2

There was a note in his pocket.

ATTREE

What's it say? What's it say?

Doc #2 hands it to him. Payne gurgles.

ATTREE (cont'd)

(reading)

"To the world: Here I am on the spot.
God forgive me for my misfortune and my
misspent time." What the hell does that
mean?

DOCTOR #1

We found an empty vial of laudanum beside
him.

ATTREE

"On the spot." This must be where he did
it!

(to the assembled as he gets
up)

Search around! Search around!

They excitedly join him in scouring the ground and
surrounding brush for clues. Poe backs off, deterred by the
possibility of finding proof of the death of his hopes.

Frustrated, Attree returns to Payne, getting down on one knee
and barely able to contain himself from grabbing him by the
lapels and shaking it out of him.

ATTREE (cont'd)

(to Payne)

Did you kill Mary Rogers? Did you kill
Mary Rogers?

(to doctors)

Do something!

(to Payne)

Payne, dammit, if ever there was a time
for a confession!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

As Attree continues his cruel interrogation and Payne sputters to his death, SOMEONE emerges from a nearby thicket displaying some torn cloth in one hand and a bloody glove in the other.

FINDER

Here! Her glove!

The crowd rushes to him. Attree abandons Payne and forces his way to the man, grabbing the glove from him.

ATTREE

Unmistakable! I'm taking this to the authorities!

All but the two doctors loudly hurry away toward the ferry.

Poe walks in the other direction, thinking intently. He knows now that Mary is indeed dead, but is coming to a conclusion different from that of the chaotic crowd.

The details of his weeks-long investigation slowly start to flood his mind.

ATTREE (V.O.) (cont'd)

"Here I am on the spot."

One of the doctors has removed his coat and placed it over Payne.

POE

(to doctors)

Do you know if the girl was pulled from the river near here?

DOC #1

(pointing)

Right on that small spit.

Poe looks upriver and sees the site of the first scene, maybe 50 feet away.

He gives one last look in the direction of Payne's corpse: Some COPS have appeared. One tends to the corpse, one talks to the doctors.

He starts on the path the boy in the first scene followed. The recollections come faster now:

TOUGH #1 (V.O.)

"...a de-com-posed mess of pu-tre-fe-ca-tion. Her skin which had been so fair was now black."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

COOK (V.O.)

The most pronounced bruises I discerned
were on the neck.

TOUGH #1 (V.O.)

"...a de-com-posed mess..."

Images of Cook's written report flash through his mind as Poe
walks, now with a ferociousness of purpose.

The words from the report read: "The bruise beneath the right
earlobe considerably larger and darker than the left."

COOK (V.O.)

I don't know how, days later, he could
have seen something that I didn't.

More words from the report: "blood covers the inner thighs."

And: "extensive blackening of face".

He finally patches together the significance of each clue:

COOK (V.O.) (cont'd)

...days later...

TOUGH #1 (V.O.)

"...a de-com-posed mess..."

COOK (V.O.)

Of the violation I am quite certain.

RETELLE (V.O.)

I'm not the only person in New York
providing this service. Only the best.

CROMMELIN (V.O.)

If Mary Rogers was anything, it was
fearless.

ANDERSON (V.O.)

...she was capable of doing it again.

EXT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - DAY

Poe has arrived at his destination.

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - PUB - DAY

Poe enters the pub. His expression is of such determination,
the moment he makes eye contact with Frederika, seated at a
table, she can tell he knows.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She leans back with a resigned expression, like she knew this day would come. They are alone.

POE

You remember me.

FREDERIKA

Yes, I remember.

POE

Have you heard? The man by the shore?

FREDERIKA

The police, they came from here.

POE

You know who it was?

FREDERIKA

(nods)

It's been killing me, also. Slowly, I can feel it. This knowing. What I saw. What I did. What I did not do. What I could have done, and what I could not do.

POE

Why...

FREDERIKA

For Oskar, I suppose. My only son, you understand. And his judgment shall come, as shall mine. What does it matter-- . Shall I tell you? I've so wanted to tell someone--

Poe can reconstruct the events, but, as a noted imaginer of horror, now deeply involved in this real mystery, he badly wants at last to hear the story of the death of Mary Rogers.
FLASHBACK:

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - INN ROOM - NIGHT

It could be the same room in which Arthur Crommelin awoke in the opening sequence. Mary lies in the bed, her skirts hiked up and her legs spread. Her face is sweaty and she's distressed, but silent and courageous.

Frederika sits by the head of the bed soothing Mary, wiping her brow, etc., sympathetic. Frederika's looking a little nervous but trying not to let Mary see.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A DOCTOR-- young, small, aspirational, a little flustered-- sits awkwardly at the foot of the bed, his hands between Mary's legs and hidden by her skirts.

DOCTOR
There's, um...

FREDERIKA
What is it?

Mary lifts her head, trying to see.

MARY
What's wrong?

Frederika gently presses her head back down, positioning herself to prevent Mary from sitting up.

FREDERIKA
There, there dear. Everything's fine.

She gives the Doctor a demanding look.

DOCTOR
I need to speak with you outside.

FREDERIKA
Can we leave her?

He nods as he stands.

MARY
What? Where are you going? Don't leave me! What's wrong? Something's wrong!

Oskar, the creepy-looking son, suddenly enters.

OSKAR
What's taking you?

FREDERIKA
(to Mary)
Nothing's wrong, dear, we'll be right outside.

The three of them start to file out the door.

MARY
Don't go! What are you doing?

Frederika, last to leave, makes calming gestures to Mary as she exits, closing the door behind her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FREDERIKA

It's all right, dear, we'll be right
outside this door...

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - ADJACENT HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Frederika is a spectator to this conversation, holding her hand before her mouth, darting her eyes from one to the other, and growing increasingly distressed as she makes a dreadful inference from their debate.

DOCTOR

There's a problem. She's losing blood.

OSKAR

What kind of problem?

DOCTOR

There's no time to explain. The point is that she's losing blood, and requires more care than I can give her here.

OSKAR

What are you saying?

DOCTOR

I'm saying that she needs a hospital.

OSKAR

You can't take her to a hospital.

DOCTOR

If we don't, she could die of blood loss right in that room.

OSKAR

That can't happen either.

DOCTOR

Exactly. Which is why we must--

OSKAR

We'll be found out, and so will you! Is there nothing you can do?

DOCTOR

I'm telling you, she needs more care than I am capable of giving in this circumstance. We can-- It's not illegal--

-

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OSKAR

We will certainly be closed down if it's discovered that we-- . And your reputation, Doctor. Do you want this to be the only work you can do?

DOCTOR

What then, just allow her to die?

OSKAR

We'll never be able to conceal it.

DOCTOR

What do you propose, then?

The silence of the unspoken alternative engulfs them. Suddenly, there is a SCREAM from the room. The three burst through the door.

INT. NICK MOORE'S HOUSE - INN ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mary has reached down with one of her gloved hands and SHRIEKS at the blood-- a lot of it-- she sees on it. She's shaking the glove off her hand when they enter.

Oskar, first through the door, moves toward her. The now-removed bloody glove sticks to a piece of Mary's clothing.

Oskar sits on the bed, leaning over her to keep her upper body down. She thrashes about to resist his attempt at stifling her cries, SCRAPING her back and shoulder blades against the bed frame and surrounding walls. He tears some of her dress and gags her with it.

FLASH to the shots from the autopsy of the scrapes on her back.

Oskar attempts to wrap a thin piece of the torn-off white lace garment around her neck. He succeeds momentarily, causing a GASH in her throat. But she resists and it SNAPS.

FLASH to the scar on her throat shown in the autopsy.

The Doctor looks on uselessly. Mary begins to beat at him, while Oskar turns away, readying to try something else. Startled, angered, and disgusted, the Doctor fights back, causing WELTS on her face.

FLASH to the bruised face as seen in the autopsy.

Mary struggles wildly and valiantly. As she flails her legs about, we see the BLOOD on her thighs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

OSKAR
 (to Doctor)
 Hold her down!

The Doctor obeys, forcing down Mary's PELVIS as she kicks, and trying to sit on her legs.

FLASH to the scrapes and bruises on the corpse's pelvic bones.

Frederika can't believe what she's seeing. She keeps looking to the door, contemplating betrayal of her son.

But he is determinedly grasping at Mary's neck.

At last, the girl falls silent, Oskar's huge hand around her throat-- the THUMB behind Mary's right earlobe.

FLASH to the bruise on Mary's corpse's neck.

Frederika collapses against a wall. She begins muttering in German:

FREDERIKA
 Oh, dear Lord, forgive me. Forgive me,
 Lord, please forgive me...

EXT. HOBOKEN WOOD - NIGHT

Oskar and the Doctor carry the lifeless body through a dark wood, Oskar in front with the legs, the Doctor in back with the arms. Passing a bush, a piece of her clothing gets caught on a thorn and tears. Oskar drops the legs, unhooks the cloth from the bush, then picks her back up and continues on his grim way.

Reaching the river's edge, the only accompaniment is the sound of water lapping on the shore. They swing the corpse and toss it into the muddy, reedy river. The glove comes unstuck in the process; Oskar picks it up off the ground, looks around a moment (the Doctor meanwhile walking away, disgusted), and takes it with the torn clothing into the thicket.

Oskar emerges and lingers a moment until the corpse floats off.

END FLASHBACK

INT. BROADWAY JOURNAL - DAY

The other magazine employees huddle around Poe's desk, waiting for the new star and GOSSIPING. When he walks

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

through the door, they all look to him. He sees them and dread washes across his face. They are disconcerted by this.

Briggs, holding a manuscript, emerges from his office.

BRIGGS

What is this? Get back to work!

They obey. Briggs follows one of them to his desk.

Poe goes to his and aimlessly shuffles some papers.

The front door opens again. A MAGISTRATE enters, carrying a small satchel.

MAGISTRATE

Edgar Allan Poe?

Poe faces and acknowledges him. The magistrate comes over.

MAGISTRATE (cont'd)

Your reward for information leading to the arrest of suspects in the murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers.

Poe didn't expect this. The magistrate empties bundles of cash from the satchel onto his desk, and removes a piece of paper from his coat.

MAGISTRATE (cont'd)

Sign here.

Poe does as requested, though far from eagerly.

MAGISTRATE (cont'd)

Good day.

He exits. Poe looks at the cash like it's a pile of shit, repugnant at profiting from the horror he has uncovered.

The other employees look at him shiftily. When he notices, they turn with embarrassment back to their work.

EXT. POE'S FRONT STOOP - EVENING

Poe walks along the sidewalk with his head down. When he opens the gate to his stoop, he looks up and sees Claire sitting on the steps. She rises. He stops. She comes down the stairs and he bursts into tears. She puts her arms around him and embraces him, soothing him.

EXT. BROADWAY - DAY

MUSIC plays as the camera takes one last look around. The chimney-sweep, the clam-seller, the coal-delivery guy, etc. from the first Broadway scene do their things. HOOKERS talk to JOHNS. BOYS fight. NEIGHBORS quarrel. New York City, for all its machinations and various outcries of indignation, absorbs and ignores all, carrying on its business of business, oblivious.

INT. BENNETT'S OFFICE - DAY

Even the blustery Bennett has moved on to the next scandal, his grandiose BRAYING (under the MUSIC) endured again by Attree and some staffers.

INT. CIGAR STORE - DAY

And Thomas, Jessup and Ralph, our chorus, debate a new topic. What it is doesn't matter; if it's not one thing, it's another, and the chain of gossip will go unbroken from that day until this.

Turning away from the mocking Thomas, Jessup opens his hardbound volume of "The Mystery of Marie Roget" by Edgar Allan Poe.
MUSIC DOWN.

INT. POE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

SILENCE. Camera looks around to find Poe sitting at his desk before the blank sheet of paper. He taps his quill on the paper. The items in the room, his clothes, his actions-- all are identical here to their depictions in the very first scene. Was that scene-- this scene-- the beginning of our story, or the end?