2004

Poe people

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Recommended Citation

Sams, Edwin Boyer, "Poe people" (2004). *Master's Theses*. 2590.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.k7hs-jj94>
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POE PEOPLE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

by

Edwin Boyer Sams

May 2004

UMI Number: 1420472

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ABSTRACT

POE PEOPLE

by Edwin Boyer Sams

The screenplay *Poe People* is a blend of romantic, marital, and screwball comedies. In it Cece Clowder travels with her fiancé Perry Allen back to Poor Valley, Tennessee, to attend his Granny Eliza's funeral. There they learn that Perry has been designated posthumously by Granny Eliza as new head of the Allen clan. The Allens of Starry Mountain are a family who believe themselves cursed ever since Edgar Allan Poe jilted their ancestress Eulalie Allen back in 1829. Inside the River House, the Allen homeplace that Granny Eliza kept shut for fifty years, Perry hopes to find the original manuscript of "Eulalie," the poem that according to family legend Poe wrote to their ancestress. Only after a series of adventures in cracking safes, foiling thieves, finding lost dogs, and arranging marriages, do Perry and Cece find the missing manuscript and discover what it means to be Poe People.

Preface to *Poe People*

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is an American writer of international importance. Avidly read on two continents in his own lifetime, Poe died violently at age forty, only to be rediscovered by French Symbolists a generation after his death. In the twentieth century he was reinterpreted by Freudian critics and exploited by Hollywood through a series of splashy Roger Corman horror films. In fine, hacks have been making a living off Edgar Allan Poe for over one hundred fifty years, so I decided to get on the gravy train myself.

Though doomed in life to utter poverty, Edgar Allan Poe is in death still very bankable. Joel and Ethan Cohen's film *The Lady Killers* (2004) uses Poe's poem "To Helen" in recitation throughout the film. Likewise, *Poe People* incorporates the titles, verse, and allusions of Poe's many masterpieces to charm an audience with what Poe himself might term "the delight of recognition" (*Edgar Allan Poe*, 136). Any audience member with a high school education will be able to recognize and appreciate these references and therefore join in the fun in identifying with that

proud but unfortunate Southern family who feel themselves cursed by Edgar Allan Poe.

This screenplay is based upon a legend from Poe Valley, Pennsylvania. According to local lore, Edgar Allan Poe searching for a legacy entered the valley bearing his name and stayed long enough to court two sisters. For one he wrote a mediocre poem, "Eulalie." The other sister was so outraged by his betrayal that she stole the manuscript and died with it gripped in her hand. As evidence of the story, a cave in the area was reputed to contain the carved names of Poe and Eulalie.

There are many aspects of this story that celebrate the Poe legend: his ill-fated struggle against poverty, his disastrous courtship of unsuitable women, his motif of a beautiful woman dying young along with the vague suggestion of incest, and the Gothic trappings of a secret cave thrown in for good measure. Furthermore, the place is significant. Eastern Pennsylvania is part of the Appalachian Mountain range. Having attended the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, Poe considered himself Appalachian as well. Among his "Marginalia" is found "The Adoption of a Name for Our Country" in which he recommends naming our nation Appalachia instead of America. His suggestion has

never received the attention it deserves despite his giving several excellent reasons:

"Appalachia" is indigenous, springing from one of the most magnificent and distinctive features of the country itself [. . .]. in employing this word we do honor to the Aborigines, whom we have at all points unmercifully despoiled, assassinated, and dishonored [. . .] . the last, and by far the most truly important consideration of all, however, is the music of "Appalachia" itself; nothing could be more sonorous, more liquid, or of fuller volume, while its length is just sufficient for dignity. (*The Unknown Poe* 47)

Like Poe I too consider myself an Appalachian, though from Tennessee (not Virginia or Pennsylvania), and I grew up among people who revered the writings of Poe above all other American writers. Edgar Allan Poe may be no more than a necessary footnote in college survey courses of American literature, yet he remains enduringly popular among the mainstream of American citizens. Therefore, I consider his story worth telling, or rather his legend worth retelling, albeit through the prism of my own recollections of

Poedolatry in the Smokies. The legend of Eulalie seems fresh and dramatic enough to sustain an original creative work, and the screenplay seems the appropriate medium to present this new perspective on America's greatest author Edgar Allan Poe.

Poe People concerns the events of the week following the death of Granny Eliza Allen, head of the Allen family of Starry Mountain in Poor Valley, Tennessee. Perry Allen and his fiancée Cece Clowder arrive for the funeral only to learn that Perry has been designated new head of the Allen clan. Also he receives the key to the River House, ancestral home of the Allens that Granny Eliza had kept shut for fifty years. The extended Allen family headed by Perry with Cece in tow enters the River House to search for the signature, their name for the legendary poem to Eulalie Allen written by Edgar Allan Poe himself. This document would be concrete proof that Poe's poem "Eulalie" was written in honor of their ancestress, thus justifying the family's airs of importance for the past one hundred eighty years. Unfortunately, all they find in the house are bills and debts. While Perry deals with family issues of feuds, thefts, and broken engagements, Cece finds the means to square debts and settle scores thereby allowing them to

return to California. In the course of their efforts, they both learn the real story behind Poe's courtship of Eulalie and discover what it means to be Poe People.

The basic plot of *Poe People* could work very well as a thriller with only a minor change in tone. After all, the outsider bride's experience in the decrepit ancestral home is the stuff of Gothic novels like *Rebecca*. However, I wished to pay honor to Poe in a positive way, and so I wrote a comedy. Film comedies that have couples for their protagonists generally fall into one of three established categories: romantic comedy, screwball comedy, and marital comedy. I believe *Poe People* to have elements of all three.

Of these three, the romantic comedy is the most natural and therefore the most difficult to write. In this comic format the couple meets early but do not fall in love at first sight. Indeed they may initially dislike each other, or else be too busy with separate concerns to stop the business of living in order to fall in love. Only gradually as events and mutual acquaintances thrust them together do the boy and girl realize their feelings for each other. Unlike the recently invented screwball comedy, this is a very old form going back easily to the plays of Shakespeare, particularly *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About*

Nothing. In *Much Ado About Nothing* both Benedict and Beatrice admit a mutual antipathy for each other right up until the moment they declare their love, and in *As You Like It* Rosalind and Orlando gradually fall in love while sorting out their own family problems. Later the novels of Miss Jane Austen provide a dependable framework for countless screenplays on the *Pride and Prejudice* model of the slow, improbable courtship of two opposite types.

The romantic comedy has been a staple in films since the 1930s when the movies discovered sound. Silent comedies relied too much on the character of the clown to drive the action. Though little tramp Charlie Chaplin may have wooed farmer's daughter Edna Purviance through variations of this same romantic motif, the lack of sound did not allow declarations of feelings or development of character beyond mime or the few words that placards could hold. Once talkies replaced silents the romantic comedy was born with fine examples of the genre appearing in every decade since: George Stevens' *Alice Adams* (1935), George Cuckor's *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952), Neil Simon's *The Cactus Flower* (1969), Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977), Rob Reiner's *When Harry Met*

Sally (1989), and Mike Newell's *Four Weddings and Funeral* (1994).

Poe People is not a romantic comedy. Perry and Cece have already met and fallen in love before the story begins. The slow, tentative development of their romantic relationship has already taken place, and now they are ready to announce their engagement when a death in the family hijacks their plans for an engagement party. Furthermore, their love for each other is not necessarily an initiation into adulthood, which is the usual scheme in romantic comedies. For instance, in Frank Capra's scheme, according to film historian Elizabeth Kendall, "romance forced a person to grow up. In [George] Stevens's, that growing up needed to happen first, before a romance could occur" (84). Here Perry and Cece are already grown-ups. They function as parent surrogates helping the grown children of the Allen family cope with the death of a matriarch who had controlled all their lives.

Nevertheless, *Poe People* possesses a degree of the lyricism associated with romantic comedies. This is due to its setting. In most romantic comedies the third character in the romance is the setting. The small town ambiance of *Alice Adams*, the Main Line grandeur of *The Philadelphia*

Story, the Irish landscape in *The Quiet Man* each provide its own forest of Arden where love can take root. Therefore, the setting of East Tennessee in early spring—"Blackberry Winter" as Perry says—allows for a sudden snowfall as well as the first bloom of rhododendron, thereby centering Perry and Cece's love squarely in the natural world. Likewise, the lovers find themselves squarely surrounded by a tight-knit community of well-wishers who cannot help but get in their way. These characters also demonstrate the natural rhythms of life, including Granny Eliza's death and Brenda's pregnancy. This setting for romantic comedy necessarily underscores natural love maturing organically between two like-minded individual within a well-defined community. This natural approach toward love in romantic comedies is lyrical rather than dynamic.

A dynamic approach to love is the "love at first sight" dictum of screwball comedies where lovers generally "meet cute." The screwball is the newest of the three comedies mentioned. Born of necessity during the Depression, the screwball genre is strictly an American invention, and as such appeals more directly to patriotic feelings than the romantic or marital comedy. Frank Capra's

It Happened One Night is generally considered the first screwball comedy. Here runaway bride Claudette Colbert meets reporter on the sly Clark Gable and both set out to travel an unfamiliar landscape less certain for romance than any forest of Arden. Screwball couples lack the support of family and friends usually found in romantic comedies. However, what screwball couples lack by way of security, they make up by way of dynamism. Thrown upon each other by outside circumstances, they must cling to each other initially to achieve their individual goals, then later cling to each other upon discovering their happiness incomplete apart.

Capra's own reformer's streak shows itself in *It Happened One Night* which establishes these basic ingredients of "muted echo of warfare between rich and poor [...] cross-class learning experiences" [...]. "last minute renunciations of snobbery" (Kendall 142). This class struggle continued through the great screwball classics of the 1930s. For instance, the term "screwball" was coined by a reviewer to describe the effect of La Cava's *My Man Godfrey* (1936) (Byrne & Miller 8), which developed a romance between a debutante and a homeless man. Preston Sturges's *The Lady Eve* (1941) is another "opposites

attract" screwball classic between a playboy and a card shark. The popularity of the screwball continued straight through the Depression into the 1940s, but with the advent of World War II, studios discontinued the screwball franchise. Greta Garbo's flop *Two-Faced Woman* (1942) caused MGM to get out of the screwball business (11). Moreover, the screwball's basic appeal of "subversive charm and absurdist authority" (1) did not reassure audiences during the war years the way it had during the Depression.

Poe People also is not a screwball comedy. The lovers do not meet cute. They already know and love each other. The crackling dialog for rapid fire delivery is also missing. Here the emphasis is not on wit, but on humor. The words and deeds of the characters reveal their humors—Cousin Etta, splenetic; Edie, neuralgic; Cece, combative; Perry, sanguine—and humor, therefore, shows their characters. The lovers take no bonding road trip across an American landscape; in fact, they mostly work apart through much of the film. It is this necessary separation of tasks that creates a temporary emotional separation. This in turn serves as the dramatic crisis that precipitates the story's climax. In this respect, *Poe People* resembles the marital comedy.

If the dramatic development of the romantic comedy is lyrical, and the development of the screwball comedy is dynamic, then the development of the marital comedy can best be described as narrative. Marital comedies begin in the middle of things: The established relationship between the two protagonists. Therefore, more exposition is needed to inform the audience in a marital comedy than in either of the other two. The marital comedy is by far the oldest of the three forms with roots going back to Attic drama, particularly the plays of Aristophanes. For instance, *Lysistrata* represents a marital comedy in the scene between Cinesias and his wife Myrrhina where the battleground for this battle of sexes is the marriage bed. Leo McCary's *The Awful Truth* (1937), Ernest Lubitsch's *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), and Preston Sturges' *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948) are classic examples in film of this type of comedy.

The concerns of the marital comedy tend to be two-fold, either adultery or neglect. Traditionally, for the comedy to work, the woman must be suspected of adultery and the man must be guilty of neglect. The third character is always the person creating the romantic triangle. In the 30s he was usually Ralph Bellamy. Howard Hawks's *His Girl Friday* (1940) is often called screwball, primarily due to

the rapid-fire dialog, yet its premise and plot structure reveal many concerns of the marital comedy. At the beginning of the film, Hildy Johnson (Rosalind Russell) has already divorced Walter Burns (Cary Grant) because of his neglect. He spends the entire movie attempting to break up her intended marriage. The claustrophobic setting of the film is the newsroom, their home. The rest of the cast characters are other newsmen who act as an extended family for the lovers. The point of the film is the lovers' reconciliation, which turns out to be practical rather than romantic. Their work ultimately becomes the bond that keeps them together.

In these two preoccupations—adultery and neglect—*Poe People* does not resemble a marital comedy. Perry does not neglect Cece. Even though he spends three nights apart from her, he does so in order to keep his promise to expedite their departure from Poor Valley. Furthermore, Cece's devotion to Perry never wavers. Even after their argument that ends the engagement, she remains more sad than mad. Also, there is no likely candidate in Poor Valley to rival Perry in her affections. The point of the story is not the lovers' reconciliation; instead, their spat on Starry Mountain is merely the last test to prove their love.

Nevertheless, *Poe People* does resemble marital comedies in its narrative exposition. Though little is revealed about Perry and Cece's lives in California, the legend of Poe and Eulalie is repeated three times throughout the story, with each retelling adding more information until the full story becomes known. This direct dissemination of back story is consistent with marital comedy development, for audiences expect to be told directly, as though hearing gossip. In *His Girl Friday*, there is very little exposition about Walter and Hildy's past marriage, except for brief, somewhat nasty asides, but much exposition is given to clarify Bruce Baldwin (Ralph Bellamy) and Hildy's romance, just as there is a lot of discussion about secondary characters, Earl Williams and Molly Molloy. This wronged man on the gallows redeemed by the love of a devoted woman serves as the subtext for Walter and Hildy's own botched marriage just as Poe's and Eulalie's romance blighted by family members underscores Cece's own concerns that she might lose Perry to the Allen clan. Cece is the character with whom the audience is meant to identify, and her love of Perry's cooking, her concern for the engagement party, and her final acceptance of the *Poe People* demonstrate her great need for family.

The importance of family is the major theme in a subset of marital comedies in film, often called domestic comedies. These movie comedies are of recent origin, becoming popular only after War World II when there was a national concern about changing family dynamics. Elizabeth Kendall writes, "Soon, after the war, would come the domestic comedies, in which the tensions of middle-class marriage would be both ignored and celebrated, in which the arena of the city would give way to the arena of the household, in which husband and wife alike would act restless and numb as a matter of course" (260). After 1945, there was a generational shift away from the extended family to the nuclear family when young couples left cities for the suburbs. Here the emphasis was not on the couple but on the family, and romantic love was demonstrated primarily by the number of children the couple produced. *Sitting Pretty* (1948), *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948), *Father of the Bride* (1950), *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* (1960) are all examples of this film phenomenon. Also, Melville Shavelson's *Houseboat* (1958) illustrates the concerns of the domestic comedy. Here a damaged family seeks sanctuary in a new home on a houseboat away from the city, and with this bucolic setting comes a new love

interest for the father. Tellingly the love affair between Tom Winters (Cary Grant) and Cinzia Zaccardi (Sophia Loren) is necessary not for their sakes alone, but also to provide the means of restoring a father's love to his estranged family. In this emphasis upon healing a family at risk, *Poe People* resembles a domestic comedy. Death is a natural disruption in families that only weddings and babies tend to heal. Moreover, Cece's own happiness is at stake with this one sure chance for a family of her own which she also rejects before the end of the story.

However, *Poe People* does not share the misogynistic subtext in most domestic comedies. Perhaps intended to reinforce gender stereotypes disrupted during the War, these comedies of the late forties through the early sixties showed families where power was not shared equally. "Father Knows Best" sums up the philosophy in these films, even though fathers (whether Cary Grant as Mr. Blandings or David Niven as Walter Kerr) were clueless of home maintenance or child rearing. Though *Poe People* uses the device of repairing a house as a metaphor for restoring the home, power is shared much more equally than in Mr. Blandings' Dreamhouse. Despite Cece's status as an

outsider, she is warmly welcomed as family by the Allen clan just as she is respected as an equal partner by Perry.

In this regard, *Poe People* more resembles the screwball comedy than either the romantic or marital comedy genre. According to Arthur Knight in *The Screwball Comedy Films*, "More than any films before (or even since), [screwball comedies] depicted an equality between the sexes, the give-and-take of equals, a sense of camaraderie that quite transcended the conventions of boy-meets-girl" (Byrne & Miller ix). *It Happened One Night* set this tone of equality in screwball comedies that lasted in public consciousness long after the era of screwball ended. Consider the characters of Peter Warne and Ellie Andrews. Elizabeth Kendall writes: "They're a curious couple—he keeping house, she appreciating it like a lost kid. Capra has mixed up their class and gender traits to make a new model of the American couple. The man isn't always supermanly; the woman isn't always ultra female" (45). Likewise, Perry and Cece are a mismatched couple that oddly complement each other. Perry is perfectly at ease as either head of the family or as Cece's househusband, while Cece is as busy multi-tasking in the Smoky Mountains as she is in California. That is why they need each other; Cece makes

Perry grow up, and Perry gets Cece to settle down. This "opposites attract" premise is a familiar one in screwball comedies which often showcased "the timid male versus the domineering female" (Byrne & Miller 123). Byrne and Miller also point out another variation of the screwball couple, typified by *The Thin Man* series: "Screwball couples whose relationship was not threatened throughout the narrative might instead be on a mission of some sort, perhaps to solve a mystery, and their 'odd-even' pairing actually strengthened them in conquering the improbable and complicating obstacles they eagerly encountered" (3). In this regard Perry and Cece's search for buried treasure in the form of Poe's manuscript resembles more a screwball comedy than a marital comedy of the 1950s with "couples who were relatively young as they faced the rewards and tribulations of married life" (Sennett 180).

By the 1950s the studio system that served Hollywood so well for so long began to dissolve. With studios no longer able to keep their special brands on film projects, film genres began to break down as well. Later comedies reminiscent of the screwball like Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* (1959) or Peter Bogdanovitch's *What's Up, Doc* (1972) were more homages than the actual articles. The advent of

the woman's movement made domestic comedies passé. Although romantic and marital comedies still appear to be timeless, the old distinctions no longer apply in force. *Poe People* is a mélange of these styles.

Besides my interest in Edgar Allan Poe and my love of comedies from Hollywood's Golden Age, my family background is also inspiration for *Poe People*. I was born and raised in the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee where people still speak according to the King James Version of the Bible. The American South has a deep regard for the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, which my own family shared. My Uncle John A. Jones, the family poet laureate, once wrote: "Edgar A. Poe was not of our class,/ He let the psychic moment pass." My father often recited "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee" to whomever would listen. When my Uncle Clarence Sams died, I found among his effects an anthology of Poe belonging to my grandmother.

I found this book in the actual River House, the one on which the Allen home place was based. After my uncle's burial, my cousin Jetta, sister Sydney, and I entered the family home which my uncle had locked away for over fifty years. The cat skeleton in the front parlor, the false teeth on the floor, the gilt clock in the jam cupboard are

all actual items that I used as details in *Poe People*. (The trapdoor, soaring staircase, and cantilevered chandelier are inventions). Thieves did break in on the third night after my uncle's funeral and stole the family silver along with several pieces of furniture. They were never apprehended. Though it is unlikely that they were Sorry, Vice, and Rotten as in *Poe People*, these are the names of three notorious local outlaw brothers in Cocke County, Tennessee. Finally the character of Cece is undoubtedly based on my wife Sally. Though never as combative as the heroine in my screenplay, she has frequently been thrust unexpectedly in the middle of many a family feud and fracas, and she has always provided a fresh perspective along with rock solid support. It is to Sally that *Poe People* and, indeed, all my work is dedicated.

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FADE IN:

INT: PUBLIC LIBRARY-DAY

PERRY ALLEN, 29, reads to a group of bored school children.

PERRY

"The deep and dank tarn at my feet
closed sullenly and silently over
the fragments of the "House of Usher."

A black telephone on the check-out desk rings.

INT: OFFICE-DAY

CECE CLOWDER, 29, sits at her desk on the phone.

CECE CLOWDER

Yes, fifty guests have RSVPed already
and I expect fifty more by next week.
Well, of course, I want everything
perfect. It's the first time I have
ever announced my engagement to be married
. . . oh, and, of course, I expect it
to be my last. Hold on a moment, Maxine,
I have call. Hello?

INT: PUBLIC LIBRARY--DAY

PERRY

Cece! I just got off the phone with my
sister.

CECE

Edwina! She RSVPed? I thought you said
she never left the farm.

PERRY

Cece. Brace yourself for a shock.

CECE

Perry, what is it?

PERRY

Granny Eliza died!

CREDITS

EXT: WHITE CONVERTIBLE ON FREEWAY-DAY

PERRY (OS)

I know this is a busy time for you,
especially with the party arrangements
and all.

CECE (OS)

I emailed Maxine a detailed memo last
night. Besides someone had to drive
you to the airport anyway.

PERRY (OS)

I have every intention of learning
how to drive.

CECE (OS)

We can practice on our honeymoon on Maui.

EXT: JET AIRLINER TAKING OFF-DAY

PERRY (OS)

I know we planned the wedding at the
end of summer, but with Granny Eliza's
death, the family may want us to put
off the celebration for a year.

CECE (OS)

A year!

PERRY (OS)

I don't think they would want to travel
during a year of mourning.

CECE (OS)

Then let them wait a year and they can
all be at our first anniversary party!

EXT: A SMALL AIRPLANE TAXIING OFF A GRASSY RUNWAY-DAY

CECE (OS)
So what's your family really like?
You never said.

PERRY (OS)
I told you how my brother and sister
and I were raised by my great great
grandmother after our parents died.

CECE (OS)
Right! Your great great grandmother,
was she on your mother's side or your
father's?

PERRY (OS)
Both.

EXT: AIRPLANE ZOOMS OFF INTO THE AIR--DAY

PERRY (OS)
My parents were second-cousins once
removed. Kissin' cousins as we say
in the hills. Oh, look! There they
are. The Great Smoky Mountains.

EXT: AERIAL VIEW OF CLINGMAN'S DOME--DAY

CECE (OS)
What will your family think of me, not
being a blood relation and all?

PERRY (OS)
Well, my brother was heard to say,
"Eddie's gone a long way off just
to get hitched."

CECE (OS)
Eddie, who's Eddie?

PERRY (OS)
It's a nickname. At home I'm Eddie,
and my sister Edwina is Edie, and my brother
Ernest is Eenie. He should be waiting for

PERRY (CONT'D)
us at the airport.

EXT: AIRPORT-DAY

CECE
So, where is he?

PERRY
Eenie doesn't own a watch. I'm not
sure he can tell time, but he's the
only one in the immediate family
who drives.

Sound of a Rebel Yell (OS)

PERRY
Except for Cousin Etta.

A 54 Chevy Pick-up truck speeds up to the front of the tiny
airport and comes to a sudden stop. Cousin Etta, 55, hops
out and embraces both in one encompassing hug.

ETTA
My, my. If you both aren't a sight
for sore eyes!

PERRY
Cousin Etta, I'm glad to see you.
I want you to meet my fiancée.

ETTA
So this is Sissy.

CECE
It's Cece actually.

ETTA
(to Perry)
Granny Eliza would be so proud.
(to Cece)
As I'm proud to make your acquaintance
and welcome you to the family.

CECE

Why, thank you.

PERRY

Cousin Etta, do you know where Eenie is? He's supposed to meet us at the airport.

ETTA

That's why I'm here. Eenie couldn't get the Essex to turn over this morning, so Edie called me from the funeral home. I'm here to take both you lambs home.

EXT: TRUCK HEADING DOWN THE TURNPIKE--DAY

CECE (OS)

How far away is home from here, Cousin Etta?

ETTA (OS)

Poor Valley is twenty miles off as the raven flies, but we'll stop in Slabtown first. Be there in no time. Just sit back and enjoy the scenery.

INTERIOR: TRUCK--DAY

PERRY

We're meeting Edie at the funeral home?

ETTA

Yes, tonight's the receiving of friends. I expect everybody in the county to be there. All the Perrys and the Allens, not to mention the ragtag and bobtail.

CECE

The who?

PERRY

The desirables and the undesirables.
Tonight, you'll meet them all.

ETTA

That Old Man Teagarden better not
be there.

PERRY

Are you still fighting that old feud?

ETTA

With my last breath. If that old coot
shows up tonight, mark my words, Sissy,
there'll be words said.

CECE

That's Cece!

EXT: SLABTOWN MORTUARY--EVENING

Etta, Perry, and Cece leave the truck as EDIE, 28, rushes
down from the front porch.

EDIE

Oh, Eddie, you're here. You're
here at last!

PERRY

Edie, I want you to meet. . .

EDIE

(gushing)

Of course, Sissy! A sister!
I have a sister at last!

PERRY

Her name is Cece.

EDIE

(kindly)

I know.

ETTA

These two are both plumb wore out.

EDIE

No doubt! Travel can be so
annihilating.

Edie takes Perry and Cece by the arm guiding them into the
funeral home.

INT: SLABTOWN MORTUARY-NIGHT

They enter an old Victorian home now converted into a
business.

EDIE

There are rooms upstairs where we can
rest before the receiving of friends,
but first I thought we should have
a private viewing of the body.

PERRY

Where's Eenie?

EDIE

He came and left, but he
will be back this evening.

ETTA

He got the Essex running?

EDIE

Not yet. The funeral home lent
him the hearse.

INT: ROOM FILLED WITH FLOWERS--NIGHT

EDIE

Here we are.

Perry, Cece, Edie, and Etta slowly approach the open
casket.

PERRY

You said on the phone that
Granny Eliza went in her sleep.

EDIE

It was a blessedly peaceful passing.

PERRY

(quoting)

"The fever called living is over at last."

CECE

What's that?

ETTA

It's Mr. Poe, dear. We think a lot of him here.

CECE

Oh, right, Edgar Allen Poe, the writer.

EDIE

Yes, that verse came from one of Granny Eliza's favorite poems of his, "For Anne."

ETTA

Or in this case, "For Grannie."

PERRY

Edgar Allan Poe is the reason I studied to become a librarian.

EDIE

Why, of course, you would be interested in Poe. After all, you're named Edgar.

CECE

Edgar! Is that what the E. in your name stands for?

EDIE

Edgar Perry Allen. That's why we were all so proud he chose a wife with the same name as Mr. Poe's darling Sissy.

CECE

My name is Cece.

EDIE

I'm sure that's what I said. What are you, French?

ETTA

Stay by me, Eddie. I can't rush up there just yet. It seems like yesterday she and I shared boiled custard at the Perry Christmas party.

EDIE

It was in the bleak December when Granny Eliza broke her hip.

PERRY

Did she have any last words?

ETTA

Not so as we know. You can ask Mamie. Granny Eliza died in her arms.

CECE

Who's Mamie?

PERRY

Granny Eliza took care of all of us, and Mamie took care of her.

EDIE

Mamie came and went like Eenie. She is staying at the Log Fort, I do believe.

PERRY

What about the River House?

ETTA

Locked up like a drum as always.

PERRY

And the signature?

EDIE

Entombed no doubt as it has been these past fifty years.

CECE

Look, let's get this over with.

ETTA

She's right. Soon it is time for
the receiving of friends.

EDIE

Hold my hand, Eddie.

Edie, Perry, Cece, & Etta step up to the dais and peer into
the coffin where lies an old lady laid out in lavender, a
sealed envelope placed in her hand.

CECE

What's that?

EDIE

How did that get there?

PERRY

Could it be the signature?

ETTA

Eulalie!

INT: SAME ROOM BUT NOW FILLED WITH PEOPLE—Night
Etta, Cece, Perry, & Edie in a receiving line greet
friends. Etta speaks to Uncle EMMETT, 60.

ETTA

It was just like Eulalie.

EMMETT

What was in the letter?

ETTA

I don't know. It had Eddie's name
on it, so he put it in his pocket, and
we all went upstairs.

EMMETT

Has he opened it?

ETTA

I don't think so.

EDIE

Uncle Emmett, I want you to meet
CEE CEE. Eddie's intended. Cece, dear,
this is Uncle Emmett.

PERRY

Uncle Emmett is the lawyer in the family.

EMMETT

Well, now I reckon I practice law the
same way I farm, both from my front porch.

CECE

Pleased to meet you, Uncle Emmett.

ERDENE, obese 34, with GIRL ELLISON, 10, and EMMALOU,
obese 32, with BOY ELLISON, 10, approach.

ETTA

And this here is Cousin Erdene and
her little girl Ellison.

CECE

How do you do?

EDIE

And this is Cousin Emmalou with
her little boy Ellison.

PERRY

(whispering)

Emmalou and Erdene are sisters.

EDIE

(whispering)

They hate each other.

GIRL ELLISON

This here's Boy Ellison, and I'm
called Girl Ellison.

CECE

You are?

EENIE, 27, approaches with BRENDA BRADSHAW, 26, pregnant.

PERRY

At last! Eenie!

Brothers embrace.

EENIE

Sorry I missed your train.

PERRY

It was a plane, but no matter.
Hello, Brenda.

BRENDA

Welcome home, Perry.

CECE

You call him Perry?

BRENDA

Why sure. We went to high school
together. Don't worry, I'm not family.

PERRY

Cece, meet Brenda Bradshaw.

BRENDA

I'm Eenie's girl friend.

PERRY

You are the only smart decision
my brother has ever made.

BRENDA

And Eenie's my only dumb one.

EENIE

Let's keep it that a way.

ETTA

Who's that coming in with Earl Peabody?

EDIE

Now, Etta, remember where you are.

EARL PEABODY, 28, enters with JUDGE TEAGARDEN, 57, following him.

EARL

Good evening, everybody. Good to see you home, Perry. Sorry under such circumstances.

ETTA

Earl Peabody, butter may melt in your mouth, but you still will be known by the company you keep!

EARL

Now, Miss Allen, you've no call to speak that way about the judge.

TEAGARDEN

I've come to pay my respects as I ought. You can't stop a man from doing what's right.

ETTA

I can stop an old rascal from coming to gloat! I know what you think of the Perrys and the Allens, giving themselves airs! I heard you say it.

TEAGARDEN

Years ago! Perry, you and Edie weren't even out of diapers. And you quote me out of context, woman.

ETTA

It's common knowledge what you said, just like it's common knowledge what you are.

TEAGARDEN

And what's that?

ETTA

Common!

BRENDA

Etta!

PERRY

Earl, Judge Teadgarden, this my fiancée, Cece Clowder.

TEAGARDEN

Pleased to meet you, Miss Clowder.
Are you two back to stay?

CECE

Oh, no! This is just a short visit.
Monday starts the work week.

EDIE

But you can't leave so soon. There's
so much to do. I had hoped we could
all go spelunking.

ETTA

That's right, Teagarden. Back to
your cave.

EENIE

Come with me, Judge. Let's go see
what a nice job the folks did here for
granny.

EARL

I got the patrol car washed over at
Bradshaw's, so I can lead the cortege
tomorrow.

PERRY

Granny Eliza would like that on her last
trip through Poor Valley.

EXT: FUNERAL CORTEGE--DAY

Earl Peabody's patrol car leads the way with Perry, Cece, and Eenie next in the hearse, followed by a line of black sedans all with their lights on. Cousin Etta's Chevy pickup pulls up the rear.

The patrol car turns in at a private road onto the Allen family farm. At the bend they come to the log fort. The flag on the flagpole suddenly lowers to half mast.

INT: HEARSE--DAY

PERRY

That's Mamie.

CECE

Where?

EDIE

She won't show herself. She said her good-byes.

EXT: RIVER HOUSE--DAY

EDIE

We walk to the family plot from here.

Mourners fall in behind the heirs Perry, Edie, and Eenie.

PERRY

Good Morning, Girl Ellison, you come to tell Granny good-bye.

GIRL ELLISON

Nosir, I come to ring the dinner bell eighty-one times, once for every year of her life.

CECE

Where's Boy Ellison?

GIRL ELLISON

Waiting at the crossroads to tell us when the preacher's coming.

EMMETT

I had forgotten what a steep climb
it is up this hill to the family plot.

ETTA

Considering your age, Uncle Emmett,
it's hardly worth your while climbing
down again.

EXT: FAMILY PLOT: DAY

The mourners pass two graves with headstones that read
"Eugenia" and "Eulalie."

CECE

Eulalie!

EENIE

And her sister Eugenia.

EDIE

Folks still argue over which sister
was the more beautiful.

PERRY

(pausing by double headstone)

My parents. They died together in
a car wreck.

EDIE

In that most immemorial year.

EENIE

She means the bicentennial.

The mourners lapse into silence until Boy Ellison comes
running up the hill.

BOY ELLISON

Preacher's coming, Preacher's coming!
(points overhead.) Looky there!

A large black bird circles the family plot.

PERRY

A raven!

ETTA

Mr. Poe's bird.

The dinner bell begins to toll eighty one times.

EMMETT

Hear the bells.

BOY ELLISON

(reciting)

Silver bells!

What a world of merriment their melody foretells!

How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,

In the icy air of night!

While the stars that oversprinkle

All the heavens seem to twinkle

With a crystalline delight;

To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells,

From the bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells,--

From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

As Cece looks askance, Edie embraces her and Perry.

EDIE

Golden bells!

What a world of happiness their harmony
foretells!

Through the balmy air of night

To the swinging and the ringing

Of the bells, bells, bells,

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells--

To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells.

Cece smiles uncomfortably as the mourners lapse once more
in silence.

EARL

Brazen bells!

EDIE

(whispering)

His mother was an Allen.

EARL

What a tale of terror, now, their
turbulency tells!
In the startled ear of night
How they scream out their affright!
How the danger sinks and swells,
By the sinking or swelling in the anger of the
bells-

Mourners chime in chorus.

MOURNERS

Of the bells-
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells-
In the clamor and the clangor of the bells!

Cece stifles a laugh and smiles at Perry, as the mourners
once more lapse into silence as the bell still tolls.

PERRY

Iron bells!
What a world of solemn thought their monody
compels!
In the silence of the night,
How we shiver with affright,
At the melancholy menace of the tone;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the throbbing of the bells-
Of the bells, bells, bells-

Mourners chime in chorus as Cece stares in alarm.

MOURNERS

To the tolling of the bells-
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells-
Bells, bells, bells-
To the moaning and the groaning of the
bells.

INT: ETTA'S HOUSE--NIGHT

ETTA

That was a right pretty funeral.

EDIE

Gorgeous weather.

CECE

What was with all that?

PERRY

With what?

CECE

Bells! Bells! Bells!

PERRY

It was just something spontaneous.

EDIE

I thought it wonderful!

EMMETT

It was one of Eliza's favorites by Mr. Poe.

PERRY

I had forgotten how much we all thought alike, how much fun we used to have.

EDIE

(to Cece)

We were always putting on shows.

CECE

You still are..

PERRY

I forgot how beautiful it was here this time of year. And Cousin Etta, I hadn't realized how much I missed home cooking.

The others look at Cece.

CECE

California cuisine is take-out. I don't make the rules. In fact, we've ordered take-out for one

CECE (CONT'D)

hundred of our favorite friends
next weekend.

PERRY

Oh, that's right. The
engagement party.

EMMETT

But you can't think of leaving
just yet.

ETTA

You just got here.

EDIE

We haven't gone spelunking.

EMMETT

We haven't read the will. You can't
leave before the reading of the will.

CECE

There's a will?

EDIE

Then there are all the thank-you
cards to write and flowers to dispose of.

PERRY

Don't worry, Edie, we won't leave you
with all that work to do. Will we,
Cece?

CECE

We could start writing the
thank-you notes tonight. If
we all pitched in, I bet we
could be done by morning.

EDIE

We need black ink. Call me
old-fashioned but I insist on
black ink.

ETTA

And there's the River House.
After fifty years, it's got to
be opened. You want to be there,
don't you?

PERRY

(to Cece)

You got to see the River House.
Built in 1825. Granny Eliza wouldn't
allow anyone in it after she inherited
it fifty years ago. Who knows what's
in there?

CECE

Why would she lock all the rest of
you out?

ETTA

We always thought she was protecting
the family secret.

CECE

What secret?

PERRY

The signature.

Knock at the door.

ETTA

(opening front door)

Eenie, where have you been?

EENIE

Taking Brenda home.

PERRY

(produces the letter.)

I've been holding on to this waiting
for the right time.

EENIE

Right time for what?

PERRY

To open it. My name's on it.

EENIE

I know. I was there at the funeral home when Mamie put it in Granny Eliza's hand.

EDIE

Why did she do that, Eenie?

EENIE

Mamie said that it was Granny's wish. She wrote Perry's name in her dying breath.

Perry opens letter.

CECE

Well?

EDIE

What does the letter say?

EENIE

(looking over Perry's shoulder)

Granny Eliza named Perry head of the family.

CECE

Head of the family! What does that mean?

ETTA

What's that inside it?

PERRY

(holding up a large rusty key)

It's the key to the River House.

EXTERIOR: RIVER HOUSE--DAY

Perry, Cece, Edie, Etta, and Eenie stand at the front door.

ETTA

Aren't you coming in, Eenie?

EENIE

Naw, old castley looking places give me the creeps.

Eenie drives away.

EDIE

We'd best be careful looking around in there. Granny Eliza always said there were snakes.

CECE

Snakes!

ETTA

Well, it's early in the year and the morning' still cool. Any rattlers inside are no doubt hibernating.

PERRY

We'll take it slow.

Everyone nods to each other and pauses. Perry gets out the iron key.

BOY ELLISON

(running up in his Sunday best)

Wait for me!

EDIE

Boy Ellison, what are you doing here?

BOY ELLISON

I heard you were breaking into the big house so I come a running.

CECE

Where's Girl Ellison?

BOY ELLISON
Still in Sunday School. When she
finds out, she's gonna spit.

PERRY
Okay, everyone, here goes.

INTERIOR: RIVER HOUSE--DAY

Front door opens onto a long deep hallway covered in dust.
Double doors open on either side. Perry, Cece, Edie, Etta,
and Boy Ellison peer inside.

ETTA
It sure has changed a lot since Great
Aunt Estelle's time. (to Cece) She
had the place before Granny Eliza.

PERRY
You been in here before, Cousin Etta?

ETTA
Only when I was a little girl. There
was this gold clock on the mantel with
a woman on top wearing a crown of stars.

EDIE
We should find the family silver
and the family jewels.

BOY ELLISON
(rushing on ahead)
There's jewels right here.

The others rush to his side and look down on the floor.

CLOSE UP: Miscellaneous jewelry scattered on the floor
lead into a side room.

Cece picks up a strand of beads and puts them to her mouth

CECE
Yep, they're salty. These are pearls.

Edie thrusts her hands into a mound of costume jewelry and screams!

CLOSEUP: A PAIR OF ROTTEN FALSE TEETH

ETTA
(pointing toward into the next room)
Omigod! What on earth is that!

CLOSEUP: LARGE CAT SKELETON ON FADED CARPET

BOY ELLISON
It looks like a cat that didn't
make it out alive. It's bones have
been gnawed.

PERRY
Look over here.

CLOSEUP: MUMIFIED RATS IN THE CORNER

PERRY
They didn't make it out alive either.

EDIE
How did Granny Eliza live in all this?

CECE
And what did Mamie do all these years?

ETTA
Whatever Eliza told her to do, I'm sure.

PERRY
Here's a desk and bookcase.

EDIE
(passing into the next room)
The dining room! Help me look
for the Allen silver.

ETTA
(opening a sideboard drawer)

ETTA (CONT'D)

Silverfish!

She gingerly feels through the nasty fluff and uncovers a reptilian claw. ETTA shrieks!

Cece grabs sugar tongs and lifts the claw and the leather purse attached to it.

CECE

What's in here?

CLOSEUP: DIRTY MONEY AND DINGY DOUBLOONS

EDIE

(opening a drawer in the dining table)

This where she kept silverware!

Edie pulls out tarnished spidery fork that breaks in her hand.

Cece turns around and finds Perry opening books and flipping through the pages.

CECE

What did you find?

PERRY

The family Bible.

CLOSEUP: E. ALLEN PERRY, SON OF EUGENIA ALLEN, is written.

BOY ELLISON

(calling from the pantry)

Come in here! Come in here!

Edie, Etta, and Cece run into pantry and find Boy Ellison standing by the corner wall.

BOY ELLISON

Watch this!

He opens wide the adjoining door.

INTERIOR KITCHEN: DAY

ETTA
This must be where Granny Eliza
stayed.

EDIE
(looking in the adjoining room)
In here's a bedroom.

CECE
She must have closed the door on all
the rest of the house years ago.
Perry, come here and look at this.
Where are you?

Cece brushes past Boy Ellison who bumps up against the
corner wall. A closet door on a spring pops open.

BOY ELLISON
It's a secret passage!

ETTA
(opening the door)
It's a jam closet.

CLOSEUP: SMALL CLOSET WITH SHELVES FILLED WITH BLACK JARS.

ETTA
Boy Ellison, come away. Don't touch
those nasty things. You might get snake-bit.

BOY ELLISON
How can I get snake bit from jam jars.

ETTA
There's lots a ways of getting
snake bit without getting bit by a snake.
Now mind me! Scoot.

INT: THRESHHOLD BETWEEN DINING ROOM AND PANTRY--DAY
Perry is still at the desk poring over papers.

EDIE
Have you found it, Perry?

PERRY
I know it's here. It's got to be.

ETTA
What's that?

PERRY
The signature.

CECE
Whose signature?

PERRY
Edgar Allen Poe's.

INT: PANTRY--DAY

Boy Ellison turns away from the jam closet. A glint of sunlight gleams upon something shiny on the top shelf. He walks back to the cupboard and reaches up to the top shelf.

INT: DINING ROOM--DAY

ETTA
What you're looking for, son,
was dead and buried over a hundred
and fifty years ago.

CECE
What are you talking about?

PERRY, EDIE, ETTA
(in unison)
Eulalie.

CECE
Your old ancestress up on the hill?

PERRY
Edgar Allen Poe visited Poor Valley
once and dedicated his poem "Eulalie"
to her.

EDIE

So we have always believed.

ETTA

But we've always lacked proof.

PERRY

If the proof still exists,
it's got to be here. Look around.
Granny Eliza never threw anything
away. All I need is a clue. . .

EDIE

Or a sign.

BOY ELLISON (OS)

Look what I found!

Boy Ellison enters carrying a gilt clock with a statue of
a woman wearing a crown of stars.

CLOSE-UP of clock where Astarte is written at the base.

BOY ELLISON

I found it in the jam closet.
Why would anyone put a clock up
in there?

ETTA

Why it's the gold clock I told you
about from when I was a little girl!

PERRY

(opening a book of verse)

Listen to this.

*And all day long
Shines bright and strong,
Astarte within the sky
While ever to her dear Eulalie upturns her
matron eye—*

CECE

Edgar Allen Poe wrote that? It sounds
so pedestrian.

PERRY

You're missing the larger point.
The reference to Astarte has
stumped most of Poe's biographers,
but if Poe knew about this clock
he could have incorporated it in
the poem as a tribute to Eulalie.

CECE

That's not evidence.

PERRY

All right then, a clue. I've spent my
life researching Poe. In 1988 a first
edition of Poe's juvenilia found in a
Vermont barn sold for \$300, 000.

CECE

Could Edgar Allan Poe's signature be
worth that much?

PERRY

On the original manuscript of one of
his know poems? Well, let's just say
Poor Valley would be poor no longer.

EDIE

We could get the River House
on the National Register.

ETTA

It could be a theme park!

BOY ELLISON

We're rich!

CECE

All we got is a clock.

PERRY

It's a clue.

EDIE

A tantalizing clue!

PERRY

I know in time we can find the
poem itself with Poe's signature.

CECE

We haven't got time. A week from today
I'm hosting a very important, very
expensive party celebrating my engagement.

ETTA

But then there's the will.

EDIE

And the thank-you cards.

BOY ELLISON

And the dead cat.

CECE

(looking at their expectant faces)
We could stay till the end of the week.

PERRY

That's my darling. See why I have
to marry her!

(aside to Cece)

A week as in seven days?

EXT. ETTA'S HOUSE: NIGHT

Perry, Cece, and Edie wait as Cousin Etta opens the front
door.

PERRY

It's awful good of you, Cousin Etta,
to let us stay with you.

ETTA

We'll have a good visit! Just
watch out for the bear.

CECE, PERRY, EDIE

Bear!

ETTA

I should have stayed up nights with
my bear rifle after it knocked over my
trashcans.

CECE

You keep that bear rifle loaded,
Cousin Etta?

ETTA

Gots to! It took off my speckled
pup. Sweetest little critter you ever
seen. Now some black bear's breakfast.
Better hurry in!

All rush inside.

INT: COUSIN ETTA'S HOUSE--Night.

EDIE

I appreciate you putting me up for the
night too.

ETTA

Now, you stay as long as you like.
Besides, it's too far for Perry and Cece to
travel back and forth from here to Slabtown.

CECE

It's less than an hour away. That's
a pretty good commute in California.

PERRY

But we're not in California.

EDIE

And the Allens don't drive.

CECE

Why is that?

ETTA

Cece, Honey, help me in the
kitchen, please.

Cece joins Etta at the bar to the kitchen?

ETTA

(handing her a tea tray)

Their parents both died in flames
because of a car. It's something we
don't talk about in the family.

CECE

But Eenie drives.

ETTA

Just barely. He was the baby and
don't remember the tragedy as well
as the other two. You'll just
have to bear with us. It won't take
long to get used to us.

PERRY

What are you two talking about?

ETTA

(taking kettle from the hearth)

Oh, just about the Allens and our
little ways.

EDIE

We are a family steeped in tradition.

CECE

(setting down tray)

So what's the story about Eulalie
and Poe?

EDIE

That goes way back to a time when the
River House was first built.

PERRY

And Edgar Allan Poe was returning home
to Virginia after quitting the army in
South Carolina.

ETTA

(dreamily)

And passed through Poor Valley.

EXT.FLASHBACK OF EDGAR ALLAN POE ENTERING POOR VALLEY--DAY.

EDIE (VO)

Naturally the Allens extended their
hospitality to him since he obviously had
bearing of a gentleman. Great Great Great
Grandfather Elmer Allen introduced him to
his daughters Eugenia and Eulalie.

EXT. FLASHBACK OF POE BEING GREETED BY ELMER, EUGENIA, AND
EULALIE--DAY.

PERRY (VO)

It's believed he stayed here for a season.

ETTA (VO)

That's when he fell in love with Eulalie.

EXT.FLASHBACK OF POE WALKING WITH EULALIE IN AN ORCHARD.
DAY

PERRY (VO)

And wrote a poem in her honor.

INT: FLASHBACK OF POE STANDING BY MANTEL WITH GOLD CLOCK
AND RECITING TO FAMILY--NIGHT.

PERRY (VO)

I dwelt alone
In a world of moan
And my soul was a stagnant tide
Till the fair and gentle Eulalie became
my blushing bride.

INT: FLASHBACK OF EULALIE--NIGHT.

EDIE (VO)

Ah, less-less bright
The stars of the night
Than the eyes of the radiant girl!
And never a flake
That the vapour can make
With the moon-tints of purple and pearl,
Can vie with the modest Eulalie's most
unregarded curl-

EDIE (CONT'D)

Can compare with the bright-eyed Eulalie's
most humble and careless curl.

INT: FLASHBACK AS EUGENIA REGARDS EULALIE AS POE RECITES.
NIGHT.

ETTA (VO)

Now doubt-now Pain
Come never again,
For her soul gives me sigh for sigh,
And all day long
Shines, bright and strong,
Astarte within the sky.

CLOSE UP on the clock with the legend "Astarte."

INT: COUSIN ETTA'S--NIGHT.

Cece regards Perry, Edie, and Etta as eyes closed they
recite in unison.

PERRY, EDIE, ETTA

While ever to her dear Eulalie upturns her
matronly eye--
While ever to her young Eulalie upturns her
violet eye.

INT: CECE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

Cece hears a tap at her window. She opens it and Perry
enters.

CECE

Where did you come from?

PERRY

My room's on the other side of the
eave. I slipped across the roof to
wish you good night.

CECE

Well, good night!

PERRY

Aren't you going to ask me to stay?

CECE

And have the in-laws find out before the wedding? What kind of girl I am! Isn't that why you're sneaking about?

PERRY

There I thought I was being romantic.

CECE

You're way romantic.

PERRY

How's that?

CECE

So far I've been to a funeral home, a graveyard, and a haunted house. How much romance can a woman take?

PERRY

Wait until you get to know the place.

CECE

I don't have to, do I? You're not getting sucked into this place, are you?

PERRY

I can't leave just yet, not with things the way they are. Take Eenie and Brenda. There's a baby elephant in the room that no one is taking about.

CECE

How can I help?

PERRY

I know Edie needs help with the condolence cards, but then someone should go through the old house to clear out the junk and collect all the valuables.

CECE

What about the will? And Probate Court?

PERRY

I'm sure Uncle Emmett will handle that. He's the lawyer in the family.

CECE

Like Eenie's the driver. Perry?

PERRY

Yes.

CECE

How is all this going to get done? I mean Probate Court--won't that happen at the County Seat?

PERRY

Yes, in Slabtown.

CECE

Someone will have to get Uncle Emmett there.

PERRY

Yes. Eenie, I suppose.

CECE

Then you work on cards and the house tomorrow and I'll work on Uncle Emmett and Eenie.

PERRY

Well, take it easy on them. Things move slowly here.

CECE

People, you mean.

PERRY

Yeah, the people here are slow,
but they're not stupid. You
like my people, don't you?

CECE

Sure, they're nice. Everyone's been
nice. Only, oh, Perry! Don't forget
California. Remember the things that
really matter: Sushi, guacamole,
Round Table Pizza!

EXT. POOR VALLEY--DAY.

There is a small green with a flagpole. On one side is the
Post Office, and on the other is a church. Bradshaw's
garage is on the hill above the green. The meadow and the
river run below.

Cece marches up the hill to Bradshaw's with Cousin Etta
trailing behind.

ETTA

Lord, girl! I can't for the life
keep up with you.

CECE

It's power walking, Cousin Etta, it
gets you where you're going.

GIRL ELLISON

Where are you going?

CECE

You again! Why aren't you in school?

GIRL ELLISON

We's home schooled.

CECE

I'm looking for Eenie. I hear Uncle
Emmett's with him.

BOY ELLISON

Yes'um. They both are at Bradshaw's
garage.

CECE

I'll bring them down to the Post Office,
Cousin Etta. And we'll get the will.

GIRL ELLISON

A will!

ETTA

There in my daddy's safe in the back
room of the P. O. Granny Eliza gave
me a whole stack of papers last
Halloween for safekeeping.

CECE

Stay there while I bring them down.

EXT. BRADSHAW'S GARAGE. DAY

Eenie and Brenda sit and watch CECE trek up the steep hill.

EENIE

There's a road that leads up round
back. You don't have to make that
climb next time, Sissy.

BRENDA

Her name is Cece.

EENIE

What did I say?

CECE

(breathless)

Eenie, is your Uncle Emmett here?

Eenie taps the wall behind him.

EENIE

Uncle Emmett, you got company.

EMMETT

(stepping outside in shirtsleeves)

Why, good morning, m'dear. What's got
you out so early?

CECE

I've come for you, Uncle Emmett.
Cousin Etta has the will. We need
you to take it to Probate Court.

EMMETT

Me?

BRENDA

You're a lawyer, aren't you?

EMMETT

Why, I haven't practiced law in
thirty years.

CECE

You should still be able to open
an estate at Probate Court.

EMMETT

We'll need a will.

CECE

We got a will. Etta's waiting for
us at the P. O.

EMMETT

I don't know that I can get away today.

BRENDA

Why, what have you got to do?

EMMETT

Slabtown is a long ways off.

BRENDA

Eenie, you got the Essex running yet?

EENIE

No, I been waiting for my issue of
Popular Mechanics.

CECE

I'm not going down that

CECE (CONT'D)
hill without you. Got it?

BRENDA
The lady's got a plan.

CECE
Come on, let's move it! Move it!

Uncle Emmett runs down the hill as Cece shouts at him.

BRENDA
You go too, Eenie. I'll be all right.
(shouting)
Give'em hell, Cece!

INT: POST OFFICE--DAY
Cousin Etta opens the door for Cece, Emmett, and Eenie.

ETTA
Now we have just a few minutes
before I open up the P. O.

EENIE
Has my copy of *Popular Mechanics*
come yet?

CECE
Where's the will?

ETTA
Emmett, Eliza gave me her papers back
last fall. I'm sure if she knew she were
gonna die she would have given them to
you, instead of giving them to me.

EMMETT
That's quite all right, Etta. Whatever
Eliza wanted is what we all wanted.

CECE
Where's the will?

ETTA
Well, now, I'm not sure it is a will,
but if it is the will, it's in

ETTA (CONT'D)
the back room with the children.

BOY ELLISON
We're protecting Granny Eliza's will
from robbers.

ETTA
I was telling them how my daddy used
the safe to lock up stamps during the
Depression to keep it from robbers.

GIRL ELLISON
And that old safe is the same safe you
put Granny Eliza's will in.

BOY ELLISON
Only the safe weren't locked.

GIRL ELLISON
That's why we locked it for you.

ETTA
You what? I never lock that safe!

CECE
Cousin Etta, what's wrong?

ETTA
Daddy left me the safe but not the
combination.

INT: POST OFFICE BACKROOM. DAY
A big steel safe with a spin dial stands in the corner.
Cece tugs at the lever. It holds fast.

CECE
There's gotta be someway of getting
this safe open. Who's the locksmith
around here?

EENIE
Not many locks in Poor Valley.

EMMETT

You'd have to go to Slabtown for something like that.

CECE

That's right. Slabtown. We got to go there anyway to open up the
CECE (CONT'D)
estate in Probate Court.

ETTA

Can we open an estate without a will?

CECE

(to Emmett)

You're a lawyer. You should know.

EMMETT

Yes, it's possible for the Probate Court judge to rule should a person die intestate.

ETTA

We wouldn't want to be asking for no favors though.

CECE

What favors? It's how the law works.

EMMETT

It puts the family in an awkward situation, having to abide by the Probate Court judge's decision.

BOY ELLISON

We don't want no judge deciding for us.

GIRL ELLISON

What if we don't like what he decides?

ETTA

I'll not be beholden to no man!

CECE

Well, you got to go before the judge,

CECE (CONT'D)
will or no will. It's some elected
official. You must know who he is; you
must have voted for him.

Etta, Emmett, and Eenie stand around silently.

CECE
You do vote, don't you?

Etta, Emmett, and Eenie stand around silently.

CECE
Great, just great!

ETTA
I'm glad you're here to help, Cece.

EMMETT
You'll go with me, won't you?

CECE
Of course, I just wish we knew what to
do about the safe. Any ideas?

EENIE
I got it.

All turn around.

EENIE
(holding a magazine)
My Popular Mechanics.!

EXT. POST OFFICE--DAY

Earl Peabody in his squad car leaning out the window to
speak to Cece.

EARL
Slabtown? What's in Slabtown?

CECE
A locksmith. Cousin Etta's safe
holds Granny Eliza's will and we
can't get it open.

EARL

I wouldn't go to Slabtown for that.
There's a good man in these parts
I'd try first.

CECE

Who's that?

EARL

His name's Boone Bradley. Top notch
cabinet maker, so he's good on doors.
I'll get a hold of him and he'll be by
tomorrow.

CECE

There's still the matter of
opening the estate officially.

EARL

The Allens won't need a will for that.

CECE

Just what I was telling them! They
got all afraid the judge was
going to do something bad to them.

EARL

People still feud in these parts.

CECE

Right! Like he cares! So who's the
Probate Court judge around here?

EARL

You met him. Judge Teagarden.

EXT. GATES TO THE ALLEN FARM--EVENING

Patrol car stops and lets Cece out as Perry rides up the
dirt drive on a bicycle.

EARL

(from the squad car)

Brought home your girl for you,
Perry.

PERRY

She's hasn't been disturbing the peace again, has she, Earl?

EARL

You'll have to ask Cousin Etta and Uncle Emmett about that.

Patrol car drives off.

CECE

If you had a better day than I did, I don't want to hear about it.

PERRY

I spent it writing thank-you notes with Edie. Every one was a poem in black ink.

CECE

Okay, then we're even.

PERRY

Hop on.

CECE

On the handlebars?

PERRY

Sure, it's not that late in the day.

CECE

(climbing on)

Okay, but you better not drop me off in the mud.

PERRY

(pedaling)

No chance of that! I am A-Number One on a bicycle. I still have dreams of running competing in the Tour de France. We'll get there on our Golden Anniversary.

CECE

First we gotta get married.

PERRY

As far as everyone here is
concerned, we already are.

CECE

What have you heard?

PERRY

Some say it's like having Granny
Eliza back.

CECE

Who says that?

PERRY

Brenda. She called right after you
chivvied Uncle Emmett down the hill.

CECE

I guess I did come off a little
strong.

PERRY

So how is harassing family members
to speed up the grieving process?

CECE

They don't hate me, do they?

PERRY

No, back here, we say a tall woman
casts a long shadow. You got grit,
Cece. That means a lot, especially
to other tall women.

CECE

Look! A full moon. Why is the weather
so warm? I figured back east would be
all frozen over this time of year.

PERRY

Sometimes we get these warm spells.
In the fall we would say Indian Summer,
but now this is a genuine Blackberry Winter.

CECE

What's the difference?

PERRY

None really. They both end in snow.
Have you ever seen the snow? I hope
we have some before we leave.

CECE

On Friday?

PERRY

After we take care of business.

CECE

Then as soon as we get to Cousin
Etta's, I'm making a list.

Perry and Cece bike off in the moonlight.

INT: THE RIVER HOUSE--Day

Perry, Cece, and Edie stand in the doorway.

PERRY

Okay, ready, Partners?

CECE

Ready, Partner!

EDIE

That's so sweet.

PERRY

Let's start where we left off
Sunday.

CECE

We were in the kitchen.

EDIE

Over here.

Edie, Perry, and Cece walk across a cavernous circular
stairwell with a sky light. Cece looks up.

EDIE

This house could be beautifully
restored.

Cece rolls her eyes.

PERRY

I wonder where this goes?
Perry enters through the small archway beneath the stairs.

INT: STAIRWELL. DAY

PERRY

The walls are all draped.

Perry pulls a cord, and the drapes part to reveal a
portrait of a young woman in white.

PERRY

Look! It's the portrait of Eulalie.

Edie pulls a cord that opens a pair of drapes that reveal
the portrait of a young girl dressed in white.

EDIE

This must be the portrait of Eugenia,
the younger sister.

Cece grabs another hanging cord.

CECE

Here's another one!

PERRY

Could it be a portrait of Poe?

Cece pulls a cord, and a trapdoor opens up in the middle of
the stairwell.

CECE

I don't see anything.

Cece totters on the edge. Perry grabs her.

PERRY

Taking a trip?

CECE
(looking down in the abyss.)
What is that? The dungeon?

EDIE
(casting her light into the hole)
EDIE (CONT'D)
They say when the Yankees came through
during the Great Unpleasantness,

PERRY
Elmer Allen had a secret hiding place.
(jumping into the hole)
I got to see what's down here.

EDIE
Etta said there were snakes!
And we know there are rats!

CECE
Shine the light. Shine the light!

PERRY
You'll never believe it!

CECE
What!

PERRY
(sticking his head out)
It's where the Allens hid their liquor.

CECE
To forget about the Great Unpleasantness.
Perry holds up a dusty bottle.

PERRY
There's a whole crate down here.

EDIE
A cask of amontillado!

CECE
I give up.

Cece walks into the dining room.

INT: DINING ROOM. DAY

Cece steps back and notices something shining at her foot.
She picks up a broken mirror.

CECE

Who would leave something like
this on the ground. Look, it's broken.

EDIE

(examining it)

I think it's chased silver.

CECE

(peering over her shoulder)

Something seems to be written on it.

Edie begins wiping the back of the mirror.

EDIE

It's someone's name.

CECE

Is that a U?

EDIE

Eulalie! It's Eulalie's hand mirror.

Both women squeal with excitement.

CECE

Eulalie.

EDIE

I must show Eddie. Eddie!

Edie rushes off.

CECE

Wait for me!

Cece turns to go but as she passes one of the open windows
she hears a noise. In front of her is a rattlesnake.

CECE (CONT'D)
(barely whispering)
Perry! Edie! Help!

Cece stands frozen as the snake coils, shaking its tail furiously.

CECE (CONT'D)
(hoarsely)
Somebody! Help!

MAMIE, 70, reaches in through the window with a shotgun.

MAMIE
Now hold right still.

Mamie takes aim and fires, dropping the rattler about to spring.

CECE
Who, who are you?

MAMIE
Why, I'm Mamie. Howdeedo. Please to make your acquaintance.

EDIE (OS)
Cece? What was that noise?
Are you all right?

MAMIE
(calling to Edie)
She's all right. She's with me.
(to Cece)
Help me through this window, Child.

Cece helps Mamie through the window into the dining room.

MAMIE
Here I was all worried about the River House opened up like this, but I guess it's a good thing.

Mamie picks up the dead snake.

MAMIE (CONT'D)

You mind if I take this?

Cece shakes her head, and Mamie pops it in her poke.

MAMIE (CONT'D)

You must be the bride. Well,
you and me gotta have a good long
talk, but first I need to get what
I come for.

Mamie spies the gold clock.

MAMIE (CONT'D)

Here it is. You can help me hide
this where no one can find it.
Come along.

INT: LOG FORT COMMON ROOM--DAY

Mamie puts gold clock on cupboard shelf and closes doors.

CECE

You sure it's okay you
taking that clock?

MAMIE

If Eddie wants to know where, you
can tell him, and if he wants to know
why, tell him Mamie says the Webb boys
are coming.

CECE

The Webb boys. Got it.

Mamie sits next to Cece and pours her tea.

MAMIE

I been wanting to sit and talk with
you ever since I heard tell you were here.
I think your coming to Poor Valley may be
the one thing to undo the Allen family
curse.

CECE

Curse! What curse?

MAMIE

The one that has haunted the family
for generations. All brought on by
that sad poet fellow.

CECE

Edgar Allan Poe? What did he
do? I mean besides maybe writing
that poem to Eulalie.

MAMIE

He proposed marriage, but
Old Elmer Allen wouldn't have it.
No poor man was ever going to marry
one of Elmer Allen's daughters.

CECE

(sips tea)

So what happened?

MAMIE

Oh, it's hard to tell for sure
what took place. It's so long ago,
but Eulalie died a maiden lady.
Some say of a broken heart.

CECE

And ever since the family
has felt like they missed the
boat. Here was their one chance
for greatness and Old Elmer sent
it packing.

MAMIE

They say Granny Eliza guarded that
house like there was something inside
too precious for thieves to steal,
but it always seemed to me that Eliza
was keeping something from getting out.

CECE

What was Granny Eliza really like?

MAMIE

Eliza Allen was a tall woman. She

MAMIE (CONT'D)

threw a long shadow across this valley.
For three generations the Allens looked
up to her and what she said was law.

CECE

She raised Perry and Edie,
and Eenie when their parents died.

MAMIE

That was during the Bi-centennial.
Mr. Edmund and Ms. Edna had just
bought a new car all the way from
Japan. At Starry Gap that car spun
out and burst into flames. Eliza
decided no Allen would die that way
again, so she told all the Allens no
one could drive any car newer than 1958.

CECE

Why 1958?

MAMIE

No one dared ask.

CECE

Perry never learned to drive
because his grandmother wouldn't let him.
Poor dope! Is that why Etta never married?

MAMIE

The feud kept Cousin Etta single. Judge
Teagarden tried interfering with how Eliza's
grandchildren were raised. Words were said, so
she sicced Etta on him.

CECE

And Edie?

MAMIE

Granny Eliza always said no man in Poor
Valley was good enough for her.

CECE

Didn't Edie ever go away to school?

MAMIE

Eliza couldn't spare her.

CECE

What an awful old lady!

MAMIE

Hush, child. Don't be speaking ill of the dead.

CECE

What's one good thing she ever did?

MAMIE

Eliza Allen loved her family, every one of them, her whole life long.

CECE

And there she was, breathing down their necks every minute of her life too. That's something, I suppose.

(sipping tea)

I never had that. People ask about my parents; I say they're semi-invalids. That's why they weren't at my graduation and why they won't be at my engagement party, only they're not really invalids—

MAMIE

No?

CECE

No, they just don't want to leave their medical marijuana farm in La Honda.
(pause) Cece's not my real name.

MAMIE

It's not?

CECE

No, just the initials C. C. My parents named me Candy Corn—the stoners!

MAMIE

This family needs to find its way.
They need a tall woman now.

CECE

I'm no good at looking for lost
china and missing signatures. I can't
get the Essex running or the will
probated.

MAMIE

You don't have to do those things.
Just stay long enough so Edie and Cousin
Etta don't feel so lost, and until Eenie
and Brenda are squared away.

CECE

But I have a very important party
planned for next weekend.

MAMIE

Why? Who's coming?

CECE

Lots of people! Not my own parents,
of course. Mostly people who couldn't
care less if I got married or not.

MAMIE

We care. All of us do.

CECE

(putting down her teacup)

Okay, maybe I was going about this the
wrong way. Let's do this right. You need a
tall woman. I'm tall enough for the job. If
you'll help me, Mamie, we'll put this house
in order and get everyone straightened out and
then it's good-bye Poor Valley!

MAMIE

God bless you, Child.

CECE

You know, this is really good tea.
What do you call it?

MAMIE

Cannabis.

CECE

Cannabis? You know, that's what
marijuana is called back in California.

MAMIE

Do tell.

EXT. THE RIVER ROAD-DUSK.
Perry is calling for Cece.

PERRY

Cece! Cece Clowder! Where are you?

CECE

(stepping through the bushes)
That's a very good question-where am I?

PERRY

What happened to you?

CECE

When? Before the rattlesnake
or after the gunshot?

PERRY

What?

CECE

Mamie took me home with her. We
had a little tea party and a good
long talk.

PERRY

Oh. Mamie's tea! Granny Eliza swore
by it.

CECE

I found it very soothing. I miss your cooking. Maybe you could fry up quiche when we get back.

PERRY

Are you all right?

CECE

Right as rainwater. Nothing a bag of cookies can't cure. Are you all right? You're the one Mamie and I are going to look after.

PERRY

Oh you are? How nice of both of you!

CECE

I mean it. I've started another a list.

PERRY

That's very helpful.

CECE

We'll stop Cousin Etta's silly feud and find Edie a fella, and get Brenda to marry Eenie. You'll see. We won't go until you're ready. Whatever comes up, we'll face it shoulder to shoulder.

PERRY

(massaging her shoulders)

I love your shoulders. I plan on using them to lean on. Thanks for sticking. I can't imagine what you must think of all this.

CECE

I know it's important to you.

PERRY

Not as important as you.

CECE

That's all I need to hear. Now take me home and feed me.

INT: COUSIN ETTA'S KITCHEN--DAY
Edie is at the bar drinking coffee.

CECE

I got my list.

EDIE

Good morning to you too.

CECE

Oh, I thought you were Perry.

EDIE

Eddie left hours ago. First
he'll be at the post office
with Eenie and Uncle Emmett
and then at the River House
for the rest of the day. I
plan to go later, if you care
to join me.

CECE

(waving list)

No. Things to do!

CECE (CONT'D)

(starts to leave, then stops)
Edie?

EDIE

Yes, Cece.

CECE

You're my favorite of all Perry's
folks. You know that don't you?

EDIE

Why, no, I didn't know.

CECE

When we get back to California,
you must come out and visit us.
You could stay as long as you like.

EDIE
Oh, now! I wouldn't wish to impose.

CECE
But we'll be sisters. I never had a sister before.

EDIE
Me either. Oh, Sissy! There's so much here I want to show you before you leave. We have yet to go spelunking.

Gun shots fire.

CECE
What's that!

EDIE
By the sounds of it, I'd say Cousin Etta got out her bear rifle.

CECE
Is it safe to go outside and see?

EDIE
In broad daylight? I doubt if she would hit either of us intentionally.

EXT. COUSIN ETTA'S WOODPILE--DAY
Cousin Etta stands by her overturned trashcans, rifle in hand.

CECE
That marauding bear come around, Cousin Etta?

ETTA
Just look at these trashcans!

CECE
Are you sure a bear did this?

ETTA
It took off my little dog. The

ETTA (CONT'D)
sweetest little pup in the world,
and a good watchdog! The night
of the carnage I heard it yapping
its poor little head off, and then
silence. Now that two-footed monster's
coming back for more.

(raises her rifle)
If it comes around here again, I'll
put some iron in its diet.

Etta fires the rifle.

CECE
Cousin Etta, of all Perry's relatives
you're my favorite. You know that, don't
you?

ETTA
Why no! How would I know that?

CECE
Well, you are.

ETTA
Poor Edie. We just won't tell her.

CECE
Good idea! So anyway, I got a
little problem I need your help on.

ETTA
(raising her rifle again)
Someone being mean to you?

CECE
(turning the rifle aside)
No, no, nothing like that. It's
just that Perry needs to open Granny
Eliza's estate at Probate Court.

ETTA
Now I don't understand why he
ETTA (CONT'D)
should. Just a bunch of red tape.

CECE

You don't understand. There's the
Internal Revenue Service.

ETTA

Humph! Revenuers.

CECE

Not having a will complicates matters.
However, if we get the Probate Court Judge
on our side, it shouldn't be a problem.

ETTA

Why wouldn't some old Probate Court
judge be on our side?

CECE

So I was thinking if you and I drove in
to Slabtown and were really nice to this
Probate Court judge, then Perry could open
the estate before he goes back to California.

ETTA

Who is this judge anyway?

CECE

Judge Teagarden, and you know it.

ETTA

Old Man Teagarden! I got a better
idea. Lemme load up this old gun again.

CECE

No! That's just what I don't want
to happen. Can't you just forget about
the feud for a little while, until we
get the estate settled and don't need
Judge Teagarden anymore?

ETTA

Cece, you're smart as a whip--
everybody says so-- but when it
comes to living around here, you don't

ETTA (CONT'D)

know beans! Don't worry, honey, you'll get back to California before long. But things take time here. It may take years before the dust on Granny Eliza's will settles.

CECE

But what about Perry?

ETTA

Your Perry's a good boy. He knows what's expected of him.

CECE

That's what worries me.

INT: POST OFFICE BACKROOM--DAY

Perry, Eenie, and Uncle Emmett stare at the locked safe.

EENIE

What if we got some dynamite and blew the door open?

PERRY

What if the dynamite blew the safe up instead?

EMMETT

I heard of a safecracker who used a doctor's stethoscope and sandpaper to open a safe.

PERRY

I can get the sandpaper, but you'll have to get a safecracker.

Deputy Sheriff Earl Peabody & Boone Bradley, 30, enter.

EARL

Never fear, boys, help is on its way.

PERRY

You got us a safecracker, Earl?

EARL

Never joke about lawbreakers to a peace-keeper, son. Instead, say hello to your salvation.

EENIE

Hello, Boone.

BOONE

Howdy, Eenie. Hello, Mr. Allen.

EARL

Perry, this here's Boone Bradley. He's new to these parts. How many years you been in business here, Boone?

BOONE

Three, come Decoration Day.

PERRY

Are you a locksmith, Boone?

BOONE

No, sir. I'm a contractor, which around here makes me a jack of all trades.

EARL

Let him take it a look at the safe, Perry. It can do no harm.

EENIE

Whatcha got there, Boone, dynamite?

BOONE

To use dynamite, you need to drill. Most safes are reinforced steel so drills don't work.

EMMETT

What about an acetylene torch?

BOONE

Well, sir, most of the reinforced steel in safes is reinforced with copper. That alloy will take the heat from an acetylene torch and warm up the whole door without burning a hole.

EMMETT

What about sandpaper and a stethoscope?

EARL

Those were used in the great Cornhill caper of 1865. I wrote about that at the academy.

BOONE

And what you got here was the state of the art answer to the Cornhill burglary—the Chatwood patented floor safe of 1870.

(placing wedges in the safe's top corners)

See these rounded corners and the flanges in back. The exterior of this safe is made of one solid piece of metal. And fireproof! It can withstand up to 500 hundred degrees Fahrenheit.

PERRY

This is hopeless.

BOONE

(taking out a hammer)

Oh, not hopeless. There's one thing Chatwood forgot about.

(tapping the wedges)

With just the right amount of pressure in the right place, the door comes right off.

(The wedges driven into the door cause it to buckle, and Boone takes a small crowbar and pries it open.)

EENIE

Glory be!

EARL

I sure am glad you're on the right side of the law!

EMMETT

What's in there, Perry? The signature?
The Allen fortune.

PERRY
(hold up a fist full of
paper)

Bills!

INT: RIVER HOUSE--DAY

CECE
Bills?

PERRY
We owe everybody. Granny Eliza
must have been living on credit for
years!

CECE
How much do you think you owe?

PERRY
I can't say just by looking. There's
the county land taxes and the Internal Revenue
Service. We're way in over our head.

CECE
Surely there's something in here
worth something that somebody would want.

ETTA (OS)
Hello, anybody in there?

ETTA with EDIE enter.

EDIE
Eenie called with the news.

ETTA
If only we'd known they were bills
in that safe, we could have kept them
locked up and saved us a heap of trouble.

CECE
I'm afraid credit doesn't work that way,
Cousin Etta. Bills keep coming.

EMMETT (OS)

Where is everybody?

PERRY

In here, Uncle Emmett.

EMMETT

(entering)

Eenie'll be along. He stopped at the log fort to pick up Mamie.

CECE

Mamie? Oh, that reminds me! (to Perry)
Mamie wanted me to tell you something.
What was it now?

EDIE

Who brought you, Uncle Emmett?

EMMETT

He did.

BOONE

Hello, Miz Allen.

EDIE

Why, Boone, welcome to our ancestral home.

CECE

(to PERRY)

Who's the hunk?

PERRY

A local contractor. What was it Mamie said?

CECE

Something about somebody's coming.
Do you see how Edie is talking to him?

PERRY

Edwina is celebrated for her hospitality. Who's coming exactly?

CECE

Oh, it's right on the tip of my tongue.

EENIE (OS)

Where is everybody?

ETTA

In here, Eenie. I'm surprised you can find your way about for all the cobwebs.

CECE

That's the name! Webb. The Webb boys are coming.

PERRY

The Webb boys!

EENIE

Sorry, Vice, and Rotten are coming here!

MAMIE

(entering)

I'd expect 'em while the moon's still full.

EMMETT

But that could be tonight.

CECE

Edie, I understand your friend is a contractor.

EDIE

Oh, Eddie! What are we to do?

PERRY

The men will have to stay here tonight and guard the house.

BOONE

With the Webb boys you'd best be prepared to fight.

EMMETT

Fight! I've never been in a fight in my life! Eliza would not allow it.

CECE

There's a fight?

MAMIE

Come with me, dear. Someone's at the door.

Mamie and Cece exit.

EENIE

Those Webb boys are crazy.

EMMETT

They dynamited the home of the last man who tried to stop them.

EDIE

Oh, Eddie! What if they blow up the River House?

ETTA

Those boys won't blow up what they can steal.

BOONE

(to Edie)

I'll stay and lend a hand if you want.

PERRY

I'm not letting them take one stick from this house.

Cece, Mamie, and Girl Ellison enter.

MAMIE

Look who we found on the doorstep.

ETTA

Why, Girl Ellison, what are you doing here?

GIRL ELLISON

I come as quick as I heard the news.

Girl Ellison looks at the open trapdoor and then looks up at the counterbalanced chandelier above it.

GIRL ELLISON (CONT'D)

Boys, I got a plan. It's gonna be the pit and pendulum for the Webb brothers if they mess with us.

CECE

Is she on the level?

EENIE

Girl Ellison is the meanest one of us.

PERRY

Is that true, Girl Ellison?

GIRL ELLISON

(considering)

I reckon I am.

EMMETT

What are we doing, Girl Ellison?

GIRL ELLISON

The way I see it, some of us need to get mattresses, while the rest rig that hanging lamp into a wrecking ball.

BOONE

The boys can rig a wrecking ball!

EDIE

And the girls'll get the mattresses.

MAMIE

(to EMMETT)

Let's have the old folks gather up all the valuables and haul them out of here.

INT: STAIRCASE--DAY.

PERRY, EENIE, and BOONE shinny up the banister, hang from the chandelier, and throw ropes while GIRL ELLISON points and orders.

INT: PARLOR--DAY

MAMIE, EMMETT, and ETTA take pictures from walls, gather up silver and china, remove curios.

INT: FIRST BEDROOM--DAY.

EDIE and CECE strip beds. EDIE strips one bed and finds a tattered mattress of corn husks that fall apart in her hands.

INT: SECOND BEDROOM--DAY

CECE strips one bed and finds another cat skeleton under the sheets.

INT: THIRD BEDROOM--DAY

In a room with twin canopy beds, EDIE and CECE take turns thrusting their hands into the dusty curtains: EDIE pulls out a comforter; CECE pulls out a moth-eaten fox stole. She struggles with it as if it were alive.

INT: STAIRCASE--DAY

Finally a shot of the thin mattresses and quilts around the brass chandelier that swings in a wide arc over the parquet floor to the trapdoor.

GIRL ELLISON

Good work, boys!

PERRY

Now all we gotta do is wait
for the full moon.

EXT. FULL MOON--NIGHT.

Perry looks out the door to the front gallery of the River House and back at Eenie, Emmett, and Boone by his side. No sound is heard.

INT: CECE's BEDROOM--NIGHT.

Cece looks out window toward River House and waits. No sound heard.

INT: EDIE'S BEDROOM--NIGHT. Edie in bed turns from the moonlight window and tries to sleep. No sound heard.

INT: ETTA'S BEDROOM--NIGHT.

Cousin Etta sound asleep in bed snoring. Suddenly a loud banging sound off screen and chuckling.

ETTA

A marauder!

EXT. REAR OF COUSIN ETTA'S HOUSE--Night.

A gunshot is fired. A sound of a bird taking flight.

EXT. REAR OF COUSIN ETTA'S HOUSE--DAY.

Cousin Etta and Cece examine overturned garbage cans.

CECE

So what happened last night?

ETTA

It was a peeping tom climbing over my garbage cans to get a good look at me.

CECE

I thought it was a bear.

ETTA

Not this time. This time it was some night marauder.

CECE

Etta!

ETTA

I hear him laughing at me as he hightailed up the draw.

CECE

(looking up behind the house.)

What's behind those woods anyway?

ETTA

If you stick to the cowpath,

ETTA (CONT'D)

and follow the draw, the woods
will take you all the way to the
top of Starry Mountain.

CECE

This is Starry Mountain?

ETTA

Yep. The Allens used to own
all of Starry Mountain. Then
the Perrys up and sold their
share to the Forest Service.
The Bradshaws built a log house
up there on the Perry side.

CECE

That cowpath will take me to
Brenda Bradshaw's house?

ETTA

Purt near. Just look for smoke
from their chimney and follow that
to her door. Watch out for bears!

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE OF POOR VALLEY--DAY
Cece spots the chimney smoke.

EXT. BRADSHAW PORCH ON STILTS--DAY
Cece calls up to Brenda.

CECE

Have you seen Perry?

BRENDA

He's still camping out at
the old house.

CECE

Where's Eenie?

BRENDA

I'll be damned if I know, or
care. That Eenie came up here
this morning all hot and bothered

BRENDA (CONT'D)
over the Webb brothers not coming
last night.

CECE
Why, what's so important about
the Webb brothers?

BRENDA
That's what I said. Stand up
to Vice, Sorry and Rotten.

CECE
Certainly.

BRENDA
I won't have a no-account man.

CECE
Surely you don't mean Eenie.

BRENDA
The very same. I hope I never
lay eyes on him.

CECE
But isn't he the father of
your unborn child?

BRENDA
Better get shut of him now than
have him spoil the baby.

CECE
If you marry Eenie, then when I
marry Perry, you and I shall be
sisters-in-law. Wouldn't that be fun?

BRENDA
Depends on your meaning of fun.

EXT. STARRY MOUNTAINSIDE VIEW--DAY
(OS) Gunshot.

Cece sees Judge Teagarden with hunting dog.

TEAGARDEN

Hold there! This is private property. You might get shot!

CECE

I left the cowpath to get to the Bradshaw cabin.

TEAGARDEN

This is serious, Miss Cece. You could get lost in these woods. Let me show you the way back to the Allen place.

CECE

Is this not Starry Mountain?

TEAGARDEN

No, you've wandered over into Frost Hollow. You're on Teadgarden property now.

CECE

You and Cousin Etta are next-door neighbors?

TEAGARDEN

Her land butts up against mine. It's a good two-mile between my door and hers.

Teagarden whistles. A little puppy comes running.

CECE

(scrutinizing the pup)

A little white speckled pup, she said.

(to Judge Teagarden)

CECE (CONT'D)

How old is he?

TEAGARDEN

I would imagine just under a year. I don't know for sure. I only found him two weeks ago.

TEAGARDEN (CONT'D)

The little fellow seems to like coming here to run. Can't imagine how he got here.

CECE

Judge, I think I know whose dog it is.

TEAGARDEN

Good! I want to know who would leave a little dog like this way out here.

CECE

Cousin Etta lost a little dog like that no more than two weeks ago.

TEAGARDEN

Hmph! Even man's best friend can't stand that woman. What did she do to the poor critter to make him take off?

CECE

A bear must have spooked him.

TEAGARDEN

A bear in these parts? I'd hate to give him up unless you're sure. There was no collar or tags when I found him. Of course, that alone suggests an Allen.

CECE

I'm sure you know best. Say, What caused that feud so long ago?

TEAGARDEN

It was right after Mr. Edmund and Ms. Edna Allen died in flames on the Bicentennial. The whole family was crazy with grief. Miss Eliza goaded poor old Mr. Emmett Allen into suing the car company, the gas company, the county roads commissioner, the United States Government and the sovereign nation of Japan.

CECE

What happened?

TEAGARDEN

The case came before my court first thing and I threw it out.

CECE

You did!

TEAGARDEN

I told them to go home and save their money. Nobody was at fault, not even whoever was behind the wheel. I told them that they had suffered a loss--there was no getting around it--but in time they would get over it, so they might as well start now.

CECE

What did they do?

TEAGARDEN

Miss Etta, for one, has been bad mouthing me at the P. O. ever since.

CECE

But you said what needed to be said.

TEAGARDEN

They didn't listen. Not one of them. Mr. Emmett took on Nissan and Mobil Oil, and by the time the eighties rolled around the Allen fortune was spent.

CECE

Was there ever a fortune?

TEAGARDEN

Back before the Civil War maybe. Since then the Allens have remained pillars of the community, but it was only Perry's daddy who made any money. Mr. Edmund had all the smarts and drive,

TEAGARDEN (CONT'D)
well, like they tell of Eulalie.

CECE
You know that old story?

TEAGARDEN
It's legend here in Poor Valley. None
so fair or fine as Miss Eulalie Allen.

CECE
You really think Edgar Allen Poe
came here and wrote a poem "To Eulalie"?

TEAGARDEN
That's what always been said,
though lately now as a kind of joke.
In Slabtown the Allens are called the
Poe People.

CECE
I'm worried I'll never get Perry
out of this valley until he finds proof.

TEAGARDEN
Your Perry is a lot like his daddy.
He'll turn out just fine with a good
woman just as yourself. Only I wouldn't
let him drive.

Teagarden and Cece reach a stile.

TEAGARDEN (CONT'D)
Well, here we are. You go
straight down this path and in no time
you'll see the smoke from Etta Allen's
chimney. Better hurry along. It's still

TEAGARDEN (CONT'D)
winter here in the mountains. Night comes
early and it feels like a cold snap.

INT: RIVER HOUSE--Night
Perry, Eenie, and Emmett upstairs looking over the balcony
as Boone Bradley enters.

BOONE
They're coming tonight.

PERRY
You know for certain?

BOONE
(nodding)
I heard the Webb brothers
down at the sawmill bragging.

EENIE
When you do reckon they'll
get here?

BOONE
Not until after dark. I guess
they'll wait until after dark.

EMMETT
For decency's sake?

PERRY
Maybe so, Uncle Emmett. We'll be
ready for them.

EMMETT
It's getting colder. You don't
suppose we could light a fire just until
they get here?

PERRY
That would ruin the advantage
of surprise, Uncle Emmett.

EENIE
We ain't got too many advantages,
EENIE (CONT'D)
so we'd best keep the one we got.

BOONE
I brought around one advantage.

(Boone pulls out of his overcoat a shotgun.)

BOONE (CONT'D)

It's loaded with rock salt, but
once the Webb boys know the difference,
I'd say, they'll be half way to Slabtown.

PERRY

I can't have any Poor Valley boy
shot on Allen land. We got to fight
them off somehow without blood being shed.

BOONE

These boys are dangerous. It's
going to take more than some jerry-rigged
catawampus to keep Sorry, Vice, and
Rotten Webb from stealing you blind.

PERRY

It's the Allen way.

BOONE

Let's hope your Mister Poe comes
to the Allen's aid once more.

INT: ETTA'S HOUSE--NIGHT

CECE

Cousin Etta, did Perry say when
he would be home?

ETTA

No, child, but I wouldn't expect
him until late tonight.

CECE

He's been working non-stop at the
River House for two days. No sign of the
signature yet?

ETTA

He's got more things on his mind than
Edgar A. Poe's fist.

CECE

Right! The bills and the taxes.
Listen, Etta, I think I may have

CECE (CONT'D)
a way out of all these debts.

ETTA
That's so? Do tell.

CECE
This afternoon I ran
into Judge Teagarden.

ETTA
On Starry Mountain!
Lemme get my gun!

CECE
He's going to help us
with Granny Eliza's estate!

ETTA
We don't need his help.

CECE
Yes, Etta, we do! Do you
want Perry spending every waking
moment night and day at the River
House worrying himself sick!

ETTA
No, I truly don't want that.

CECE
It's too much to ask of him.
There's only so much a person can do.

ETTA
That's right.

CECE
You know Perry. He would blow
out birthday candles with his last
breath, if he thought wishing would
help.

ETTA
Oh, Cece, I've been worried so.

CECE

Well, you can relax. Judge
Teagarden is going to help.

ETTA

What's he going to do?

CECE

He's going to probate Granny
Eliza's will.

ETTA

What does he hope to get
out of that?

CECE

Nothing! He only wants to
be a good neighbor. How long as
he been judge around here?

ETTA

For the past thirty years, why?

CECE

I bet the old rascal knows everybody
in state government. If we ask him,
he might even pull some strings over
the delinquent taxes.

ETTA

For a little girl, you got
awfully big ideas.

(OS) Loud noises outside of someone approaching.

CECE

Someone's outside.

ETTA

(grabbing her gun)

It's that peeping tom
again, come back for a
floor show.

There is a knock at the door. Cece opens it and there stands Judge Teagarden in overcoat with hunting rifle.

CECE

Why, Judge! We were just talking about you.

TEAGARDEN

Miss Etta, I believe I may have something of yours.

Teagarden pulls out of his overcoat a little freckled pup shivering with the cold.

ETTA

Land's sake! It can't be. It looks like little Jupiter, my dog the bear ate.

TEAGARDEN

No bear ate your dog, woman! It ran off, and I'm bringing it back!

ETTA

Well, don't stand out in the cold then. Come inside and set a spell.

CECE

I was telling Cousin Etta about how all you want is to be a good neighbor.

TEAGARDEN

It's what I have always wanted. It's what I believe I have always been.

ETTA

You've not been hanging about here at night spying and tipping over garbage cans?

TEAGARDEN

Of course, not, woman! Have you no respect for the dignity of my robes?

ETTA

It was a bear then.

TEAGARDEN

There haven't been any bears
on Starry Mountain since Elmer
Allen's time.

ETTA

It was some marauder.

TEAGARDEN

There have been no marauders
either since the Civil War.

ETTA

Well, something's been up to no
good around my house lately.
Maybe a peeping tom.

TEAGARDEN

Talk sense. Why would a peeping
tom come here?

ETTA

What's that supposed mean?

CECE

Judge, Etta. We're friends
now, remember.

ETTA

Friends! Not by a long sight!

TEAGARDEN

I'm taking my dog and going home.

ETTA

You take that dog and I'll shoot
you, robes and all!

CECE

Listen!

(OS) Loud noises of crashing garbage cans.

ETTA

It's coming from around the back.

TEAGARDEN

I'll take care of this. You women
stay here.

EXT. Back of Cousin Etta's house. Night.

Judge Teagarden walking stealthily with pointed gun. CECE
and ETTA dog his heels.

TEAGARDEN

(hissing)

I told you both to stay inside.

ETTA

We heard you the first time,
Judge. Don't shoot both barrels.
Save one for me in case you miss.

TEAGARDEN

I won't miss at this range.

Moonlight shines through heavy clouds on the overturned
trash cans. A large raven perched on a garbage bag, flaps
its wings, loudly cackles, and flies off into the night.

CECE

What was that!

ETTA

Why, it was Mr. Poe's bird. It's

ETTA (CONT'D)

come like an omen.

TEAGARDEN

Now I wouldn't worry about that,
Miss Etta. That bird is more Allen
than it is Poe. What did he say?
"Nevermore." Let's call a truce, Etta.
Can the feud be nevermore?

ETTA

Why sure, Judge. I was just waiting
for the right time to forgive you.

CECE

(taking out her list)

I can't wait to tell Perry.

TEAGARDEN

Where is the boy?

ETTA

I don't rightly know.

CECE

Sure you do. He's down at
the River House.

TEAGARDEN

At this time of night? And
this weather. Why, it may snow.

CECE

He's waiting on some friends
of his. The Webb brothers.

TEAGARDEN

Sorry, Vice, and Rotten!

(to ETTA)

You let him face those criminals
in the dark alone?

CECE

Criminals!

ETTA

Now, Judge. This is Allen business.
Emmett and Eenie are there too.

TEAGARDEN

That bird came as an ill omen
all right. Let's hope it is not
too late!

EXT. RIVER HOUSE--NIGHT

An American-made pick-up truck with its lights off rolls down the driveway, comes to a stop, and out slip the Webb brother, Sorry, Vice, & Rotten. Sorry kicks open the front door.

INT: RIVER HOUSE--NIGHT

SORRY

Now remember, steal everything
that ain't red hot or nailed down.

VICE

Get the Allen silver. It's kept
in the dining room.

ROTTEN

Smash the dishes!

(The WEBB BROTHERS move down the hall toward the curved staircase.)

ROTTEN

Do you hear something?

VICE

This old house is haunted.

SORRY

Any pissant Allens in here?

Perry steps into the moonlight from the curve of the banister before them.

PERRY

This is Allen property, and
you're trespassing. Clear out!

SORRY

What you gonna do about it?

EENIE

(rising up from the banister
behind the WEBB BROTHERS)

Here's what! Now, Uncle Emmett.

EENIE let's go of the cantilever chandelier wrapped in quilts. It swings in an arc into Sorry Webb lifting him off his feet and into VICE who falls back into ROTTEN who falls

back on the trapdoor that UNCLE EMMETT opens by pulling the bell rope and sending all three WEBB BROTHERS to the cellar floor covered in mattresses.

EMMETT

(stepping out of the shadows)

Perry caught the Webb boys. We did it!
Funny, I don't feel cold anymore.

BOONE

(rising into the moonlight)

I told Edie I'd ring the dinner bell
as soon as we whipped the Webb boys.

PERRY

When did you see, Edwina?

EENIE

And when did you start calling
her Edie?

EMMETT

We caught'em, Perry, we
caught'em good.

PERRY

Yeah, but it's like catching
skunks. Whatcha gonna do when
you caught'em?

(OS) A police car siren.

(Car lights down the driveway shine through the windows.)

EENIE

It's Earl Peabody.

EARL

(entering through open front door)

I'm awful sorry about this,
fellers, but the Judge called me
up and made me come out here.

EMMETT

How did he find out?

EARL

Oh, the judge is awful smart.
When he called he had just
returned a lost dog.

PERRY

There's no trouble here, Earl.
Everything's fine on Allen land.

EARL

(glancing at the doorway
and the rigged pendulum)
You sure you couldn't use
another hand around here.

PERRY

Nosir, there's nothing around here
that concerns the law.

EARL

(walking over and calling down
the open pit)
You Webb boys need any help with
these Allens?

SORRY

Just a friendly visit, officer.

VICE

One neighbor calling on another.

ROTTEN

That's all.

EMMETT

You got your answer, Earl Peabody,
EMMETT (CONT'D)
now scoot!

EARL

Just the same, I'll be out in my
patrol car to escort that pick-up off
Allen land. Say your good-bye, boys!

EARL exits, and Perry takes a rope ladder and drops it down the opening of wine cellar's trapdoor.

PERRY

(calling down into the pit)

We never intended to involve the police.

SORRY

(climbing up)

No harm done.

PERRY

Then there's the door; don't call again!

(OS) The dinner bell begins to ring.

EXT. BACK OF THE RIVER HOUSE--NIGHT.
There is a rustling in the brush.

PERRY

Boone? Edwina?

CECE steps into the moonlight.

CECE

Are you all right? Why didn't you tell me you were in trouble? I'm worried sick!

PERRY

Everything's fine. Nothing could be better!

CECE

Why, what happened?

PERRY

We bested the Webb brothers and all with the help of Edgar Allan Poe.

CECE

I'll never understand you.

Boone and Edie enter as snow begins to fall.

BOONE

Look who I found.

EDIE

Eddie, Sissy! Isn't it glorious?

PERRY

Edie, we should go spelunking.

CECE

At this time of night? In this weather? It's starting to snow.

BOONE

Aw, this is no more than powdered sugar. It won't lay.

PERRY

The old mountain is just dusting herself off for spring. You wait, tomorrow will be bright and clear.

EDIE

I bet the mountain laurel will bloom.

PERRY

I bet I know where.

EDIE

Eulalie's cave on Starry Mountain.

EXT. ROCKY BLUFF BANKED WITH BLOOMING RHODODENDRONS--DAY.
PERRY, CECE, EDIE, & BOONE hike through the rock outcropping among the flowers. EDIE leads them to a limestone cave through an entrance bathed in sunlight.

EDIE

Over here.

She takes them to a smooth wall of stone.

EDIE (CONT'D)

When the morning lights shines
just so . . . here it is!

A shaft of sunlight illuminates an old carving in the rock wall.

CECE

E. Allen + E. POE. That can't be!

EDIE

But it is. That's why we just had
to come spelunking. Who would believe
it otherwise?

CECE

It's hard to believe even now.
How can you be sure that someone didn't
come up here and carve the name for
a joke.

PERRY

This is Allen land. Nobody comes
up her, except Allens, and the legend
of Eulalie has been family lore since
Poe's time.

(Flashback of Eulalie and Poe.)

EDIE (VO)

The story goes that for a while
Poe kept his feelings for Eulalie a
secret. He delayed so long declaring
himself that her sister Eugenia fell
in love with him too.

PERRY (VO)

But Poe loved Eulalie, so he wrote his
poem "Eulalie," and they carved their
initials to show their undying love.

Flashback of Eugenia.

EDIE (VO)

But Eugenia found the poem with Poe's signature and stole it, and disappeared.

PERRY

And when they found Eugenia, she was dead with the stolen poem clutched in her fist. They buried Eugenia with it still in her grasp.

EDIE

So Eugenia won in death what she could not have in life. She got the poem and made Eulalie give up Poe because of her death.

PERRY

Grandmother Perry always claimed there was another copy of the poem written out in Poe's hand. She saw it when she was a schoolgirl just learning how to read.

EDIE

What are you doing, Boone?

BOONE

(with pen knife cutting
into the stone)

These lovers have been alone
all these years.

PERRY

You're right, Boone, they
need company.

Perry takes his pocket knife and carves into the wall too.

EDIE

Edgar Perry Allen what are you
doing to Eulalie's wall!

CECE

(reading)

P. A. + C.C. What's Boone
carving?

EDIE

(reading)

B. B. + E. A. Is that me?
Oh, Boone, how did you know?

BOONE

It was my tell-tale heart.

CECE

Perry, this is much more romantic
than a big engagement dinner. Somehow
this seems much more official than a ring.

PERRY

I only wish the whole world can see it.

CECE

Maybe the whole world will. Listen,
with Boone working on the River House. . . .

BOONE

I am?

CECE

Sure. We just now hired you. It can
be a bed and breakfast. This cave is a
natural draw. We could build cabins,
have a camp, oh, oh! An RV park!

EDIE

So long as it was a tasteful trailer park.

PERRY

Where are we going to get the money?

CECE

I got that taken care of. While you
were out whipping the Webb boys, I was working
on Judge Teagarden. He's going to bat
for us with the state over land taxes.

PERRY

Why would he do that?

CECE

Let's just say that before long there
may be the judge and cousin Etta's initials
up here.

BOONE

A blasted miracle!

CECE

And I've made arrangements for a big
auction back in California.

PERRY

What have we got to sell in California?

CECE

Nothing there, silly. It's all the stuff
you got back here. I've talked with Maxine
at Hotel Albacore. Their spring antiquing
festival is coming up. All we have to do
is cart up all the old odds and ends at the
River House and ship them west.

EDIE

Oh, Eddie! Are you going to sell
the Allen heirlooms?

PERRY

Oh, course not!

(to CECE)

Cece, How could you make a business
deal like that?

CECE

You wanted my help. Those shoulders

CECE (CONT'D)

to lean on? Besides, how can it be
behind your back when I haven't even
seen your back for the past three days?

BOONE

That's a long time to leave a woman
like Cece alone, Perry.

PERRY

Yeah, another day and she'd have
sold the farm out from under us!

EDIE

Now, Eddie, I'm sure Sissy only
meant well.

CECE

It's Cece! (to Perry) And selling
this farm is what will have to be
done if you can't pay the taxes!

PERRY

I'll pay the taxes.

CECE

On your librarian's salary?
Assuming you got your part time job
once you get back to California!

PERRY

You make me sound like some
deadbeat? I wouldn't take a
penny from you.

CECE

And I wouldn't take a penny for you
or this old place.

BOONE

Now, you two don't want to
say something you'll regret.

CECE

It's too late! I already regret!

PERRY

You regret my proposal of marriage?

CECE

I've put up with a good bit of guff
since I got here because you were my
man. Maybe not the best man, possibly
not even the right man, but a man!

PERRY

What does that mean! Didn't I whip the Webb brothers?

CECE

Oh, if I hadn't told Judge Teagarden, Sorry, Vice, or Rotten would have had you for lunch.

PERRY

You told! I couldn't figure out how the judge knew.

CECE

The whole valley knew, you big dumb cluck!

EDIE

Oh, dear, maybe we shouldn't have gone spelunking.

PERRY

I thought you understood. But you're calling the law and selling out birthright at some yard sale show you don't understand anything. Otherwise, you wouldn't make us a laughing stock.

CECE

News flash, Pal. The whole valley's laughing already. Do you know what they call the Allens?

EDIE

Don't say it. Please don't say it!

CECE

Poe people!

PERRY

Yuppie carpetbagger!

CECE

Yeah? Well, this yuppie is packing her carpetbag and then it's good-bye Poor Valley!

CECE stomps off out of the cave.

EDIE

Oh, Eddie, speak to her. Call her back! Call her back!

INT: PHONE EXCHANGE--DAY

Emmalou sits at the board.

BRENDA(OS)

I told him no I wouldn't marry him until he found a job.

EMMALOU

Job's a hard thing to come by in Poor Valley.

BRENDA(OS)

Eenie better try.

INT: EDIE AT PHONE--DAY

EDIE

Emmalou, I need to use the party line. It's an emergency!

BRENDA(OS)

What's wrong! Who's in trouble.

EDIE

Who is this I'm talking to?

(CROSS CUT)

EMMALOU

It's Brenda on the line. Eenie popped the question and she turned him down flat.

EDIE

Oh, no! Another doomed bride of the Family Allen.

EMMALOU

What are you going on about?

EDIE
Cece left! We got to find Eddie.

ETTA(OS)
Emmalou, let me on. It's
an emergency.

EMMALOU
Who is this!

ETTA
It's Etta Allen. There's a car
thief in the valley. Some marauder
stole my truck.

EDIE
You're not driving Cece to
the airport?

ETTA
Land's sake, don't worry.
Until my truck's returned, Cece's
not going anywhere.

BRENDA
Oh, yes, she is, and I know who with.

EXT. POST OFFICE--DAY
Cece waits on bench with suitcase as Eenie drives up in the
Essex. Wordlessly she approaches the car.

EENIE
My *Popular Mechanics* finally came.

INT: ESSEX--DAY
EENIE and CECE riding wordlessly.

INT: EMMALOU AT PHONEBOARD--DAY
EDIE (OV)
Emmalou, is Cousin Etta still there?

INT: ETTA'S KITCHEN--DAY

ETTA
I'm here!

EDIE(OS)

She's gone! Eenie's driving her to
Slabtown to catch a bus to Knoxville.

ETTA

You gotta find Perry. I gotta
find my truck. Emmalou!

INT:EMMALOU AT PHONEBAORD--DAY

ETTA(OS)

Get a hold of Judge Teagarden.
Tell him I need a lift.

INT: ESSEX--DAY

EENIE and CECE ride wordlessly.

EENIE

Not long until we reach Starry Gap.

CECE

And it's good-bye Poor Valley.

EENIE

(craning his head)

Is that Cousin Etta's truck up ahead?
What would she be doing outside the
valley this early in the day?

CECE

I left Cousin Etta at home.
Her truck had been stolen!

EENIE

Whoever stole it is coming on
mighty fast!

CECE

You don't think?

EENIE

The Webb brothers!

The pick-up truck pulls a fast U-turn in the middle of the road forcing Eenie in the Essex to stop.

INT: ESSSEX--DAY

EENIE

Stop! Don't shoot!

Perry jumps out of the truck.

PERRY

Cece! Cece Clowder! Where are you!

Cece jumps out of the Essex.

CECE

I'm here!

PERRY

I've been all the way to Knoxville and back, afraid I couldn't find you!

CECE

You drove!

PERRY

I wasn't scared a bit. My only fear was losing you.

Patrol car with Earl Peabody driving and Judge Teagarden and Cousin Etta inside.

EARL

Halt, you're under arrest!
Perry, that you?

ETTA

You stole my truck? (to Teagarden)
Judge, I want those charges dropped.

PERRY

Cece, you forgive me, don't you,
after I've proved my love for you?

CECE

Well, I know that's awfully brave

CECE (CONT'D)
of you, driving a truck and all,
but maybe I don't want a brave man.
Not if he has to be an insensitive
jerk! I put up with a good bit and
gave up a whole lot to be here this week.

PERRY
I know it. Forgive me. You love me,
so you might as well forgive me because
you know I love you.

JUDGE
(to Eenie)
You got this car running all by yourself?

EENIE
It's my pride and joy.

INT: LOG FORT COMMON ROOM--DAY
Mamie, Cece, and Perry sit having tea.

PERRY
That was when Judge Teagarden
offered Eenie a county job at
the courthouse garage.

CECE
So Brenda said yes.

MAMIE
Looks like a new Allen coming
this year.

PERRY
Maybe. There still might be another
PERRY (CONT'D)
falling out. They happen to the Allen men.

CECE
And only the Allen women know why.

MAMIE
So you two back together?

PERRY

I've promised never to be a man again.

CECE

(embracing him)

All I ever really wanted in a marriage
was someone to cook for me.

PERRY

We've reconsidered Cece's idea
of an auction. None of the stuff
in the River House we grew up with.
There are no heirlooms, except the
Allen pearls, and the gold clock, perhaps.

MAMIE

That reminds me.

Mamie goes to the cupboard where the gold clock sits.

CECE

Of course, we need to go through
everything thoroughly before shipping,
in case there's money in the pockets,
or old photos in the books

PERRY

The signature. (rising) I just
remembered my favorite story by
Edgar Allan Poe.

CECE

What's that?

PERRY

"The Purloined Letter." Never

PERRY (CONT'D)

overlook the obvious.

Perry goes to the clock and pushes in the gold name plate
"Astarte." A hidden drawer opens. Inside is an ancient
envelope.

CECE

What is it?

MAMIE

(taking Perry's hands that hold the
envelope into her own)

Sit down, son. There's something you
need to know.

PERRY

The family secret?

MAMIE

It's what scared your granny Eliza
into being a hermit for the rest of her
life. The true story of Eulalie, and
Eugenia, and Edgar Allan Poe. As I heerd
tell it. That poet fellow came to Poor
Valley hoping to find some of his kin.

FLASHBACK of Edgar Allan Poe entering Poor Valley at Starry
Gap where he meets Old Man WEBB.

POE

Pardon me, good man, I'm looking for
the Poes of Poe Valley.

WEBB

Ain't no Poes in Po' Valley.

POE

(replacing the card reading
"Poe" in his cardcase with the card
reading "Allan.")

Then who are the armigerous families
around here?

WEBB

You must mean the Allens.

POE

Allan, eh? I owe my godfather money.

(replacing the card "Allan"
with the card reading "Perry")

Pray introduce me as Cadet Edgar Perry.

Flashback of WEBB bringing Poe to the River House where
Eulalie and Eugenia wait on the front porch.

MAMIE (VO)

Edgar Allan Poe loved both sisters.
While all the Allens saw him playing up
to Miss Eulalie, he was secretly courting
her sister Miss Eugenia. When Miss Eulalie
found out, she was the one who tore up the poem.

PERRY (VO)

How did she find out?

MAMIE (VO)

Miss Eugenia began to show. Poe
had to leave that morning without even
saying good-bye. That's why Miss Eugenia
saved her copy to remember him by.

PERRY

Her copy? She had a copy of the
poem? Did he sign it?

MAMIE (nodding)

Here it is.

CLOSE-UP of Poem, which is the same as the poem "Eulalie"
by Poe, only this one is called "Eugenia" and signed Edgar
Perry.

PERRY

(handing document over to CECE)

It's the signature he used to
deceive his creditors. I finally
found the proof I spent my life
searching for, and it's worthless.

CECE

It's all over now and it never
happened anyway.

PERRY

Eugenia Allan bore Edgar Poe an
illegitimate child! We are Edgar
Allan Poe's bastard children.

MAMIE

Miss Eugenia left for good, but
in time her son returned with his family,
and they were the first Perrys.

CECE

Eulalie must have spent her whole
life spinning yarns just to save
her pride.

MAMIE

Now, don't say nothing bad about Miss
Eulalie. It was her that made the Allens
what they are.

PERRY

You're right there, Mamie.

MAMIE

I guess there's nothing to keep you
from going back to California.

PERRY

Well....

CECE

There is one thing we still
want to do.

INT: RIVER HOUSE. DAY

The center staircase is decorated for a wedding. Eenie and
Perry in dark suits stand at the bottom of the stairs as a
bride veiled in white passes among the Allens and Perrys
kin. A side view shows us the bride is Brenda. Perry
looks across the room at Cece with corsage who stands as
maid of honor next to Judge Teagarden who performs the
ceremony.

INT: RECEPTION ROOM--DAY

Brenda and Eenie talk to Mamie.

BRENDA

If it's a boy, we're calling him Elvis.

Edie and Boone Bradley stand silently watching the dancers trot by. Judge Teagarden dances with Etta while Earl Peabody and Uncle Emmett dance with Emmalou and Erdene.

INT: DINING ROOM--DAY

Boy and Girl Ellison lick the wedding cake.

EXT. RIVER--DAY

The Webb Brothers peer over the weeds at the goings-on.

EXT. DINNER BELL--DAY

The Raven flies off the dinner bell when it starts to ring.

INT: STAIRCASE--DAY

Cece and Perry run down the staircase to the luggage waiting for them at the bottom of the stairs.

PERRY

It's time for Cece and me to go.

EDIE

Before you go. I want Cece to take these.

CECE

The Allen pearls.

EDIE

For your wedding this fall.

CECE

Thank you, thank you all.

PERRY

We should go if we plan
to catch that red-eye out of
Knoxville tonight. Cece, why
are you crying?

CECE

I don't want to say good-bye!

FADE OUT