

EXTRACT

CHILLING AND KILLING MY ANNABEL LEE

Aidan Fennessy

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NOTE ON THE SCRIPT

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CHARACTERS:

Christina Muzy

34.

(Also plays **Angelica** and **Debra** and **Woman**)

Edgar Lancedowne

43.

her “lover”.

Detective Graham Calminir

45.

Detective Douglas Wesin

27.

Arthur Kilty.

Publisher, 40-50

SETTING:

The play occurs in a nasty little netherworld that is neither here nor now. A wrap around psych like a movie set contains the stage. It depicts a sepia sky that continues across the floor also. Costumes and props are 1940's noir. Stetsons, pinstripes etc. Again grey scale or sepia with the face bringing the only colour. The exception to this is Christina. The space is delineated through lighting which should also have a noir feel. Large shadows hitting the psych and silhouetted figures etc. Added to this is the notion of luminescence.

For example Edgar's typewriter could luminate through the keys, the detectives desk could have an opaque top, the bed could glow a certain points, the whisky bottle etc. The rationale for this is to place the play outside of naturalism and support the idea that artistic inspiration is often spawned by the luminosity of objects. It is vital that the setting is not naturalistic but falls between two worlds. In terms of score I can envisage a sound scape and perhaps a single trumpet or harmonica.

The scenes occur in :

Edgar's rather squalid flat. Kitchen and bedroom (Perhaps this is elevated)

The Detectives office.

Kilty's office.

A street scene.

The interview room.

A Corridor.

“The Enchanted Hunters”. A pub.

Playwright's Notes

This play has presented problems for a number of those who have read it or workshopped it. The reasons for this is that it is problematic. It presents itself as being that which it is not. For me the play is about the twisted process of creation. It is about mythologising and reinventing the past through the act of writing. This is an interesting idea but not one that is immediately theatrical. So I've made it something else. A clue might be found in the title. The Edgar Allen Poe poem that it is taken from refers to a real life childhood love of Poe's who died of consumption in her early teens. It has been speculated that their romance was also sexual. Poe was evidently shattered by the death of Annabel Lee and a similar thematic of lost love, regret and death occurs in many of his works. Nabakov used the poem as the background story of Humbert Humbert in "Lolita". My interest in the poem is the action that "chilling and killing" imposes on the real memory of Annabel. Poe in fact entombs and freezes the memory, the feeling, through his writing, forever. And that is precisely what our Edgar does in this. He reinvents his loss to make it beautiful and bearable. He manipulates the circumstance of his grief and guilt and subverts the "crime" into a love story where all is forgiven or at the very least "crafted". He is the only real character in the play, except perhaps for the rebellious memory of Christina. Although the action of the play occurs over time it is in effect the course of a nights writing.

ACT ONE
SCENE 1:

A match is struck in the darkness. We see a small dirty kitchen. The light flickers about until it finds the end of Edgar's cigarette. In his early forties he looks worn out and ragged. There is an old typewriter in front of him on the kitchen table. He rolls on the paper in the typewriter slightly and stares blankly for a moment. Frustrated, he scrambles through a pile of papers on the floor until he finds what he is looking for. A manuscript. He flips through this until he finds the page and then begins to read, smoking and rubbing his hands gingerly as he goes. A dim tungsten glow issues from the typewriter illuminating his face.

Edgar:

The cigarette lighter popped abruptly as the car edged its way over 30. Sliding neatly from third to fourth he sat back in the seat and lit up. His hands rested gingerly on the wheel, still aching. He rolled through a corner and found himself in the familiar backstreets of his childhood. The old church, covered in vines, where he'd caught pigeons as a boy, watched him with a dark air of rebuke as he rumbled by. A loose corrugated sheet slapped back and forth, like a tired applause, as he pulled into the disused ice works. He sat for a moment and let the engine idle as he finished his cigarette. He watched the thin plumes glide over the dash board lights. He was tired.

(beat)

He got out and pulled her body unceremoniously from the back seat until it hit the gravel with a crystalline thud. He turned her face upwards and brushed the hair from her eyes. Her bluish face was full of frozen surprise as she gaped upwards at the stars. He followed her gaze up into the heavens and tried to catch onto the tail of a vague thought that was rocketing in his head, until he felt the tiredness in him again. He scratched the image of an angel in the dirt by her head. His winged seraph pointing to the crime. He stood up with a sigh and then pulled the car around until she lay in his headlights. A siren wailed out from the local cannery for a change of shift. He lit another cigarette and let the car slowly roll over her. He flicked on the radio and cruised out of the ice works gates still chasing that rocket in his head.

(He rises and reads to himself a poem which has been pinned to the door frame. He then returns to the type writer and types.)

Edgar:

There is...nothing...more terrifying....than...a...blank...piece of paper.

(Edgar rises, painfully adjusting his back and starts moving towards the bedroom.)

Edgar:

I think you've really hurt my hands. It hurts to close them.

(The bedroom lamps flick on revealing an empty unmade bed. Edgar talks as if there is someone in the room.)

Edgar:

Don't worry about the dishes I'll get them in the morning. If I can open these hands in the morning.....

(A siren is heard in the distance. Edgar addresses an empty chair.)

Come on then, it's late... hop into bed....Christina...silly...hop into bed...

Edgar quietly begins to sob then reaches down and flicks the lamp off:

SCENE 2:

(Lights snap up on Detective Wesin A short muscular man in his late twenties who is neatly dressed and slick. He is on the phone.)

Wesin:

No... well... I've got him here now. I'm assuming the details have all been sorted. Yes...well, I'm not sure, we'll have to see about that. Why isn't Casper doing this?... It's not my bloody responsibility... He's what?...Demoted!...I didn't hear about that...When did this happen?...You know why don't you...All those files went missing rather mysteriously didn't they on that Gilmore assignment...Of course it was, he botched it... What? Him? That old dinosaur no...no he was taken off it. ..Detective Calminir...Yes...Conflict of interest with the Annabel Lee case....Department said he'd personalised the investigation. ..Flew a little close to the flame...Don't ask me....Maybe he's a romantic. Any replacement for Casper then?...Really? That'll make things interesting won't it...Are you coming to the pub tonight?...Don't wear that thing you had on last time....the red one with that low cut...yes...I'm only flesh and blood...meaning that I won't be held responsible for my actions.*(He hangs up)*. Yes, you may indeed need to bring your handcuffs.

(He hangs up and winds his office chair up and sits again. Happy, he then sits in the opposite chair. He winds this one down, and sits in it. He then takes files out of his desk and arranges them importantly. There is a knock on the door and he grabs a piece of paper and holds it up.)

Wesin:

Come.

Edgar:

Detective Wesin?

Wesin:

Yes, I'll just be one moment.

(Edgar stands awkwardly at the door while Wesin appears busy making notes)

Wesin:

I'm sorry, come in, make yourself comfortable.

Edgar:

Thankyou.

Wesin:

Alright then... Mr Edgar Lancedowne...

(beat)

Cup of tea?

Edgar:

Tea would be fine.

(Wesin rises and starts making the tea.)

Edgar:

White with one thankyou.

Wesin:

That's how my mother has it. "White with one, no harm done."

Edgar:

Very wise.

Wesin:

Don't know what it means, 'no harm done'. I don't think I've ever asked her. Odd phrase don't you think?

Edgar:

One sugar is better than two.

Wesin:

That's what I thought. Hardly seems worth saying though.

Edgar:

It's the rhyme. Gives it some sort of weight.

Wesin:

"A moment on the lips, an eternity on the hips".

Edgar:
Yes.

(Wesin sets the tea down and pulls out a form)

Wesin:
Name?

Edgar:
Edgar Lancedowne.

Wesin:
Address?

Edgar:
7-43 Coldac Street, Edington.

Wesin:
Telephone.

Edgar:
No.

Wesin:
No telephone?

Edgar:
No. I find them disturbing.

Wesin:
How's that?

Edgar:
Nervy. They make me nervy.

Wesin:
No telephone. Age?

Edgar:
43.

Wesin:
Same as your address.

Edgar:
Yes.

Wesin:
Sex?

Edgar:
Er...male.

Wesin:
You're meant to say "yes please".

Edgar:
Oh yes, yes please.

Wesin:
Now this letter.

(He holds up a piece of paper)

Edgar:
Yes.

Wesin:
Hang on, it's the...what is it?

Edgar:
The 23rd.

Wesin:
23rd, yes, sorry. And this was sent the...No date on it.

Edgar:
I sent it last Thursday.

Wesin:
Which was the?

Edgar:
16th.

Wesin:
16th. Yes, lost the envelope somewhere I'm afraid.

Edgar:
Right...and you would have received it Friday.

Wesin:
Ah, no, actually this just got to me today. Hence the delay.

Edgar:

Yes, I was curious as to why you didn't call me straightaway.

Wesin:

You don't have a telephone.

Edgar:

I mean call around.

(beat)

Wesin:

Right you are. Interdepartmental wranglings. Staffing shake-up. Now, tell me about this letter.

Edgar:

Well, it's all fairly self evident.

Wesin:

Do you think so?

Edgar:

Well, yes, I think I've been fairly clear.... May I see it?

Wesin:

Not for the moment. Do you work?

Edgar:

No, I'm a... work disability.

Wesin:

And what was that?

Edgar:

I damaged my back and there have been complications. Blackouts, migraines.

Wesin:

Blackouts? A gentleman working here last year severed his arm in a car accident. Hasn't worked since.

Edgar:

That's terrible.

Wesin:

Oh he's fine. Harmless.

Edgar:

Cars can be very dangerous.

Wesin:

I said he's harmless, armless. It was an elaborate joke Mr Lancedowne. We try to keep these interviews as light as possible.

Edgar:

I'm sorry I'm just not...I'm a bit nervous.

Wesin:

Understandable. What was your previous employ?

Edgar:

I was a storeman. At the cannery.

Wesin:

Children?

Edgar:

No.

Wesin:

Not that you know of right.

Edgar:

I'm fairly sure.

Wesin:

Religious orientation.

Edgar:

Atheist.

Wesin:

Atheist.....Well there you go.

Edgar:

Sorry?

Wesin:

Why don't you believe there is a God? I'm curious.

Edgar:

I just don't think there is.

Wesin:

Mr Lancedowne, you seem to me to be an astute person, however “I don’t think there is” hardly constitutes an argument. This is a very big issue. One of the biggest and one that you’ve failed to reconcile. God is the keystone in the fabric of our society, but you, I believe, haven’t given it much thought. Have you?

(beat)

Edgar:

I don’t believe in an omnipotent God...

Wesin:

Do you believe in heaven and hell?

Edgar:

Does this relate to the interview?

Wesin:

I’m just curious. Indulge me.

Edgar:

No I don’t, not in a spiritual sense, no.

Wesin:

More a psychological sense.

Edgar:

Earthly.

Wesin:

Earthly? Tell me then. How do you formulate a moral code.

Edgar:

I do what I feel is right.

Wesin:

Again Mr Lancedowne. A statement not an argument. What I’m asking is do you formulate a moral code from the teachings of God or do you just formulate your own?

Edgar:

I guess I form my own.

Wesin:

And what informs that formulation?

Edgar:

I...society.

Wesin:

And what is the keystone in the fabric of our society.

Edgar:

The law?

Wesin:

God. No man is a law unto himself. We are all informed, directly or otherwise by the word of God.

Edgar:

Yes.

Wesin:

How can he not. God exists because he informs. God is in this very room. He is pouring from this letter in front of me.

Edgar:

I see.

Wesin:

I hope I wasn't too heavy on you then Edgar. I was making a point. Something to think about that's all.

Edgar:

It caught me off guard.

Wesin:

Yes.

(Pause.)

Edgar:

In regards to the letter.

Wesin:

Know what hell is?

Edgar:

No.

Wesin:

Demotion. That's what we say when a colleague is demoted. They've been sent to hell.

(beat)

Edgar:
Yes.

Wesin:
Yes
(beat)
The letter. Odd sort of thing to write.

Edgar:
I felt it was the right thing to do.

Wesin:
Did you?

Edgar:
Yes. I did.

Wesin:
Who told you it was the right thing to do?

Edgar:
I did.

Wesin:
I see. Your personal code. Sudden explosion of conscience.

Edgar:
It's a confession. Do you mind if we talk about that.

Wesin:
Certainly.

Edgar:
Well, that is why I'm here.

Wesin:
And that's why I'm here too.

Edgar:
Yes.

Wesin:
We're here to confess.

Edgar:
Yes.

Wesin:

Before we start on that. One more thing I'd like to pick your brain about. You can smoke if you like.

Edgar:

No thankyou.

Wesin:

Do you mind if I do.

Edgar:

No, go ahead.

Wesin:

Well thankyou. It is my office.

Edgar:

I don't mind if you smoke.

Wesin:

Thankyou. Very accommodating of you.

(Wesin lights a cigarette)

Edgar:

What would you like to talk about before we proceed?

Wesin:

You seem very keen to get down to this letter of confession that I have in front of me.

Edgar:

Well, yes I am.

Wesin:

That seems very odd to me.

Edgar:

That's why I'm here.

Wesin:

Yes, however, considering the contents of the letter it all seems a little misplaced.

Edgar:

It was the right thing to do.

Wesin:

But rather the wrong way to do it. Why not call?

Edgar:

I don't have a telephone.

Wesin:

You've posted a nicely typed letter, detailing, what it does, then you've waited eight days for a knock on the door. All this it seems, after you've got away with the crime. How is that?

Edgar:

It's not something I've ever done before and to be quite honest I was a little nervous...facing up.

Wesin:

I can understand that.

Edgar:

Besides the gravity of this, whole...business, deemed it necessary I should think to employ a degree of formality.

Wesin:

For the records.

Edgar:

Yes.

Wesin:

Are you a formal 'type' Mr Lancedowne?

Edgar:

In some ways but I wanted this to be orderly.

Wesin:

This "business". You called it "business".

Edgar:

Yes.

Wesin:

What would you like me to do then?

Edgar:

Well I assume there is some sort of due process involved. Laying charges. I don't know. Fingerprinting.

Wesin:

Trial etc, yes however before we proceed there is the small matter of the crime.

Edgar:

That's all detailed in the letter.

Wesin:

I've read the letter but I still have no crime. Perhaps you could decipher it for me.

Edgar:

I think that if you read just down about half way, there that -

Wesin:

Do you like the police Mr Lancedowne?

Edgar:

I've never had much call to form an opinion really. Umm, yes I believe you do a good job of upholding the law.

Wesin:

Society's moral code in a sense.

Edgar:

Yes. Why?

Wesin:

I wondered if you'd ever contemplated it as a career.

Edgar:

No.

Wesin:

It's a good job. You get to meet some nice people.

Edgar:

Really?

Wesin:

Yes really. People like yourself Mr Lancedowne. I always wanted to be in the force. My father was a policeman. A real man's man. He was the top in his field. It seemed a natural progression for me. There are drawbacks of course. Mainly in paperwork involved. Reams and reams of reports that, for the most part, don't have any significant use. A lot of time wasting. The thing that gets me though is that we spend half our professional lives behind a desk, not out there. Where it matters. I'd like to ask you a simple question and I'd like you to answer honestly. Are you wasting my fucking time?

Edgar:

No...I...I don't know what to say. No.

Wesin:

Fine, that's fine. That's all I needed to know. Sorry about the swearing.

Edgar:

That's quite alright. I can imagine how a job like this can become quite stressful.

Wesin:

Only when my time is wasted Mr Lancedowne. Only then.

(Pause.)

Wesin:

Alright. Would you care to read the letter?

Edgar:

Certainly.

Wesin:

Ready when you are.

Edgar:

Alright... Attention. Police. Homicide Division. I am writing to you concerning a matter which I feel I must resolve. It concerns the murder of Miss *Christina Musy* of 43 Coldac Street, Edington. She has lived with me for the past six months now and I regret to inform you that on the second of this month, a Monday evening, she died. At the time I believed that it was a spontaneous action, an accident almost. But upon reflection I realise that I had indeed murdered her with a cold and malicious intent. I can only put it down to the resultant pressures in our relationship, that I could not, or failed to resolve. For this action I am sorry and wish to incur the full force of the law. Here below is a detailed statement of the events leading up to and including her death. Please don't hesitate -

Wesin:

Fine, very good, very straight forward.

Edgar:

And what happens now?

Wesin:

Well let's not jump the gun. I have a few questions, regarding your relationship with Miss Musy. I'm assuming Miss?

Edgar:

Yes yes , as far as I know.

Wesin:

And you only knew her for six months?

Edgar:

Yes.

Wesin:

And where did you meet?

Edgar:

Where did we meet? We met in...by a...a bookshop. We met in a bookshop.

Wesin:

Mmm.

Edgar:

Crime specialist in Clapham Road.

Wesin:

You read crime novels then.

Edgar:

Yes. Big fan.

Wesin:

Never have had an interest.

Edgar:

She was a writer. A crime writer.

Wesin:

Published?

Edgar:

No. Not for want of trying though.

Wesin:

Is she good?

Edgar:

She was I think.

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