

Annabelle Lee

by Angie

In this kingdom by the sea

- Edgar Allen Poe (Annabel Lee)



Vincent was arguing with Elliot on the 'Compass Rose' ... and then everything exploded. He was thrown into the water, which put out the fire on his clothes. He was so stunned he could only grab blindly for something to keep him afloat, which happened to be a piece of wood.

The light from the burning boat showed him it had lettering on it 'Annabelle Lee'. He couldn't make sense of that, but held onto it as he used his other arm and legs to move him closer to the dock. He was too weak to do more and he couldn't hear anything at all - he had been deafened. He could see, though, and any lights were moving further away from him. Natural caution, and the fact he hurt everywhere, made him move slowly amid the debris, as if carried on the tide.

After a long time, he managed to reach a set of concrete steps leading down from the dock and pulled himself up. He sat on the steps for a longer time, sodden, weary, heartsick and in pain. The piece of wood was still in his hand. He looked at it, and realized the lettering was different, under the light standard from the dock. It said 'Compass Rose'. He flipped it over and was relieved to see 'Annabelle Lee' on the other side. That meant he wasn't mad. It still made no sense.

There was no time to puzzle it out. He slid onto his knees and then slowly moved up the steps to the edge of the dock. He looked over it cautiously, but saw no one and sensed nothing. He was still deaf, but he hoped that would pass. He oozed onto the dock and slouched behind the nearest cover, a bunch of shipping containers.

For the next several hours he made his slow way to the only place he could go - Catherine's grave. He used the outer tunnels for a while, but never got close to the home tunnels. He did not want to see or meet anyone he knew.

He had failed. Elliot was probably dead, and any help he might have had to find his son had died with him - or was beyond his reach. He had brought the board along, instinctively. It

seemed important, although he couldn't have said why. He had to get to the cemetery at Hamilton Heights. He left the board, finally, in a tunnel narrow enough to allow him to use both hands for support. He trusted he would remember where it was. He was too exhausted to carry it further. Walking upright took all his concentration.

He reached the grave and collapsed on it, gratefully. He no longer cared what happened to him.

The next few days left him no time to think. Diana had found him and somehow got him to safety - her flat. He had only blurred memories of that. He must have been able to help her to some extent.

Diana fed him, bathed his facial cuts, and gave him water. Finally, when she had had a visitor one night and went down to meet them, he left without being seen and returned to the tunnels.

When he was finally in his own chamber, washed, his clothing discarded as scrap, and dressed in his nightclothes, he tried to find a nagging memory, one that had bothered him since the explosion. He closed his eyes and tried to recover the horrors of that terrible night.

Then he remembered. There had been a board. Yes, that board had saved his life. He could remember no more about it, but was sure it was important, and had a memory of leaving it somewhere. Satisfied that he was on the right track, he went to sleep.

He felt much better when he awakened at last, remembered something of his conversation with Father on his return, which included a news report on the fire and destruction of the 'Compass Rose'. Something bothered him about the name, and finally he remembered the board again, and what had been on the other side - 'Annabelle Lee'.

Washing and dressing quickly, he made his way to the distant tunnel where he last remembered seeing the board. He found it leaning against a wall, and picked it up.

What was it about the name? He carried the board back to his chamber and then went for breakfast, sure that something would become clear more quickly, if he didn't pressure himself. And he was very hungry.

He sat down beside Father and gobbled up the porridge gratefully. He took great swigs of tea and finally sighed.

" 'Annabelle Lee' ."

Father looked at him. "What Vincent? Edgar Allen Poe?"

Vincent looked at the patriarch, surprised. Of course. Why had he not recognized it immediately? Just because it was not spelled the same? He nodded. It was beginning to make sense.

"No reason, Father, except that I have the name board off the 'Compass Rose' with that on the other side."

"How extraordinary! Why on earth would anyone name a ship that? More to the point, why did they change the name - and why did you bring it back?"

"I don't know, Father. It saved my life in the harbour, but something nagged me about it."

"The poem, perhaps?"

"I suspect so, Father."

"I'm sure I have a book of Poe's poems, if you want it."

Vincent looked at this empty bowl. "All I remember is parts of lines ..."kingdom by the sea".

Father looked at his son and wondered if he should say any more. It wasn't like Vincent to forget anything, but the more he thought of that poem, the more he realized it could have been speaking about Vincent and Catherine ... or even himself and Margaret.

"It's very sad ... if I recall," Father said softly, not wanting to say more.

"I remember that much about it," Vincent admitted, wondering why he couldn't remember more.

He sighed. "I'll read the poem. I believe none of this is happening by accident, Father. I seem to be driven to it." He rose and preceded Father into the library.

It didn't take long to find the book, or the poem. Vincent read it silently, sitting on one of the chairs at Father's table. Of course, the name had a different spelling on the ship. As he reached the end, tears were rolling down his face. Father watching him, but said nothing and pointedly browsed through a medical journal.

Vincent abruptly stood up, closed the book with his finger to mark the place, and left.

Father sighed and tried to concentrate on the journal, without success. Too much sorrow, he decided. Perhaps he should go and read stories to the children. That always put him in a better mood, and he needed the distraction.

Back in his chamber, Vincent sat on his bed and opened the book to the poem again. What was it about that name? Something nagged at him. He reflected on the ship, where he had met Elliot again. It was related to Elliot! He cast his mind back to the only other time he had been close to Elliot, albeit unseen, rescuing his father from the hospital ... and the fight at the dock, and Catherine and Elliot escaping via the tunnels. She had told him that the whole mess was because of some deal of Elliot's that had gone sour in the Caribbean, some illicit deal that involved a ship. Smuggling?

Then he remembered! Elliot's father had been shot because of a ship named the 'Annabelle Lee'! How had that ship come to be in New York harbour? Why had Elliot chosen to meet him on board that ship? But he hadn't - that had been the decision of the man Elliot had betrayed at the last, the man who had abducted Catherine and killed her after kidnapping her baby. Gabriel. The one Snow had told him about during their altercation deep in the tunnels.

The one who was connected in some way to a ring Snow had left him. The one with the Latin inscription.

At this point, Vincent felt like he was caught in a whirlpool. So many threads swirling together, all with some connection. And all because of that ship's name and the board with it on. It could not be a coincidence. He had something substantial from that disaster after all. He had a name, a connection to Gabriel, and perhaps a lead Diana could help him with.

He sent the ring to her, dropping it off at her attic one night, but did not think to translate the Latin inscription for her.

As it happened, before he could give Diana the information about the ship in person, so she could perhaps trace it, Gabriel had abducted her, released her, and he had agreed to be captured and taken to Gabriel, to save his son.

He had been caged, and tortured, but had known the second his son was in danger. He had broken the cage, and found Diana facing Gabriel with a gun. Gabriel looked unworried.

He would have willingly put an end to Gabriel's life, but instead he took Diana's advice and rescued his son, escaping through the tunnels before any of the police knew he was there.

Diana had fatally shot Gabriel, probably intentionally. Vincent was grateful for that. That part of the story was ended.

That bullet had also been justice for Elliot's father, Vincent mused, who had not just been shot, but later killed in the helicopter taking him to safety. He had witnessed that explosion, shocked at the malicious intention behind it.

There were still questions, but Vincent felt more at ease now. He had his son, Gabriel was dead, and the case was closed - or so Diana told him.

But there was still Elliot. He who had had a 'kingdom by the sea' stated in the poem. Where was he? Could he be still alive? Was that why the name of the ship nagged at him?

That evening, before dinner, Vincent decided. He put on his cloak, slung a canteen with a long strap over his head, and started towards the waterfront, via the same tunnels he thought he had taken in the other direction, after the explosion. There was intermittent light, this close to the surface, but it seemed a lot longer distance than he remembered. He wondered how he had made it, in his condition at the time.

He moved silently, and stopped often to sense as far ahead as he could. He knew he was following a kind of sixth sense, a hunch, and it always led to something.

Some yards from the actual dock and water, the last manhole cover was slightly askew. Had he left it so? He couldn't even be sure he had come this way. That night was a blank. But this manhole had been used by Catherine and Elliot that awful night, that much he did know. He shifted it back into place with a grunt, and continued.

The tunnel began to slope downwards and after two sharp turns, it became brighter. Vincent reached the brightest spot and looked up. A drainage grate had been completely destroyed by a piece of ship's mast, probably from the 'Annabelle Lee'. The force had been such to drive the metal into the floor of the tunnel, leaving nothing above ground. It had obviously been overlooked, being in a disused part of the dock.

He wandered a little further down the tunnel and found traces of blood, and clothing. Not his own, so probably the blood wasn't either. Elliot's? Someone else caught in the blast?

He reached the end of the tunnel a little further on, where an ancient metal fence blocked the tunnels, to prevent rubbish from getting into the harbour. There was a large pile of unidentifiable fabric and garbage, plastic, dead rats and material that he did not try to identify. It reeked of sewage and death. He shifted some of the pile, looking for clues - and a moan sounded from under them.

Vincent carefully lifted away more garbage and uncovered a head of dark hair and a face smudged with soot and several days growth of beard. It turned to look at him and he recognized Elliot with a shock. His eyes were swollen and matted with blood, almost closed, although obviously he could see enough to identify who had disturbed him.

"Vincent," a scratchy voice addressed him.

"Yes, Elliot. I'm here to help you."

Elliot groaned and his voice was raspy and dry. "Weak. Found water. Sick. No food. How long?"

Vincent helped Elliot sit up and held him so he could drink out of the canteen. Elliot took a few swallows and sat back against the wall, exhausted, and closed his eyes.

Vincent considered his options. He could take Elliot to Father, where his injuries could be treated. He owned the man that much - more in fact. He quickly discarded any thought of leaving him outside a hospital, not least because there were none nearby. Better to stay

hidden, he decided.

"It's only been a week since the explosion," Vincent answered him at last, after some calculating on his own account. Had it only been that long? "I'll carry you."

Elliot groaned again. "Where?"

"To a place Catherine knew well. And kept secret - as you must."

Elliot nodded and said no more. Vincent moved him, carefully, not without a grunt or two and a groan from Elliot. He snagged what looked like an old moving blanket, and wrapped it over Elliot for some warmth.

Vincent started on his trek home, realizing after a time that he was not going to make it on his own. He was not completely recovered. He had put his body through a great deal of trauma lately - beginning with the shoot-out at the carousel, then having to deal with Snow while only partially-healed, and then the explosion, and then Gabriel's mental torture, not to mention his own frantic escape with his son. There had been little time for relaxation - or meals - now that he thought of it.

Vincent sighed, and tapped out a message for assistance, when he was far enough from the dock and about halfway home. Elliot was unconscious, so Vincent sat down carefully cradled the man on his lap, leaning against a wall, for support, to wait for help to come. He was breathing heavily, but Elliot's breathing sounded far worse. Broken ribs probably, as he himself had had after the explosion.

Kanin and Cullen arrived after an indeterminate time, waking Vincent from an unintentional nap. They arrived, quietly, since they were still some distance from the home tunnels and close to the surface. They assembled the stretcher and lifted Elliot onto it. Vincent was glad the two men were able to carry Elliot between them. He followed, reflecting that he needed more rest.

They carried Elliot directly to the hospital chamber where Father and Mary were waiting. Father took one look, frowned at the state of his charge, and shooed them all away. Vincent did not envy their job separating Elliot from his clothes and cleaning him up, but they were experts. Tunnel accidents were only slightly less noisome.

Vincent returned to his chamber, and spotting the Poe book, reflected that his instincts had again proven worthwhile. Too bad they had not been able to save Catherine. But he had his son, and Diana was now part of the community. She would be his contact with the world above, which even without a bond, would give them all some peace of mind, especially where the forces of law and order were concerned.

Elliot would need time to recover, but Vincent had no doubt that *this* man, a proven friend, would not betray them. What he knew of the man told him he had a moral code that stood the test of even his world. Catherine had once dated him, until she had seen his business for what it was. Later, she had even promised to marry him, if he would stop construction on that be-damned tower - for the tunnel world and himself. Elliot would not then have known why she had insisted, but perhaps he had since resolved that mystery. He had left New York for a time after that, somehow being implicated in whatever the 'Annabelle Lee' had been doing.

Truly, Vincent had no idea what Elliot's situation was now. Would he try to return to his world and it's dog-eat-dog society? Gabriel had targeted Elliot, there was no question of that, although Vincent only knew what the newspapers had reported. Elliot's empire was said to be all but gone. Had Gabriel offered to return it to him? Was that that reason he had met with Vincent on that ship? Elliot had been conflicted - that much had been evident. Vincent could see his uncertainty and knew they were both in danger. He had played along to give Elliot a

chance. Neither of them had expected the explosion.

It didn't matter now. Catherine had been well known to both of them. Her memory was not sullied by whatever Gabriel had been involved with. She had given birth and Gabriel had killed her. In a way, Vincent reflected, that had been Gabriel's principal mistake - to kill someone who might have been more useful to him alive. *Elliot and I were just pawns to use - to sacrifice.* It gave him no small pleasure to realize they had both beaten Gabriel and that the world would never have to worry about him again.

Elliot stayed in the hospital chamber for several days, on Father's orders, even after he began eating and getting restless. Vincent visited him the third day, and had a short conversation with him.

"How did you know?" Elliot asked, somewhat blearily due to the painkillers.

Vincent didn't have to ask what he was referring to.

"I had a hunch. I kept something that kept nagging at me." He produced the board he had carried home, and showed the names, both of them, to Elliot.

Elliot was rendered speechless for long moments, but his eyes widened.

"What the hell?" he gasped at last. "Gabriel! He probably thought it very clever."

"Exactly," Vincent remarked quietly. "It nagged me, Elliot. Why had I held onto it? The only association it had was with you, and your father - and Poe. I decided it was somehow tied to you, and that you might be still alive, so I finally searched for you, albeit almost too tardily."

Elliot raised a hand to wave that off, grunted and let it flop back onto the bed.

"Vincent, I never thought I'd be grateful for the name of a poem - or someone who knew it."

Vincent nodded. "It is a sad poem, and the message is one of sorrow you and I can share, in this 'kingdom by the sea.'"

"Catherine." Elliot said. It wasn't a question.

"Yes. She left us both, but she left something else. Her son."

"Your son," Elliot croaked. "Did you find him?"

"Yes. You'll meet him when you're feeling better."

Elliot nodded and closed his eyes. Vincent realized he had fallen asleep.

He stood up and looked down at the man Catherine had once thought she loved. There was much in this man that was honourable. No wonder she had been attracted to him. Honour and honesty were important to Catherine. She had hated deception in her world. Her work for the Attorney General had given her a way to fight it. She had saved lives and convicted a lot of criminals. Two had come from their world, both because of deceptions played above and below. Vincent had not missed that obvious lesson. Their world was not perfect.

Deception was rare below. Living as they did, close together, dependent on each other, how could it be otherwise? Catherine had always treasured her time with them, been relaxed, happy, often laughed - and she had loved him unconditionally. They had produced a son, somehow. He could not remember much about that occasion, just enough to know it had happened. And now his son was where he should be, with him, with all of them in the tunnel world. It would be a great responsibility, he realized suddenly, to ensure the boy grew up

strong and true, a tribute to his mother. Their world considered such values above all else, even life.

"Catherine," Vincent whispered. "I have found and saved Elliot, who has twice saved my life. He is a good man, my love, an honourable one. He will be welcome here. Our son will know him. It is the least I can do."

END

Annabel Lee

by Edgar Allan Poe

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

I was a child and *she* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my Annabel Lee—
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
Went envying her and me—
Yes!—that was the reason (as all men know,
this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we—
Of many far wiser than we—
And neither the angels in Heaven above
Nor the demons down under the sea
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;

For the moon never beams, without bringing me
dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.