

# **EDGAR & EMILY**

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**A Play by**

**Joseph McDonough**

*Pre Production Draft*

**Contact: Mark Orsini  
Bret Adams Ltd. Artists' Agency  
448 West 44<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10036  
(212) 765-5630  
morsini@bretadamsltd.net**

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

EDGAR ALLAN POE

EMILY DICKINSON

## **SETTING**

An upper bedroom in the Dickinson home  
Amherst, Massachusetts

## **TIME**

January, 1864

The play is performed without intermission.

# EDGAR & EMILY

By Joseph McDonough

**SETTING:** The upstairs bedroom of Emily Dickinson.

Evening. A Massachusetts January.

A large iced window looking outside. A door leading to the rest of the house, tightly shut.

Several candles light the room.

Books and papers cover a desk and flow out to the rest of the room.

EMILY, 33, dressed in white, sits at the desk.

She has a rudimentary paddleball— a small ball of tightly wound cloth attached by a string to a piece of wood— which she has become rather expert at playing. She proudly paddles the ball several times, counting out each successful hit.

EMILY

One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . etc.

(She misses. She sighs. She tries again.)

One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . etc.

(She misses again. She sighs again. She tries again.)

One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . etc.

(She stops and sighs.)

EMILY (Cont.)

Hours and hours of amusement and frivolity.

(She starts again.)

One . . . two . . . three—

(There is a sound, a thud, coming from another part of the house.

She stops and listens, then continues.)

One . . . two—

(There is another sound, much louder.

She listens a moment longer.)

One—

(The sound happens again, much louder still.

EMILY gets up, goes to the door, opens it slightly and listens.)

Father? Vinnie? Are you home already?

(She listens.

No response.

She calls out.)

Mother? Are you up? You took your sleeping bromide, didn't you?

(She listens.)

Go back to bed. Dr. Phillips said you need sleep in your condition. I'm retiring too. I've had such an exhausting day!

(She shuts the door.

She starts to paddle again.)

## EMILY (Cont.)

One . . . two . . . three—

(There is a loud knock on the door which startles her.

She goes to the door but does not open it.)

Who's there?

(The knock repeats.)

Mother?

(There is no response.)

Father?

(No response.)

Vinnie— Lavinia, what do you want?

(No response.

She slowly opens the door a crack and peers out.

She opens it a little more, then fully.

She looks around.

There is no one there.)

I know it was you, Vinnie. Such hilarity does not become you, Sister.

(She closes the door.

She goes back to the desk and picks up the paddleball.

Suddenly, the door flies open.

EDGAR, 54, dressed mostly in black, rushes in.

He is frightened and panicked.

He slams the door behind him.

He grabs a chair, and jams it up against the doorknob to barricade the door.

He leans up against the door to keep it shut, takes a deep breath, and looks at EMILY.)

EDGAR

I'm sorry. Am I intruding?

EMILY

Yes! You are intruding!

EDGAR

(Looking around.)

Oh, damn! I forgot it!

(He quickly grabs the chair and un-barricades the door.

He opens it and runs back out.)

EMILY

Wait!

(EDGAR comes back in, pulling a muddy wooden coffin that is attached to a rope.

He pulls the coffin into the room, then grabs the chair and re-barricades the door.

He turns to EMILY.)

EDGAR

I hope I'm not inconveniencing you.

EMILY

You are most certainly inconveniencing me!

EDGAR

I'm in a bit of trouble.

EMILY

Who are you?

EDGAR

That is a most perplexing question.

EMILY

Perplexing?

EDGAR

Simple yet perplexing.

EMILY

Who are you?

EDGAR

It's not so much as the "who" as the "why" I suppose . . .

(He goes to the window and looks out.)

EMILY

You can't just assume your way in here!

EDGAR

I'm afraid I've been followed . . .

EMILY

Invading our home . . . !

EDGAR

He must be out there . . .

EMILY

Invading my own room!

EDGAR

Down in the dark street somewhere. Waiting . . . lurking . . .

EMILY

I cannot tolerate this intrusion!

EDGAR

I understand. I do. But he won't leave me alone . . . he's a grave danger . . .

EMILY

Who—?

EDGAR

He's always within steps of me. I just need him to pass me by . . .

EMILY

Who are you talking about?

EDGAR

My pursuer, I'm afraid. It never ends . . .

(She looks at the coffin.)

EMILY

And what is that?

EDGAR

Oh. A coffin.

EMILY

You can't just bring that in here!

EDGAR

Yes. It was terribly difficult getting it up the stairs . . .

EMILY

Whose coffin is it?

EDGAR

Well, I suppose it's mine.

EMILY

Yours?

EDGAR

It was intended for me anyway. But I'm not yet dead, thank god! Not yet. I feel quite alive . . . for the moment . . .

(She slowly approaches the coffin and looks at it closely.)

EMILY

What's in that?

EDGAR

I keep only the essentials in there.



The essentials? EMILY

Yes. EDGAR

What essentials? EMILY

Only what is necessary. EDGAR

(She considers touching the coffin.)

Necessary . . . EMILY

(She stops herself.)  
No! You can't have a coffin in my room!

But— EDGAR

You can't even be in my room! EMILY

No? EDGAR

No! EMILY

Apparently I am in your room. EDGAR

You can't be alone with me! EMILY

But we are alone— EDGAR

In the private room of a respectable woman! It's scandalous! EMILY

EDGAR  
Trust me, I've had more interesting scandals.

EMILY  
Get out!

EDGAR  
Please—

EMILY  
I mean it!

EDGAR  
Just listen—

EMILY  
No!

(She raises the paddleball at him.)

Get out! At once!

EDGAR  
Trust me, I've survived more fearsome weapons.

EMILY  
I'll scream for help!

(Pause)

I'll scream.

EDGAR  
Please do.

EMILY  
I will!

EDGAR  
Scream.

EMILY  
Don't make me—

EDGAR

Your ill mother is deeply asleep with her bromide. Your father and sister are out for the evening. We are essentially alone in this house. Aren't we?

(She does not answer.)

And I mean you absolutely no harm. No harm at all.

EMILY

These are dangerous times, with our country at war—

EDGAR

Yes, I'm well aware—

EMILY

I can't allow a stranger, a Southerner, no less—

EDGAR

Ah, my gentlemanly Virginia cadences betray me. I was actually born here in Massachusetts. Over in Boston. To a pair of quite talented actors, no less. I was named after a character in *King Lear*. Have you heard of that play? Ah, probably not.

EMILY

I certainly have heard of it—

EDGAR

(Not listening)

My father was performing that role when I was born. But my dear mother died of consumption when I was just a child of three. My father quickly became a travelling actor, abandoning his son, never to return for an encore. But I was indeed raised in Virginia, by a respectable if unloving Richmond man and his respectable if unloving wife—

EMILY

I am not interested in your pedigree!

EDGAR

It's actually a quite fascinating upbringing—

EMILY

I want you out!

EDGAR

Though quite a sad upbringing and the likely breeder of mental disturbances that I prefer not to dwell upon.

EMILY

This is my home!

EDGAR

Yes, I am aware. I am merely finding temporary safe haven in your home. I was unaware that you were up here until I heard you call out to your family.

EMILY

My father will be home soon—

EDGAR

And I would be most obliged if I could hide in here just a short while until it's safe for me to venture out again. My life depends upon it.

EMILY

Who is it you're hiding from?

EDGAR

I know what he looks like. But I don't know who he is. That's been my question for fourteen endless years.

EMILY

Fourteen years? Really now.

EDGAR

Every day of them on the run. He wants to kill me, I'm certain of it.

EMILY

Why does he want to kill you?

EDGAR

Again, I wish that I knew.

EMILY

You seem to be quite ill informed of your own situation.

EDGAR

And what man isn't?

(He goes to look out the window again.)

Don't worry. I shan't be here long.

(Silence.

She watches him closely for a moment.)

EMILY

What is your name? You do have a name, don't you? Or is that another convenient unknown perplexity that has been hounding you for fourteen endless years?

EDGAR

My name is Poe!

EMILY

Poe?

EDGAR

Edgar Poe. Of that much I am certain!

EMILY

Edgar Poe?

EDGAR

Yes.

(Pause.

She thinks it over.)

EMILY

Edgar Allan Poe?

EDGAR

Well, the Allan comes from my respectable if unloving stepparents—

EMILY

Impossible—

EDGAR

Though they never formally adopted me— I don't know why, but being the offspring of actors may have had something to do with it—

EMILY

I don't believe you.

EDGAR

Oh, yes. Actors are often held in shockingly low repute. Just below thieves and streetwalkers, but above politicians.

EMILY

I do not believe you are Edgar Allan Poe.

EDGAR

Believe what you will. It's no concern of mine.

EMILY

Edgar Allan Poe, the writer?

EDGAR

Yes.

EMILY

Edgar Allan Poe the contemptible drunkard? Edgar Allan Poe the lecherous, immoral drug addict? Edgar Allan Poe, the third-rate poet?

EDGAR

I am not a third-rate poet—

EMILY

Edgar Allan Poe the *dead* writer?

EDGAR

Again, I am not a third-rate poet!

EMILY

But you did die, did you not?

EDGAR

No, I did not.

EMILY

But you certainly—

EDGAR

What do you know of death?

(Pause)

EMILY

I know of death.

EDGAR

I doubt that!

EMILY

I do know death.

EDGAR

You only think you do!

(Pause)

EMILY

Death is my companion.

EDGAR

I thought I knew of death! I wrote of death! But I did not know death! Fourteen years ago . . . well into a lonely night . . . I found myself in a sad old tavern in Baltimore, and I was well into my cups. A man I did not know came up to my solitary table. And for reasons I could not then nor now discern, he began arguing with me. Arguing fiercely. I looked at him closely, into his dark soulless eyes, and to my shock, I felt he appeared very much like me. As much as I could fathom—his build, his face, his features—he looked eerily identical to me. I asked him who he was and he would not answer. I knew not this angered fiend, my doppelganger, who swore he hated me. He suddenly began to beat me and strike me most violently! And with that I fell and I lost all consciousness of the familiar world around me.

EMILY

I read you were found in the street . . .

EDGAR

If I was, I do not recall that.

EMILY

And you were never conscious again . . .

EDGAR

What I do remember is waking up in darkness. The blackest, most complete darkness I had ever . . . the smell damp and thick and of the earth . . . I reach up

with my hands and there are walls tight around me, wood all around me . . . I've been buried . . . buried alive! I begin pounding on my coffin lid— I scream but there is so little air to breathe that I choke— I scratch and scratch at my coffin walls until I feel my fingers bleed— if I'm bleeding I must surely still be living! But what to do? Then I hear a sound. A steady scraping sound above me. It sounds like— someone is digging. Someone is digging me out! I'm saved! Soon the lid of my casket is opened and I'm blinded by moonlight. When my eyes adjust, I see a beautiful woman dressed in white— the moonlight shines right through her. Is she an angel? A spirit? I crawl out of my crypt and she tells me I must hurry. My ghostly doppelganger is dangerous. He wants me dead and he'll soon find me. "Flee at once!" my angel tells me. "I have saved you, for the moment, from your doom. But as payment for your deliverance, you are fated to carry with you your own coffin." She warns me: "You must keep this casket near you always, throughout your travels, as you live. Now go!" I pull that coffin up out of the earth, but when I turn to thank her, the sprite is gone. I look all around but she has vanished. I push piles of dirt back in to fill up my grave. And I flee. I've spent day and night evading my tireless pursuer, extending my wretched life. So, do I know of death? No. I only fear death. I've stared into its eyes, tasted its breath. But do I know death? No. I'm not ready for that.

(Pause.

He looks out the window again.)

So what about you? Do you lead an interesting life?

EMILY

Why don't you just kill him?

EDGAR

Kill him?

EMILY

Yes.

EDGAR

Kill my pursuer?

EMILY

That would presumably be an option. For a man in your unusual position.

(EDGAR laughs.)



EDGAR

I've tried to poison him. I've tried to shoot at him. I even tried to surprise him and stab him. Nothing works. He's not of the same flesh and blood. I can only evade him.

EMILY

Oh. That's disappointing for you.

EDGAR

Yes.

EMILY

He's quite the nuisance then.

EDGAR

He is much more than a nuisance.

EMILY

But it keeps you busy.

EDGAR

If you care to put it that way, yes.

EMILY

Gives you something to do each day. And night.

EDGAR

I suppose.

EMILY

There's an advantage there.

EDGAR

I see little advantage in being in constant mortal flight. No advantage at all.

EMILY

Perhaps you're correct.

EDGAR

So what about you?

What about me?	EMILY
You. Do you have a name?	EDGAR
Of course I do.	EMILY
And? It is? Your name?	EDGAR
Emily.	EMILY
Emily.	EDGAR
Emily Dickinson.	EMILY
Emily Dickinson.	EDGAR
Yes.	EMILY
Rather ordinary.	EDGAR
I suppose I am rather ordinary.	EMILY
Hmm . . .	EDGAR
Rather . . . nondescript . . .	EMILY
Nondescript?	EDGAR
I— I suppose I am . . .	EMILY

EDGAR

You're not married?

(She instinctively pulls her left hand behind her.)

EMILY

No. I am not.

EDGAR

Surprising.

EMILY

And why is that?

EDGAR

It just is. Surprising.

EMILY

I don't think it's surprising at all—

EDGAR

I just thought that it was.

EMILY

I enjoy my solitude.

EDGAR

Too much solitude leads to boredom—

EMILY

At times, yes, perhaps.

(He picks up the paddleball and looks it over for a moment.)

EDGAR

What items of interest does Emily have in her life? Any? I don't suppose you've ever been buried alive?

EMILY

No.

EDGAR

I don't suppose there is anybody trying to kill you?

EMILY

(Trying to make a joke)

Nobody of which I'm aware.

EDGAR

Good for you. My advice is to keep it that way.

(Goes back to the window.)

Hmm, he must not have seen me crawl in here. But he's probably still down there, searching the neighborhood . . . if I stumbled out too quickly he'd likely see me, reflected by the full moon and the snow . . . he could be anywhere out there . . . in the shadows . . . behind any tree . . .

EMILY

I have . . . fulfillment.

(He doesn't hear her. She says it again.)

I have fulfillment.

EDGAR

(Barely listening)

I'm overjoyed.

EMILY

I'm . . . a poet. I'm a poet too.

EDGAR

Isn't that nice.

EMILY

I am a poet!

EDGAR

Good for you.

EMILY

I write every day . . . private poems . . . not for publication . . . I couldn't stand for publication of my most intimate thoughts . . .

EDGAR

Uh-huh . . .

EMILY

But my poetry is always in my thoughts . . . the words are always whispering to me . . . whether I'm alone here in my room or alone with my precious flowers out in my quiet garden in glorious summertime . . . when autumn arrives the flowers wither away, and when winter's here my poor garden is lost with the snow . . . but the words, my words, they never die . . .

EDGAR

That's charming.

EMILY

I am not charming!

EDGAR

That's sweet?

EMILY

I am not sweet! I am also not an inordinately renowned fourth rate poet!

EDGAR

I am not a fourth rate poet!

EMILY

I'm sorry. Third rate.

EDGAR

Or a third rate— I happen to be a literary critic of considerable intellect! As well as an esteemed writer of penetrating prose tales of human behavior and cognition. And I am a first rate poet—

(EMILY laughs quietly.)

The most noteworthy poet this young country has yet produced!

EMILY

Oh. I must be mistaken.

EDGAR

What would you know?

(She goes to her desk.

She looks around and finds a book from the stack.

She flips through it until she finds a page.

She reads aloud from it.)

EMILY

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before—

EDGAR

Of course. From *The Raven*. It's not my own favorite, but universal acclaim overrules me.

EMILY

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,  
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before--  
"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice;  
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore—

EDGAR

Apparently, I'm now celebrated as a literary genius in the artistic capitals of Europe. It's all quite flattering, though maddeningly slow in coming.

EMILY

Surely that is something at my *window lattice*. Let me see, then, *what thereat is?* Are you quite serious? You rhymed "lattice" with "thereat is?" It's no wonder someone's trying to kill you.

EDGAR

Admittedly, my brilliance dimmed a bit on that line.

EMILY

Shameful.

EDGAR

It's only an internal rhyme! It's much better throughout!

(She looks over the poem.)

EMILY

Hmmmph . . . I will say though . . . there are a few parts of this poem . . . isolated stanzas that are more tolerable . . . one or two unlikely phrases that approach pleasantness . . . even creditable workmanship . . . creating in the

reader a momentary illusion of . . . pleasure. Perhaps not worth the popular fame and adulation that has been misbestowed upon your poem . . .

EDGAR

Let's see you come up with a rhyme for "lattice!"

EMILY

I don't use conventional rhymes. They're simplistic.

EDGAR

"Lattice" and "whereat is" is just an unconventional rhyme.

EMILY

There is a distinct difference between unconventional and merely bad. You might not understand.

EDGAR

I understand unconventional rhymes!

EMILY

Perhaps you should try to master the simple ones first.

EDGAR

I have mastered them!

EMILY

I was just offering a helpful suggestion.

EDGAR

I am not in need of your helpful suggestions!

EMILY

Apparently you are.

EDGAR

I'm no longer engaging in this conversation!

(He moves toward the coffin and looks down at it.)

It's time. Yes . . .

EMILY

Time for what?

EDGAR

Yes . . . it . . . is . . . time . . .

EMILY

What are you doing?

EDGAR

The necessities . . . the deathly necessities . . .

(He bends down and puts his hands on the coffin lid.)

EMILY

Don't open that in here!

EDGAR

The deathly necessities . . . always calling me back . . .

EMILY

No!

EDGAR

Calling me back to my crypt . . .

(He opens the lid.)

EMILY

Stop!

(He pulls out two bottles of liquor.)

EDGAR

Cognac or whiskey? Whiskey or cognac? Twin seducers of my soul.

(He turns to EMILY.)

Do you have any clean glasses?

EMILY

No . . .

EDGAR

Pity. Well, these will have to do . . .

(He reaches back into the coffin and pulls out two glasses.)



EDGAR

I shall begin with whiskey. Driven to drink once again . . .

(He pours himself a glass.)

Drinking alone does not suit me. Which do you prefer?

EMILY

I have no preference—

EDGAR

Whiskey? Good Irish whiskey?

EMILY

No.

EDGAR

What about some fine cognac then?

EMILY

What's cognac?

EDGAR

It's a French brandy.

EMILY

Is it sweet?

EDGAR

You'd like it.

EMILY

How would you know?

EDGAR

It's not too sweet. Just like you.

(Pause.)

EMILY

A small glass perhaps . . .

Ah . . .

EDGAR

Just a small glass . . .

EMILY

Of course.

EDGAR

That would be sufficient.

EMILY

Sufficiency is unattainable . . . perhaps undesirable as well, but certainly unattainable . . .

EDGAR

(He pours EMILY a glass of cognac.)

Not so much— that’s too much—

EMILY

Too much is a matter of perspective, Emily.

EDGAR

(He hands EMILY her glass.)

Well . . . a truce between us . . .

EDGAR

A truce . . . yes.

EMILY

Good.

EDGAR

Yes . . .

EMILY

(Toasting)

To poetry . . .

EDGAR

To poetry . . . cheers!

EMILY

Yes . . . cheers!

(They both take a drink.)

EDGAR

Ahhh. Whiskey, my dear consistent friend. My loyal, soothing chum. Not as strong as laudanum but much more sociable.

(He takes another drink.)

Ahhh. Do you like the cognac, Emily?

EMILY

It's mildly agreeable . . . in moderate sips . . .

(She takes another sip.)

EDGAR

More?

EMILY

Just a modest amount.

(He pours her a small amount more.)

Don't be stingy now.

(He pours more.)

You spoil me, Mr. Poe.

EDGAR

Fair payment for your hospitality this evening.

EMILY

I could have been a tad bit more hospitable, I suppose . . . but you startled me . . . I had no idea who you were . . .

EDGAR

That's true.

EMILY

I have to stay safe . . . I have to stay protected . . .

EDGAR

Of course.

EMILY

People from the neighborhood are forever making comments and remarks as they stroll by outside . . . whispering to themselves about me . . . pointing up . . . to the strange woman . . . the oddity . . . who lives inside . . . I'm continually reminding Father and Vinnie to lock the door when they go out . . . I need to keep the mischief-making children of the neighborhood from sneaking in to play their games and pranks at my expense . . .

(He puts the bottle down and goes back to the window.)

He looks out.

(She watches him for a moment.)

And your poem— I did think my well-intended criticism might be useful . . . but perhaps not . . . perhaps I wasn't very hospitable at all . . . I'm sorry . . .

(He stops and looks at her.)

EDGAR

I'm sorry too.

EMILY

What are you sorry for?

EDGAR

I'm just sorry, I suppose. There's always a lot to be sorry for if you think too much about it.

EMILY

Yes . . . I agree . . .

EDGAR

I have many chances these days to think back upon my years. Entire days I have given away and cannot live again . . . opportunities squandered . . . words unspoken . . . small but significant cruelties I should have avoided . . .

(He turns back to the window.)

Still no sign of him . . .

EMILY

Thinking back on all the not forgotten moments of one's life can be overwhelming . . .

(He checks carefully.)

EDGAR

Maybe it's a good sign. Maybe it's safe for me to venture out now . . . I think I shall try . . . see how far I can make it tonight . . .

EMILY

Mr. Poe?

EDGAR

Yes, he might be past by now . . . I should be able to backtrack the other way and escape him for a while . . .

EMILY

Mr. Poe?

EDGAR

Maybe he's gone from me at last!

EMILY

Perhaps . . . perhaps you'd care to read . . . while you're here . . . perhaps you'd care to read one of my poems . . .

EDGAR

What was that?

EMILY

Perhaps you'd care to read one of my poems . . . before you go . . .

EDGAR

One of your poems?

EMILY

Yes . . .

EDGAR

Read one?

EMILY

Yes . . .

EDGAR

Why would I want to do that?

EMILY

Just a short one . . . they're mostly short anyway . . . I thought you could read one while you were here . . .

EDGAR

I've written about torture. I try not to practice it.

EMILY

Well then . . . are you just saying that because I was unkind to your poem?

EDGAR

Sadly, no.

EMILY

Oh—

EDGAR

I say that because I fear the worst.

EMILY

The worst!

EDGAR

The world is overstuffed with poets for whom mediocrity is a lofty ambition. I spent years as a literary critic. I read—and tried to digest—alleged poetry day after day after day. I never drank before becoming a literary critic. But soon hard liquor became a medicinal necessity of the profession. Fraudulent claimants of the poetic muse were continually shoving their ill-conceived scribblings into my hands, imploring me: “Read my precious poem! Read my beautiful poem! Just a short one. You’ll love it!” Love is a rare, rare quality indeed.

EMILY

I don't believe you'll love my poems . . .

EDGAR

Probably not.

EMILY

I harbor no such illusion.

EDGAR

I don't like most poems. There are very few that I can stomach. In the end, all I hope for with most poetry, what I fervently pray for, is that if the endless gibberish isn't palatable, isn't comprehensible, please, dear god, at least let it be amusing.

EMILY

I don't think you would understand my poetry.

EDGAR

Oh, I would certainly understand it—

EMILY

No, I don't believe so.

EDGAR

Yes, I certainly—

EMILY

No. No. It would be a waste of time for both of us.

EDGAR

I did make a somewhat modest living as a literary critic.

EMILY

I am quite certain that the deceptively simple complexity of my poetry would baffle you.

EDGAR

Baffle me?

EMILY

Perhaps one of my earliest poems would be a conquerable challenge for you—

EDGAR

Oh, please!

EMILY

But my better poems, those of which I am most satisfied, if not prideful— they are certainly beyond your faculty of comprehension.

(Pause)

EDGAR

No. No. I'm not falling for your trick.

EMILY

I am not asking you to do so.

(He laughs.)

EDGAR

Noble attempt though it was, I must say. Very good. Very good.

(She holds out her glass.)

EMILY

May I please have a bit more cognac, Mr. Poe?

EDGAR

I'm not reading your poetry.

EMILY

I'm beyond that. More cognac?

EDGAR

You're not going to make me read anything you've written—

EMILY

And I am most happy to hear that. I am now in agreement with you. I absolutely do not want you to read anything I have written! I will not allow it! It was a silly, stupid notion of mine. And I am sorry I asked. Now could you please refresh my glass? Please. My glass, Mr. Poe?

(He takes her glass and pours her more cognac.)

Thank you.

(He hands the glass back to her.)

Thank you, Mr. Poe.

(She takes a long sip.)

Reading a poem of mine certainly would have ended in embarrassment for one of us and I have no intention of facilitating that.



Give me a damn poem! EDGAR

Certainly not! EMILY

Let me see one! EDGAR

No. EMILY

And not just an easy one either! EDGAR

I wouldn't term any of them easy— EMILY

Give me a few! Let's see that complexity— EDGAR

Are you confident you're suited to the challenge? EMILY

Show me the toughest you've got! EDGAR

Well . . . if you so vociferously insist, I shall reluctantly comply . . . EMILY

Just let me read them! EDGAR

(EMILY goes to her desk and searches carefully through her papers.)

Let's see . . . let's see . . . EMILY

Let's go now . . . I don't have all evening for this . . . there is a man trying to kill me after all . . . EDGAR

(EMILY finally selects a few sheets.)

EMILY

These will suffice . . . yes . . .

(She takes the poems to EDGAR and hands them to him.)

I'm rather fond of these . . .

(EDGAR looks over the papers.

EMILY blows out a candle.)

EDGAR

What are you doing?

EMILY

I'm blowing out a few of these candles.

EDGAR

Why on earth would you want to do that?

EMILY

I prefer to hear my words in the near darkness. With just one candle.

EDGAR

My eyes— I don't see as well as I used to. I see rather poorly, actually.

EMILY

Is that so? My eyes are horribly ill.

EDGAR

Are they?

EMILY

Yes. It's a burden.

EDGAR

But you're still young—

EMILY

I've spent time with doctors in Boston but not much has changed . . .

EDGAR

Doctors. A miserable lot—

EMILY

Too much light causes me great pain. Very acute pain . . .

EDGAR

Oh.

EMILY

The greater the brightness the more my head hurts.

EDGAR

I don't want to hurt you—

EMILY

I'm afraid I may be going blind. I don't know what I would do.

EDGAR

I'm sorry to hear that. I am.

EMILY

Thank you. I'm quite sorry about it too. When I recite my poems aloud I prefer to snuff out much of the light. My head, and my eyes, feel better that way. And strangely, my poems seem to brighten for me in my mind.

EDGAR

Yes, but I'm afraid I can't read these poems like this. I might be the Master of the Macabre but I can't see a damn thing in the dark.

EMILY

No, I suppose not—

EDGAR

I'd like to read your poems, Emily . . .

EMILY

Let's leave the candles as they were. . .

EDGAR

Yes, thank you.

(EMILY relights the candle and places it near  
EDGAR.

EMILY shields herself a bit from the candle.)

Much better. These look like words again . . .

EMILY

They are words . . . I am in love with words . . .

EDGAR

You're rather fond of these poems?

EMILY

Yes . . .

(EDGAR begins to read a poem aloud.

EMILY watches him with nervous apprehension.)

EDGAR

To die— takes just a little while—  
 They say it doesn't hurt—  
 It's only fainter— by degrees—  
 And then— it's out of sight—

A darker Ribbon— for a Day—  
 A Crape upon the Hat—  
 And then the pretty sunshine comes—  
 And helps us to forget—

The absent— mystic— creature—  
 That but for love of us—  
 Had gone to sleep— that soundest time—  
 Without the weariness—

(EDGAR stops and considers the poem for a moment.

He looks through the sheets and selects another poem to read aloud.)

I measure every Grief I meet  
 With narrow, probing Eyes—  
 I wonder if It weighs like Mine—  
 Or has an Easier Size.

I wonder if They bore it long—  
 Or did it just begin—

I could not tell the Date of Mine—  
It feels so old a pain—

I wonder if it hurts to live—  
And if They have to try—  
And whether— could They choose between—  
It would not be— to die—

(He stops and thinks.

EMILY waits nervously.

Silence.)

You're not often considered the joy of social gatherings, are you?

EMILY

There's more to that poem . . .

EDGAR

You don't go out much, do you?

EMILY

No, I don't . . .

EDGAR

I didn't think so.

EMILY

Do you want to read more?

EDGAR

No, I've read enough.

EMILY

Oh . . .

EDGAR

Well . . .

EMILY

Well . . . ?

EDGAR

You are not . . . an awful poet, Emily. You are decidedly . . . not awful. Not awful at all . . .

EMILY

Oh, thank you, Mr. Poe . . . !

EDGAR

I have survived poetry that is considerably more nauseating than yours . . .

EMILY

Thank you . . . !

EDGAR

In fact, I will admit . . . I detect in your poetics, a concise resignation to morbidity that I personally find exhilarating . . .

EMILY

Mr. Poe!

(She embraces him.)

EDGAR

But what do I know? Well, damn near everything, actually. But that's beside the point—

(EMILY pulls back.)

EMILY

My apologies . . . I lost control of myself for a moment . . .

EDGAR

No, I'm used to it . . .

EMILY

I'm just . . . overjoyed!

EDGAR

I noticed.

EMILY

Yes . . . I'm just . . . happy . . . happy that you liked my poems!

I didn't say I liked them . . .

EDGAR

Well, you said—

EMILY

No—

EDGAR

You said—

EMILY

I just didn't find them revolting. My lack of vomiting should not be considered an endorsement. You're no Shakespeare—

EDGAR

No, I'm no Shakespeare— of course not— I could never see as Shakespeare sees—

EMILY

None of us sees as Shakespeare—

EDGAR

But you said . . . you said you found my concise resignation to morbidity . . . exhilarating. Exhilarating. You said that.

EMILY

I suppose I did.

EDGAR

I shall consider that a grand compliment!

EMILY

Wonderful.

EDGAR

A commendation of the highest order—

EMILY

Not the highest order—

EDGAR

Coming from Edgar Allan Poe!

EMILY

EDGAR

Exhilaration is fleeting . . . momentary at best . . . by the time you're aware of it,  
it's gone . . .

EMILY

You praised my morbidity! I am so happy!

EDGAR

I've seen more morbid—

EMILY

From the Master of the Macabre!

EDGAR

I actually detest that appellation. I'm an artist not a butcher—

EMILY

You must read more!

EDGAR

I must go, Emily.

EMILY

No!

(EMILY rushes to her desk to find more poems.)

EDGAR

I must—

EMILY

Just a few more, Mr. Poe!

EDGAR

I was afraid of this.

EMILY

It shan't take you long!

EDGAR

But I must be on my way—



No—

EMILY

I've waited here long enough—

EDGAR

You'll find these poems even less revolting—

EMILY

My evil doppelganger is in pursuit—

EDGAR

Stay a while longer!

EMILY

He'll find me—

EDGAR

Stay!

EMILY

I can't!

EDGAR

Please, Mr. Poe!

EMILY

I really can't!

EDGAR

Please! You must!

EMILY

(There is a loud noise from another part of the house.

They both stop and listen.

Silence.

Then the noise is heard again. Louder.)

EMILY

Father—

EDGAR

Who's down there?

(EMILY goes to the door.

She stands and listens.)

EMILY

Father?

(She pulls the chair away and opens the door.)

EDGAR

Careful!

(She calls out.)

EMILY

Father?

(She listens.)

Lavinia?

(The noise is heard again. Louder still.

EDGAR looks around in panic.

EMILY goes out, calling as she goes.)

Are you home?

(EDGAR is alone.

He quickly gathers up his liquor bottles and glasses and puts them back in the coffin.

He closes the coffin lid and drags the coffin to the window.

He opens the window.

He considers how to take the coffin out the window.

He gives it a clumsy try but is unable to lift and fit the coffin out the window.

EMILY comes back in.

She stares at him.)

EMILY

And where do you suppose you're going?

EDGAR

Nowhere apparently . . .

(She shuts the door.)

EMILY

My window is open.

EDGAR

Yes, I was . . .

EMILY

Are you taking your coffin through my window?

EDGAR

Yes.

EMILY

Really?

EDGAR

I was going to attempt it.

EMILY

I don't think it will fit.

EDGAR

No . . .

EMILY

Surely not.

(EMILY locks the door with a key and puts the key in her dress.

She stares at him again.)

EDGAR

Who is in the house? Is it a man? Does he look like me?

EMILY

You're letting in the January chill, Mr. Poe.

EDGAR

I enjoy the January chill . . .

EMILY

I do not.

EDGAR

Who—?

EMILY

Shut that window.

EDGAR

Who is in the house? Is it a singularly strange man? Handsome like me, but murderous?

EMILY

Shut that window.

EDGAR

I need to leave, Emily! The snow is picking up out there and that will certainly slow my escape.

EMILY

Perhaps you should wait till morning.

EDGAR

I prefer traveling by moonlight. It's easier to blend in with the darkness.

EMILY

It's easier to blend in with the darkness . . . yes, you're right about that, Mr. Poe  
. . .

EDGAR

Is it safe? Can I go down the stairs, Emily?

It's never safe.

EMILY

Is my pursuer here?

EDGAR

Living is not safe.

EMILY

Who's down there?

EDGAR

My father and sister are home.

EMILY

Thank god!

EDGAR

Father and Vinnie are downstairs. They will be asleep soon.

EMILY

When they're asleep I'll take my leave the way I came in. Will you be so kind as to assist me with the coffin so I don't make a disturbance banging it on the stairs?

EDGAR

No.

EMILY

Please, Emily.

EDGAR

If you attempt to leave soon, I shall scream for my father.

EMILY

Emily—

EDGAR

I'll tell him we have an intruder in our house. An intruder who trespassed, unbidden into our home.

EMILY

Don't do that—

EDGAR

I'll have you arrested.

EMILY

No—

EDGAR

EMILY

And if your doppelganger comes by, I'll tell him you can be found at the Amherst town jail. I'm sure he'd be happy to bail you out.

EDGAR

All right! I'll read more poetry!

EMILY

It's not the poetry, Mr. Poe.

EDGAR

Let me see them!

EMILY

Not just the poetry. No. I'd like you to read more, but that's not really it. No. It's larger than that. It's—

EDGAR

No. No. You don't have to say it.

EMILY

I don't?

EDGAR

I know what it is.

EMILY

You do?

EDGAR

Of course.

EMILY

What is it?

EDGAR

You want me to make love to you.

EMILY

What?

(He moves toward the bed.)

EDGAR

No, I understand. I should have suspected.

EMILY

Mr. Poe—

(EDGAR reclines on the bed.)

EDGAR

All right then, all right . . .

EMILY

We will do nothing of the kind!

EDGAR

Let's make it quick though. I might be killed at any moment.

EMILY

Mr. Poe!

(EDGAR picks up the paddleball and begins playing with it.)

EDGAR

Come now . . . let's get on with it . . . let's get it over with . . .

EMILY

Oh! Would it be such a chore? Such an awful, miserable chore!

EDGAR

Not a chore. I'm agreeable.

EMILY

Maybe I'm not!

Maybe? EDGAR

(Silence.  
EMILY is embarrassed.)

I . . . I am not . . . agreeable. EMILY

Oh. EDGAR

That is not what I wanted! Not! EMILY

Surprising, but all right— EDGAR

But . . . EMILY

But? EDGAR

Mr. Poe . . . EMILY

Yes? EDGAR

Before you go . . . EMILY

Yes? EDGAR

What I wanted to ask you . . . I would like you to speak with me. EMILY

Speak with you . . . ? EDGAR



Speak with me. EMILY

Haven't we been speaking? EDGAR

No, I want you to really speak with me. Converse with me. EMILY

Converse . . . EDGAR

Converse essentially . . . EMILY

O.K. EDGAR

Converse intimately . . . your mind and your soul . . . EMILY

My mind and my soul? Both? EDGAR

Yes. EMILY

I'll provide what I can. My mind is more to be trusted than my soul. EDGAR

Perhaps you sell yourself short, Mr. Poe. EMILY

Perhaps. I'm agreeable . . . to converse . . . EDGAR

Thank you . . . EMILY

What shall we converse about, Emily? EDGAR

Death. EMILY

EDGAR

Oh, god. I suspected that.

EMILY

And living.

EDGAR

I have a bit of limited experience with both.

EMILY

Yes . . .

EDGAR

I've found neither to be acceptably pleasant.

EMILY

No.

EDGAR

To be honest, if asked my expert opinion, I don't think I'd recommend either living or death. There's considerable pain involved in both directions.

EMILY

Pain . . . I agree . . .

EDGAR

I suspect I do fear them— fear both living and dying at times . . .

EMILY

Yes . . . your own Pit and the Pendulum, and mine too . . . I fear them both each day . . .

EDGAR

Nights are the worst . . .

EMILY

But perhaps I fear living the most . . . yes, I do fear living the most . . .

EDGAR

Oh, please. That's a luxury for those in need of a worthwhile hobby. You're suffering from a superfluity of time, Emily.

EMILY

Perhaps. But that is how I feel.

EDGAR

For the rest of us for whom time is a rare commodity, I am no idiot— I am certain I fear death the most . . .

EMILY

The more I consider the essential qualities of living, it always brings me thoughts of death. And the more I consider the unfathomable eternity of death . . . through my tears, I find the simple beauties of living . . . sparks of happiness that I have trouble describing . . . tiny joys that are too overwhelming . . . I touch . . . and then they're gone . . . gone forever . . . death has won . . . and I'm colder than before . . . and sadder than before . . .

EDGAR

Have you considered a puppy?

EMILY

The beautiful flowers in my garden . . . lilacs, roses, hyacinths . . . so graceful . . . angelic . . . the supple petals perfectly curve and flow . . . out and out into the world . . . the colors burst pink and red, purple and blue, exactly full and new each time I open my eyes to them . . . I joyously breathe in the scent of each of flower one at a time . . . and yet they are dying before me the moment I behold them. I cannot look upon my flowers without tears . . . tears of wonder, joy and pain . . . I loathe the winter. Each winter feels to me longer and with more piercing chill than the one before. But I submit to winter's inevitability, Mr. Poe. It is a cold life. And living is somehow shockingly brief. Heaven, if it exists, may be an endless garden or it may be eternal winter in the end. Which, I do not know. Do you? You said you know damn near everything.

EDGAR

Well, that's true. I do. But the answer to that particular question has for the moment escaped me.

EMILY

Of course.

EDGAR

But Virginia knows. My wife. My poor wife.

EMILY

How would she know?

EDGAR

Virginia died.

EMILY

Oh—

EDGAR

Virginia suffered quite a bit at the end. Almost seventeen years ago now. Virginia was my muse. So much of my writing sprang from her. She inspired in one way or another most everything I wrote. I still miss her terribly.

EMILY

I'm sorry.

EDGAR

My sweet Ginny knows of death. And she knows of heaven too, if it exists. For the rest of us, we're left in the dark. I really hate the dark.

EMILY

Yes, I feel that too.

EDGAR

With no peace.

EMILY

No peace. You're right.

EDGAR

Just temporary shelter. Then the old gnawing restlessness returns . . .

EMILY

A restlessness, yes—

EDGAR

Emotional, mental indigestion.

EMILY

Another night, another day . . .

EDGAR

At least Virginia is beyond that now. She's found whatever peace there is that is attainable. My sweet Ginny . . . I do miss her so . . . she had a good, simple heart— the most rare and lovely of qualities to be found among men and women

on this earth . . . so many people I've encountered are shockingly lacking . . .  
Ginny put them all to shame . . .

(He recites from his poetry.)

Thou wast all that to me, love  
For which my soul did pine:  
A green isle in the sea, love,  
A fountain and a shrine  
All wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers,  
And all the flowers were mine.

(Pause)

EMILY

Your wife . . . your wife, Mr. Poe . . . ?

EDGAR

Yes?

EMILY

You'd like be with her again?

EDGAR

God, yes . . .

EMILY

To see her again?

EDGAR

More than anything.

EMILY

Are you certain, Mr. Poe? Absolutely certain?

EDGAR

Of course I am! What kind of question is that? There was nothing more  
important to me than my Virginia!

EMILY

Yet you fear death?

EDGAR

Of course.

EMILY

Why don't you embrace death?

EDGAR

Embrace it?

EMILY

Your ghostly doppelganger is chasing you. He wants your life. Let him have it.

EDGAR

I can't let him kill me!

EMILY

It seems a perfectly reasonable solution to your quandary.

EDGAR

It is not!

EMILY

But maybe you'll see your Virginia again. Have you considered that?

EDGAR

Of course I've considered it—

EMILY

If there's a heaven. She might be waiting for you, Mr. Poe.

EDGAR

No—

EMILY

If you embrace death, you'll find out.

EDGAR

That's easy for you to speculate—

EMILY

Give up living. Just be done with it. It's actually quite a simple answer. I'm surprised someone of your talent and genius hasn't thought of it.

EDGAR

Oh, I've thought of it—

EMILY

A more decisive alternative to your present conundrum.

EDGAR

But . . . no . . . I can't!

EMILY

But why? Why not?

EDGAR

Because . . . I'm a coward! If you must know, I'm a coward!

(Pause)

There, I said it. It may surprise you to hear that.

EMILY

Oh, no, not at all—

EDGAR

I am afraid of dying itself! The pain. The irreversibility. The unknowing finality of it all. The vast endlessness. As Shakespeare says, as he has Hamlet say at his moment of death . . .

(EMILY mouths the words with him.)

BOTH

The rest is silence . . .

EDGAR

Yes . . .

EMILY

Indeed . . .

EDGAR

Ginny may not be there waiting for me. And I'm not so certain I deserve to see her again. Whatever that may or may not have to do with it. I don't know. I have, I must confess, my particular private demons . . .

EMILY

You?

EDGAR

Oh, yes, I have my shameful inner companions of disrepute . . . I've had many a terror-filled night of opiate-induced nightmares . . . but might death be worse? Whatever might be there after death . . . what I might find . . . what might be . . . what might be there . . . I don't know! I have no idea! But I'm frightened of the answer. How is any man qualified to describe eternity? Even me.

EMILY

Are you sure you're not more afraid you'll miss living?

EDGAR

Impossible.

EMILY

There may be no whiskey or cognac in heaven.

EDGAR

Oh, god, I hope you're wrong. That would make eternity even longer.

EMILY

I would suspect that in eternity there is no need for poets. First, second, or third rate. Is there a use for wisdom in eternity?

EDGAR

I don't know. There's plenty of use for it down here.

EMILY

I doubt that being the most noteworthy poet this young country has yet produced . . . I doubt that distinction will be worthy of note in eternity.

EDGAR

No, perhaps not . . .

EMILY

But you rather enjoy that status in this world. Along with your cognac and whiskey. You don't find living is not so awful.

EDGAR

If you think that's why I persist in evading my pursuer, you're wrong! If I knew what awaited me in Hamlet's undiscovered country, I would willingly travel there, never to return. But I truly am a coward at heart. And so I persist in persisting.



EMILY

Persist in existing . . .

EDGAR

Yes, that's all I can do.

EMILY

That's all any of us do.

EDGAR

I'll face it alone . . . we all must at some point . . . but only when I'm damn ready! Only when I say so!

EMILY

I don't think that's cowardly, Mr. Poe.

EDGAR

No?

EMILY

I don't think that's cowardly at all. I'm not certain I could embrace death either.

EDGAR

You said death is your companion.

EMILY

It is. Death has always been near, but still an arm's length away. When I was a girl we lived next door to the Amherst Cemetery.

EDGAR

My own dream as a child . . .

EMILY

I used to wander among the graves. Reading all the names, the dates of birth, the dates of death . . . all of these defined, contained, specified lives. Now I was standing on the bones of these men and these women who wore shoes and gloves like me, who danced, who cried . . . who wandered themselves by this cemetery each day, with no time to consider that they too would be buried under this earth, under an occasional beautiful flower if they were so loved . . . for a while . . . and then, inevitably, no more flowers . . . and I too would be buried so.

EDGAR

I doubt there shall be flowers for me . . .

EMILY

When I was thirteen my cousin Sophia died of typhoid fever. When I saw my funny, happy playmate, lying gray and still in her little casket . . . I became sick— I didn't eat and couldn't leave my bed for days and days. Not until I understood that death walks among us always . . . death is behind us and in front of us . . .

EDGAR

Welcome to my own life . . .

EMILY

Death has so long been with me, Mr. Poe. It is my companion . . . and yet I too am a coward I fear . . . a coward . . .

EDGAR

Come with me, Emily . . .

EMILY

Come with you?

EDGAR

Yes!

EMILY

But—

EDGAR

Come with me! It would benefit you tremendously!

EMILY

Would it now?

EDGAR

But of course. Let's go, shall we?

EMILY

But where?

EDGAR

It doesn't matter— anywhere. I'll let you evade my pursuer with me.

EMILY

Oh . . .

EDGAR

Yes! You'll love it!

EMILY

I don't know . . .

EDGAR

Come with me at once! It's decided.

EMILY

But, Mr. Poe—!

EDGAR

What could be more thrilling than gamely escaping death with Edgar Allan Poe?

EMILY

I'm not sure that's a thrill I am seeking—

EDGAR

Nonsense. You know you'd like to. Wouldn't you?

EMILY

I've—I've always been decidedly reluctant in the pursuit of uncertain thrills, Mr. Poe—

EDGAR

Emily, we can elude what's chasing me, the two of us together. I could use another set of eyes . . . to see the same indescribable oddities I see . . . the tiny terrors that overwhelm . . . we'll traverse, you and I, across the fields and the snow . . . under the night sky . . . guided only by soft moonlight to be kind to those eyes of yours . . . perhaps we'll find warmer places to hide where hyacinths bloom forth for you in wintertime . . . and we'll evade and fend off the ghostly fiend as long as we can . . . until we've seen what we need to see . . . and we understand what we need to understand . . . and we're ready, both ready, each of us . . . come with me . . .

(He moves toward her and takes her hand.)

Come with me, Emily.

(She slowly walks with him.)

They stop at the door.)

And you will not be alone. Nor will I. I dread the solitude at times, Emily. The desolation . . . terrifies me. We have mutual eyes and similar souls, Emily. Come with me. Help me. Please.

(EMILY slowly pulls the key out of her dress.

She holds the key open in her palm and stands motionless.)

EMILY

But . . . I don't know if I will be able . . . I don't know . . . I haven't left our yard since the middle of May . . .

(EDGAR takes the key from her hand.

She doesn't move.)

EDGAR

You must be missing the conviviality down at the cemetery— come away from here.

EMILY

I haven't left this house . . . I haven't been outside since the first week of July . . .

EDGAR

I'm sure your grass needs cutting. But no matter, Emily!

(EDGAR unlocks the door.)

EMILY

I rarely leave this room . . . only just for meals and not always then . . . lately I've had my meals handed in to me here through the door . . .

(EDGAR opens the door.)

EDGAR

Now neither of us will be alone . . .

(He begins to escort her though the doorway.

She quickly pulls her hand away.)

EDGAR

Emily—

EMILY

I don't know . . . I don't know if I can . . . I don't know . . .

(EMILY pushes him aside and slams the door shut.

She grabs the key and locks the door.)

EDGAR

Emily . . . please . . .

EMILY

I don't mind being alone . . . I don't really mind . . .

EDGAR

Are you always alone, Emily?

EMILY

I have my family—

EDGAR

But your mother is ill.

EMILY

Yes, I worry about her.

EDGAR

And your father is getting on in years I assume?

EMILY

I worry about him too. Very much so. I cannot leave them.

EDGAR

But, alas, the day will come when they leave you.

EMILY

Yes . . .

EDGAR

And you will be even more alone.

EMILY

Yes . . .

EDGAR

And what friends do you have?

EMILY

My sister . . . and others . . . I have . . . several . . . acquaintances . . .

EDGAR

But friends?

EMILY

Friends?

EDGAR

Are there any? None?

EMILY

When I was at school, when I was younger . . . I had . . . friendships . . . good friends . . . exceedingly personal friendships . . . other young girls . . . Kate Turner was one . . . and a some young gentlemen . . . Leonard Humphrey was one . . . Benjamin Newton another . . . it's not as if I did not have suitors . . . but Leonard died young . . . it was as if an irreplaceable part of myself had passed on . . . and with Benjamin, the interest was ultimately not mutual . . .

EDGAR

Your interest or his?

EMILY

Does it matter? Would my life be much different?

EDGAR

But you have no friends holding you here now?

EMILY

I have other . . . intimates . . . I've held them close to my heart over the years . . . Susan Gilbert, Charles Wadsworth to name just two . . . we're all still close . . . we write letters, you understand . . . we still write letters . . . on occasion . . . as time permits . . . we are all quite busy, you know . . . all quite busy . . . all of us . . . so busy . . .

EDGAR

Friendships are passing . . .

EMILY

Passing . . .

EDGAR

Intimacy is made of air . . . it cannot be held . . . it cannot be kept . . . it cannot be breathed again in the same way . . .

EMILY

No . . .

EDGAR

Do you have any idea what the rest of the world looks like?

EMILY

I think so.

EDGAR

Which parts of the world have you really seen? Any parts?

EMILY

I know Amherst quite well . . .

EDGAR

I'm sure Amherst wears its mid-sized provincial blandness quite cheerfully. But have you ever ventured far from here?

EMILY

I took a trip with my sister . . . we visited Washington to see my father when he was in Congress . . . and then Philadelphia briefly to visit distant relations . . . so many hurrying, perspiring people stuffed and stuffed into those train stations . . . so many curious, inquisitive pairs of eyes fixed upon me, not letting go their grasp of me, on those hot endless trains . . .

EDGAR

And then you returned home, exhausted, I suspect.

EMILY

Well, of course.

EDGAR

And you were so happy weren't you? You were so relieved . . . so thrilled to be home again . . .

EMILY

Yes!

EDGAR

Home is a falsely comforting trap, Emily. It's a morgue with less charm. My homes have always been an ephemeral address . . . Boston, Richmond, Baltimore, Philadelphia . . . each a heartless, humorless town of haunts and difficult times for me . . . none of them let me feel that I could close my eyes and comfortably breathe . . . it's often better to move on, Emily . . .

EMILY

I am not myself without my home . . . it's my own Tell-Tale Heart, as it were—

EDGAR

Stop quoting my own tales to me—

EMILY

But it's true! My home beats the truth for me. I can breathe here—

EDGAR

I thought I had a home at last, a little cottage in the Bronx, New York . . . Ginny and I were unbelievably happy there for a perfect moment or two . . . then she fell ill one night while playing the piano . . . a vein in her throat suddenly burst forth and she began coughing, bleeding terribly, covering the keys with her blood . . . she never fully recovered, never stopped coughing, though she did everything the respectable if uncaring doctors asked of her . . . it was a slow agonizing descent into death that I wouldn't wish on another soul . . . it turns out I did not have a home for long . . .

EMILY

Home is both the smallest of places . . .

EDGAR

Yes . . .

EMILY

And a pilgrimage without end for me . . . I am the queen of infinite space here . . . I fear the rest of the world might prove tiny . . .

EDGAR

Oh god, you really should travel more.

EMILY

I haven't found being away from here to be pleasant, Mr. Poe.



EDGAR

You've had a single trip, Emily! Is that it?

EMILY

Well . . . I've seen doctors in Boston for my eyes . . . but they were of no help . . . I doubt that I will return . . .

EDGAR

Exactly!

EMILY

Exactly what?

EDGAR

You have no idea what most of the world looks like. Do you?

(Pause)

EMILY

Perhaps not. There's a lot I haven't seen, much I don't know, I'll admit . . . much uncertainty . . .

EDGAR

Come then.

EMILY

But I can imagine.

EDGAR

It's not the same.

EMILY

I prefer imagination . . .

EDGAR

It's completely different.

EMILY

Imagination is often better . . .

EDGAR

More inexpensive but not better—

More vivid . . .

EMILY

No—

EDGAR

More free . . .

EMILY

No, I disagree— imagination certainly has its place—

EDGAR

Imagination is all my own. It's selfish, perhaps. But I can control it . . .

EMILY

You can drown in imagination—

EDGAR

I do not fear drowning . . .

EMILY

It's an illusion, Emily.

EDGAR

To me, the entire world is an illusion, Mr. Poe.

EMILY

An illusion, yes. In many ways it is. But we can go to an as yet unimagined, as yet unspoken world . . . beyond this tiny, tiny home. Imagine if you want! But come imagine with me. Beyond confining Amherst. Beyond an occasional disappointing trip to the doctor in Boston.

EDGAR

(He takes her hand again. This time she holds his hands tightly with both hands.)

Beyond everything that you know for certain. And to all you have been longing for . . . just try it . . . walk away from here and imagine with each new step you take . . .

I want to . . . I want to . . . I want to so . . .

EMILY

EDGAR

Trust yourself, Emily . . . just try . . . try . . .

(She wrestles with the thought.

Silence.)

EMILY

But will I be protected, Edgar? Edgar?

EDGAR

Well, I'll do all that I am able—

EMILY

I foresee poor prospects there.

EDGAR

I don't disagree with you. But I'll try.

EMILY

It's not you, Edgar. Is there any such thing as safety out there?

EDGAR

I can't promise that.

EMILY

And I don't mean just from your pursuer . . .

EDGAR

No, I suppose not—

EMILY

Safety from the enormity of it all . . .

EDGAR

The enormity . . .

EMILY

Will I be safe from the aching loss of friends? From bright youth that ages sick and regretful . . . from love that will not be shared . . . and the hopeful touch that turns disinterested and cold . . . will I be safe from unkind eyes that stare back at me with cruelty and do not understand . . . ?

(Silence.)

EDGAR

No. I'm afraid not. Of course not.

EMILY

No, of course not.

(She lets go of his hands.)

That is what I have learned from living. Yes, I do find some comfort in solitude . . . at times I wonder if true solitude is bliss . . . is happiness . . . and yet, I know that it is not . . . I still want . . . I still fear and tremble . . . and then the bliss I find is in my words . . .

EDGAR

Words, yes . . .

EMILY

My words . . .!

EDGAR

Yes. The happiest days I had, with Ginny in mind, even after she was gone, were the days when I was right in the thick of it, assembling the words, in the midst of composing a poem, or the intricacies of a story . . . the words, so possessing of a voice and a clarity to move me, assembled, and reassembled, until I had it just right . . . my words finally gave me . . . joy . . .

EMILY

My poems . . . that's where I've found my moments of joy . . . enough to live another day . . .

EDGAR

Another day, yes . . .

EMILY

If I went with you, would I find my words out there? What do you honestly think? Would my inspiration travel with me?

EDGAR

For you, perhaps not . . .

EMILY

I fear I'll lose . . . my muse. My words are all I have in the end. And I do imagine them, conjure them here. They live with me here in my room. My

poems express what I see in my mind but can speak for myself in no other way.  
 All my trembling, all my fevered questions. Sometimes I do fear for my sanity  
 . . .

EDGAR

Sanity is overvalued.

EMILY

My words may be a little more alive than me. I do hear them . . . speaking  
 intimately . . . precisely . . . to me. I must embrace my words! I both feel and  
 fear that is the life I must choose. Does that make sense to you?

EDGAR

Yes . . . I see . . .

EMILY

But to choose . . . to decide . . . to elect a life like that . . . if I continue down this  
 path . . . my solitary adventure . . . I will never be at ease changing my mind and  
 with the fear of turning around again . . . it would be too difficult to go back . . .  
 to confront again all that painful enormity of wandering outside there . . . I know  
 what I have already started to choose . . . yet I am still frightened of it just the  
 same . . .

EDGAR

Poets must follow the muse that speaks to them. If you think you've found your  
 inspiration, don't let it go.

EMILY

No . . .

EDGAR

A muse is a rare spirit . . . the capacity to listen to one's muse is rarer still . . .  
 most people just want to talk, talk, talk. Keep listening, Emily. Keep listening.

EMILY

Yes, thank you . . . thank you! I don't think I can go with you, Mr. Poe. I don't  
 think it would be possible for me to go. My choice is before me.

EDGAR

Yes, I understand.

EMILY

I must thrive here.

EDGAR

And I must continue as well. Struggle on. As I have.

EMILY

I'm afraid so.

EDGAR

And when it's my time, it's my time . . .

EMILY

I think we may have more courage in us than we've wanted to believe, Mr. Poe.

EDGAR

I too find odd occasional comfort in solitude. Perhaps not the same as you.  
There are days it suffices for a while . . .

EMILY

For a while . . . yes . . .

EDGAR

And then . . .

EMILY

And then . . . words endure. Words endure, Mr. Poe.

(The window suddenly flies open.

Wind and snow blow into the room.

They are both perplexed.

EMILY goes to the window and closes it.

When she turns from the window, it flies open  
again, even wider than before.

More wind and snow blow in.

EMILY turns and looks out the window.

A VOICE is heard.)

VOICE FROM OUTSIDE

Poe! Poe!

EDGAR  
My doppelganger! He's out there!

EMILY  
I don't see him . . .

VOICE FROM OUTSIDE  
Poe! Poe!!!!

EDGAR  
That's his voice!

EMILY  
I don't hear anyone.

EDGAR  
You didn't hear that?

EMILY  
Hear what?

EDGAR  
That voice!

EMILY  
I didn't hear a voice.

EDGAR  
Outside there!

EMILY  
Where?

EDGAR  
He was calling my name.

EMILY  
I didn't hear anyone, Mr. Poe.

EDGAR  
He's right outside!

(EDGAR moves far away from the window.)

EDGAR

He knows where I am! He must have seen me up here. Or heard me . . .

(EMILY looks out the window again.)

EMILY

I don't see anyone out there . . .

EDGAR

I can't hide here any longer . . .

EMILY

No footprints in the snow . . .

EDGAR

I'm in danger . . .

EMILY

Are you sure you heard him?

EDGAR

Absolutely!

EMILY

It sounded like your pursuer?

EDGAR

Who else would be calling my name?

EMILY

Are you sure it wasn't the wind?

EDGAR

That was not the wind! I know that voice! It's the voice of my living nightmare!

EMILY

Of course.

EDGAR

He's here. I must flee . . .



EMILY

Flee . . . yes . . .

(EDGAR stands still.)

EDGAR

I must run . . .

EMILY

Don't be afraid.

EDGAR

Run . . .

EMILY

Don't be frightened. Fear does not become you, Mr. Poe.

EDGAR

But I dwell in fear— fear is my usual abode . . .

EMILY

I believe it's time for you to flee.

EDGAR

Time . . . yes . . .

(He moves near the window, careful not to be seen from  
outside.)

Perhaps there's still a route out there . . . a route in the darkness for my escape  
. . .

EMILY

I hope so . . .

EDGAR

Will you assist me?

EMILY

I can't go with you—

EDGAR

I know. But help me with my coffin. Can you do that?

Yes. EMILY

Help me take it down the stairs. Quickly! EDGAR

O.K. EMILY

Thank you, Emily! EDGAR

(Whispers) EMILY  
We must be quiet. Very quiet.

(Whispers) EDGAR  
Of course.

(They carry the coffin toward the door.

When they get to the door they stop.)

Let me unlock it. EMILY

(They put the coffin down.

EMILY pulls the key out of her dress.

As she is about to unlock the door, there is a loud pounding at the door.

EDGAR is stunned and frightened.)

Who's that? EDGAR

What? EMILY

(He pulls her aside.)

EDGAR

Don't unlock it! Someone's at the door!

(More pounding is heard.)

EMILY

I don't hear anything . . .

EDGAR

Someone's knocking. Is it your father? Your sister?

EMILY

I doubt it . . .

(The voice is now heard from beyond the door.)

VOICE AT THE DOOR

Poe! Poe!

EDGAR

(Whispers)

Did you hear that? It's him! He's right outside the door! I don't care if fear doesn't become me, I'm terrified!

EMILY

(Whispers)

I hear nothing . . . but I too share your fear . . .

(There is pounding at the door again, louder than before.)

EDGAR

I don't know what to do . . . !

EMILY

I share your uncertainty . . .

(The voice beyond the door is heard again, louder than before.)

VOICE AT THE DOOR

Poe!

EDGAR

He's come for me . . . !

EMILY

Your doppelganger is apparently quite persistent . . .

(The voice screams, louder still, echoing throughout the room.)

VOICE AT THE DOOR

POE!!!!!!!!!!!! POE!!!!!!!!!!!!

EDGAR

Out the window!

EMILY

Perhaps you shall!

(They run to the window and look out.)

EDGAR

Wait—!

EMILY

Just hop down to the porch roof, then jump down to the ground!

EDGAR

My coffin! I must keep it with me!

EMILY

It won't fit through the window!

EDGAR

But the spirit who saved me— she said I must carry my coffin with me while I live . . . I can't be separated from it . . .

EMILY

Well . . . can't you just say I'm borrowing it?

(The voice and pounding are heard again.)

VOICE AT THE DOOR

POE!!!!!!!!!!!!

EDGAR

He might break down the door . . .

EMILY

Go now!

VOICE AT THE DOOR

POE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

EMILY

I'll take care of your coffin! I'll keep it for you.

EDGAR

O.K— keep it for me. I can face my fate without it . . . I'll run . . . as long as I can . . .

(EDGAR looks out the window apprehensively.)

EMILY

Run as long as you're able . . . then be ready . . . be ready . . .

EDGAR

Yes . . . yes . . .

(The knocking continues.)

VOICE AT THE DOOR

POE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

EMILY

Go, Mr. Poe. I hope you find eternity palatable. I hope you find eternity comprehensible. Or at least amusing.

EDGAR

Thank you, Emily . . .

(He looks out again.)

I believe I do have but a glimpse of it . . . I'm ready . . .

(EDGAR goes out the window and is gone.)

EMILY looks out and watches him go for several beats.)

EMILY

The rest is silence . . .

(EMILY stands still for a moment.)

She then looks around the room.)

Silence . . .

(She goes about the room and blows out each candle but one. She picks up the remaining lit candle.

She looks at the coffin and walks over to it.

She kneels down before the coffin.

She puts her hands on the coffin and touches it all over.

She speaks softly to herself.)

Behind Me—dips Eternity—  
 Before Me—Immortality—  
 Myself—the Term between—  
 Death but the Drift of Eastern Gray,  
 Dissolving into Dawn away,  
 Before the West begin—

(She slowly opens the lid of the coffin.

The coffin is filled with bright, colorful, beautiful flowers.

The flowers radiate out into the room.

She smiles.

She speaks softly again.)

Heaven is so far of the Mind  
 That were the Mind dissolved—  
 The Site—of it—by Architect  
 Could not again be proved—

'Tis vast—as our Capacity—  
 As fair—as our idea—  
 To Him of adequate desire  
 No further 'tis, than Here—

(EMILY joyously breathes in the scent of the flowers.

The knocking is heard at the door again.

EMILY does not hear it.

There is a voice from beyond the door.

EMILY smiles and does not hear it.)

VOICE AT THE DOOR

Emily . . . Emily . . . Emily . . .

**END OF PLAY**