

# Lov'd Alone

The tragic story of Edgar Allan Poe

By Catherine Gourley

## CHARACTERS

(main characters in boldface)

Narrators 1, 2, 3

Mrs. Usher } friends of  
Mr. Usher } Eliza Poe's

Edgar Poe

Frances Allan, *Edgar's foster mother*

Mrs. Petrie

Mrs. Lawrence

John Allan, *Edgar's foster father*

Rob Stanard, *Edgar's boyhood friend*

Jane Stanard, *Rob's mother*

Master Clark, *Edgar's teacher*

Mr. Royster, *Elmira's father*

Elmira Royster, *Edgar's childhood sweetheart*

Z. Collins Lee } students  
Ebenezer }

Maria Clemm, *Edgar's aunt*

Virginia Clemm, *Edgar's cousin*

Dr. Snodgrass

## SCENE 1

**Narrator 1:** The year is 1811. A **dismal** November rain is falling over Richmond, Virginia. A horse-drawn carriage splatters through the puddled streets. The driver reins the horse to a stop in front of a weathered boarding house on lower Main Street.

**Narrator 2:** Mr. and Mrs. Usher step out of the carriage and hurry to the door. The horse—its body wet and steaming—hangs its head in the downpour.

**Narrator 3:** The elderly couple enter the boarding house, a temporary home for actors traveling through the city. Mrs. Usher carries under a damp towel a dish of cold, greasy chicken legs.

**Mrs. Usher:** Do you think she'll be much improved today?

**Mr. Usher:** (*gravely*) My dear, our Eliza is never going to get well again.

**Mrs. Usher:** What will become of the children?

**Narr 1:** Mr. Usher gazes up the stairwell, dimly lit by wall sconces. On the top stair, gazing down at the visitors through the spindles, is a 2-year-old boy.

**Mr. Usher:** Hello, Eddie. We've come to see you.

**Narr 2:** Mr. Usher whispers to his wife as they climb the stairs.

**Mr. Usher:** Surely some good family will take the children.

**Mrs. Usher:** Eliza told me there are relatives in Baltimore. Perhaps—

**Narr 3:** The sudden sound of a woman's **racking** cough stops Mrs. Usher on the top step. She gazes down the narrow hallway to a partially open door.

**Mrs. Usher:** Poor, beautiful Eliza.

**Narr 1:** Mr. Usher picks up Edgar in his arms.

**Mr. Usher:** All this rain has kept

you from playing outside, hasn't it, lad? Well, it will soon end.

**Narr 2:** A few evenings later, the rain does end. Edgar stands at the foot of his mother's sickbed and stares at her waxen face and at her black hair streamed across the soiled pillow.

**Edgar Poe:** When will Mama wake up?

**Mrs. Usher:** Not for a long, long time. She wanted you to have this so you should never forget her.

**Narr 3:** She hands him a miniature portrait of Eliza.

**Mrs. Usher:** Throw her a kiss now and say good-bye. You must kiss your little sister, Rosalie, too, for she is going away just like you.

**Edgar:** Can't she come with me?

**Mrs. Usher:** No. She is going with Mrs. Mackenzie.

**Narr 1:** Outside in the hall wait a man and a woman, John Allan and his wife, Frances Allan.

**Mr. Usher:** Come here, Eddie, and say hello to your new ma and pa.

**Narr 2:** The woman kneels and holds out her arms, but the man remains standing stiffly, distressed by the sour odors of sickness that fill the place.

**Frances Allan:** I have no children, Edgar. You shall be my own little boy from now on.

**Narr 3:** Edgar glances over his shoulder toward the sickroom, but Mrs. Usher has already softly shut the door.



## SCENE 2

**Narr 1:** Months later in the Allan home in Richmond, friends gather for a party. Dressed in a new velvet suit, 3-year-old Edgar wanders among the adults.

**Narr 2:** He would have preferred to stay with the Allans' butler, Dabney. Old Dab tells such scary stories of haunts and spirits.

**Mrs. Petrie:** Is that the child? Such large gray eyes and curly black hair.

**Mrs. Lawrence:** His mother was that beautiful actress who died last autumn of—what was it? Pneumonia?

**Mrs. Petrie: Consumption.** The boy's father was also an actor and a drunkard! One day

he simply walked out and was never seen again.

**Frances:** Good evening, ladies.

**Mrs. Lawrence:** Dear Frances, we were just commenting on what a beautiful child Edgar is.

**Frances:** He can recite rhymes!

**John Allan:** He sings and dances like his mother. Here. Off with your shoes, lad.

**Frances:** John just loves to show Edgar off.

**Narr 3:** The foster father undoes the shiny buckles of the boy's shoes, then lifts him in his stocking feet onto the

### \* vocab

**DISMAL:** gloomy or sorrowful

**RACKING:** wrenchingly painful

**CONSUMPTION:** an outdated term for tuberculosis



dining room table. The room grows silent as the guests turn.

**Narr 1:** Edgar begins to sing and dance in an elfish way. When the dance ends, John pours sweet-smelling wine into a teacup, which Edgar lifts in a toast.

**Edgar:** To your fine health, one and all.

**Narr 2:** Charmed, the guests applaud.

**Mrs. Petrie:** He's such a precious pet!

**Mrs. Lawrence:** Will you be adopting him?

**Narr 3:** Frances looks at her husband, now helping Edgar from the table.

**Frances:** Of course, Mr. Allan loves children as much as I do. He has sworn to provide

Edgar with an excellent education.

**Mrs. Petrie:** Then surely Mr. Allan has given the boy his name.

**Frances:** Actually, no. I have not yet persuaded him to adopt Edgar.

**Mrs. Lawrence:** Perhaps Mr. Allan simply requires more time to grow accustomed to the idea.

**Frances:** Yes. A little more time.

### SCENE 3

**Narr 1:** So begins the second childhood of Edgar Poe. The first was brief and tainted with the pain of his mother's illness. But life in the Allan home is all books and learning and velvet suits.

**Narr 2:** Frances Allan coddles the dark-eyed boy. John Allan praises him for excelling in his studies of Latin and Greek.

**Narr 3:** As the years pass, Edgar learns to shoot and to box and—somewhat annoying to John—to write love poems to pretty girls.

**Narr 1:** Then in the spring of 1823, Edgar's life changes once again.

**Narr 2:** A crowd of boys clamber onto Ludlow's Wharf on the James River. Edgar, now 14, strips off his shirt and shoes. Beside him, his competitor—a boy named Mayo—also undresses.

**Rob Stanard:** Six miles? Who can swim that far? Poe's not afraid of anything. Not anything!

**Narr 3:** The two swimmers dive into the muddy river and strike out against the current for Tree Hill, 6 miles upstream. Two rowboats, full of boys, follow, ready to pick up the swimmers should their strength fail.

**Narr 1:** The boys on the riverbank also follow, shouting encouragement.

**Narr 2:** At 3 miles, Mayo gives up. The boys haul him into a boat. Amazingly, Poe keeps swimming.

**Narr 3:** That night, Rob pleads with his mother.

**Rob:** Don't scold me for being late. I couldn't leave! Oh, you should have seen him. By the time he crawled out of the river at Tree Hill, his back was covered with water blisters!

**Jane Stanard:** What is this boy's name?

**Rob:** Edgar Poe. Let me bring him home one day so you can meet him. He writes poetry and has good manners.

**Narr 1:** Across town, in the library at the Allan residence, an entirely different conversation is going on.

**John:** Showing off, that's what he's about.

**Frances:** The other boys like him. He's rather popular.

**John:** Where is he now?

**Frances:** In his room, writing. He wants you to publish a book of his poems. Will you, John?

**Narr 2:** He hesitates. He is not a poor man, but neither is he wealthy.

**John:** I was an orphan myself. Nobody gave me all the things I have handed to Edgar—clothing, a good home, an education. He shows no gratitude.

**Narr 3:** Frances does not remind her husband of the one thing he has yet to give Edgar—the legal name of Allan.

**Narr 1:** A few days later, a visitor arrives at the apartment of Master Clark, Edgar's schoolteacher.

**Master Clark:** Mr. Allan! How can I serve you?

**Narr 2:** John sets a small bundle of papers on the master's desk.

**Master Clark:** What is this? Verses?

**John:** Edgar's work. What is your opinion of the rhymes? Are they any good?

**Master Clark:** They are indeed good. Edgar is a born poet.

**John:** He wishes to have this bundle published into a book. I vowed to see what I could do—upon your approval, that is.

**Master Clark:** I must be frank. I like the boy very much, but you have spoiled him. He is an excellent pupil but arrogant and mischievous. That 6-mile swim made him quite a hero in the eyes of the boys.

**John:** So my wife tells me.

**Master Clark:** In short, sir, to publish a book when he is but 14 would excessively flatter his self-esteem.

**Narr 3:** Allan clears his throat, then stands.

**John:** The women in the house have spoiled him, not I. As for the poems, I shall do as you say and forget them.

**Master Clark:** Forget them? Oh, I should not go that far. Your son is a credit to you, sir. One day he—

**John:** Edgar Poe is my ward, I should not go that far. Good day.

**Narr 1:** With that, John Allan leaves in a huff.

### SCENE 4

**Narr 2:** Dressed in white muslin, Jane Stanard is in the garden feeding pigeons. In a shaft of golden sunlight, birds flutter above her. The vision stuns Edgar, and he whispers just loud enough for her to hear.

**Edgar:** This is Rob's mother? No, she is Helen, a goddess.

**Narr 3:** Jane, startled, turns around.

**Jane:** Oh, so you are Edgar Poe. Rob has talked about you.

**Narr 1:** Edgar stares as if in a trance. Her dark eyes are like the eyes in the miniature portrait of his mother that Edgar has treasured all of childhood.

**Jane:** Rob tells me you are a poet. When you come to visit again, you must bring some of your poems and read to me.

### \* vocab

**WARD:** a person who is under protection or control of another

**MUSLIN:** a woven cotton fabric used for clothing, bedsheet, and a variety of other uses

**Narr 2:** Edgar returns again and again. He sits with his friend's mother in the garden and reads his verses. The same verses his foster father has refused to publish.

**Edgar:** (*reading*) In youth's spring, it was my lot/To haunt of the wide world a spot/The which I could not love the less/So lovely was the loneliness.

**Jane:** Loneliness? You are too young to know so much about sadness and melancholy.

**Edgar:** I am 14. I have traveled with my foster father and studied in England.

**Jane:** You frown each time you mention Mr. Allan.

**Edgar:** He hates me. He wants me out of the house.

**Jane:** That can't be true.

**Edgar:** He praises, then scolds and accuses me of **idleness**. What else am I to think?

**Jane:** Be kind to him, Edgar. Treat him well.

**Narr 3:** Edgar does not tell her the truth he has recently learned about John Allan—he has a mistress.

**Narr 1:** Jane sees the **brooding** in the boy's eyes and places her hand gently on his cheek.

**Jane:** Do not linger long in those dark corners of your imagination, Edgar.

**Edgar:** I am not like others. I see things differently. Oh, the things I see in my dreams—shadows and demons!

**Jane:** But you also see beauty. One day you will be a wonderful poet, but you must not let the darkness swallow you.

**Narr 2:** At a time when his foster father has turned cold to him, Jane's kind words fill Edgar with hope—and something more. Although he can never speak of it to Rob, Edgar has fallen in love with this beautiful woman who is the very age his own mother would have been—had she lived.

**Edgar:** One day I shall write about you.

**Jane:** You must go now, Edgar. I'm not feeling well.

**Narr 3:** A few days later, Rob tells Edgar he must not come again to his home. Rob's baby sister has died, and his mother's overwhelming grief has made her seriously ill.

**Edgar:** But I must see her! She'll want to see me.

**Rob:** She sees no one. She speaks to no one. All she does is wail.

**Narr 1:** That night, Edgar begins to write a poem that he titles "To Helen." For days he works on the meter and the rhyme, but before he can finish, the news of Jane's death shocks him.

**Narr 2:** For the second time in his young life, someone he loves has been stolen away from him.

**John:** What is wrong with the boy? Why is he so moody?

**Frances:** Be patient with him,

John. That woman who died was his friend.

**John:** A woman twice his age who died of insanity?! My patience grows thin—with him *and* with you.

**Narr 3:** Alone in a graveyard at dusk, Edgar sobs over Jane's tombstone. This is not the first visit to the dead Edgar has made. Nor will it be his last.

## SCENE 5

**Narr 1:** Several months later, John Allan inherits a great sum of money and purchases a large home in Richmond. Nearby is the Royster estate.

**Narr 2:** For the first time since Jane Stanard's death months earlier, the curtain of depression lifts from Edgar's shoulders. Elmira Royster is 16 and quite pretty.

**Narr 3:** She, too, has taken notice of Edgar—handsome and mysteriously romantic. When Edgar calls on her, she plays the piano and he reads her stories of lost love.

**Mr. Royster:** He is beneath you, the son of actors.

**Elmira Royster:** Is he not Mr. Allan's heir? Besides, I love him.

**Mr. Royster:** Elmira, you are too young to know anything of love.

**Narr 1:** Edgar and Elmira manage to find ways of being alone. He signals to her from his bedroom window, waving a white handkerchief.

**Narr 2:** In a private, wooded

place, Edgar vows his undying love.

**Edgar:** In January, I am going away. I am going to the University of Virginia to become a man of letters.

**Elmira:** Can you make money writing stories?

**Edgar:** Money isn't important. What I see in my dreams is. I must write! Promise me that you'll marry me when I return.

**Elmira:** Marry you? But my father—

**Edgar:** We won't tell him. Not yet. Once I have distinguished myself at the university and published my poems, he will not object.

**Elmira:** Oh, yes! I'll marry you. Our engagement will be our secret.

**Edgar:** I'll write to you.

**Elmira:** Every day? You write the most wonderful things, Edgar.

**Narr 3:** In January, John Allan gives Edgar \$110 and bids him farewell. Sixty miles away at the university, Edgar discovers that the rental of his room—No. 13 West Range—does not cover wood for the fireplace nor food nor books nor paper.

**Narr 1:** The other students arrive with trunks of clothing. Some even bring personal servants. Within the first week, Edgar's money is gone, and he must buy his books on credit.

**Narr 2:** At once he writes to his foster father of his

**predicament**.

**Edgar:** (*writing*) Dear Sir, Surely you have underestimated the costs of my education. I am in extreme need of funds.

**Narr 3:** At last the expected letter arrives from Richmond, but its contents are meager.

**Edgar:** Forty dollars? With \$1 extra for spending money?

**Narr 1:** His room rent alone costs \$15 a month.

**Narr 2:** It is going to be a long, cold winter.

## SCENE 6

**Narr 3:** A half-dozen boys are crowded into room No. 13. They have unbuttoned their ruffled shirts and pushed back their sleeves.

**Z. Collins Lee:** I've brought something to add to the fun.

**Narr 1:** One boy deals cards while Z. Collins Lee passes around a bottle of apple wine.

**Z. Collins Lee:** Go on, Edgar, have a drink.

**Narr 2:** Drinking is a new and not so very pleasant experience for Edgar. The liquor sets his heart pounding. Still, he takes the glass and **quaffs** the warm wine in a single swallow.

**Z. Collins Lee:** Why is it you never wait for the water but gulp it down?

### vocab

**IDLENESS:** inactivity  
**BROODING:** dwelling on depressing, morbid, or painful thoughts  
**PREDICAMENT:** an unpleasant or difficult situation  
**QUAFFS:** drinks heartily



**Edgar:** I don't much like the taste.

**Narr 3:** Suddenly the room is very warm. The liquor flushes his face. His hearts pounds.

**Narr 1:** The boys gather their cards and begin to gamble.

**Narr 2:** Edgar excels at his studies but not at cards. Each night, his debts mount. One afternoon, charged with a 60-cent fine at the library, Edgar counts out the coins in his pocket.

**Edgar:** Fifty-four cents. That's all I've got.

**Narr 3:** The librarian takes it.

**Z. Collins Lee:** You ought not to drink, Eddie. You can't carry your liquor. And why do you play cards if you always lose?

**Edgar:** How else am I to get some money? Pa has abandoned me.

**Z. Collins Lee:** What of the girl you left behind? Have you heard from her?

**Edgar:** I am too busy studying to worry about Elmira just now.

**Narr 1:** That is not quite the truth. He has written letters, many letters, and not one has she answered.

**Narr 2:** In Richmond on a February evening, Elmira appears at the door to her father's library.

**Elmira:** Is that the mail you are reading, Father?

**Mr. Royster:** Were you expecting some correspondence?

**Elmira:** Edgar Poe promised to write to me. Has no letter come?

**Mr. Royster:** I told you he was unreliable.

**Narr 3:** Disappointed and confused, Elmira returns to her room and gazes out the window at the Allan residence, where once Edgar had signaled to her.

**Elmira:** Eddie, why have you betrayed me?

**Narr 1:** Downstairs, Mr. Royster opens a drawer and removes a bundle of letters. One by one he drops them on the fire in the **hearth**.

**Narr 2:** Meanwhile, 60 miles away, in room No. 13 . . .

**Z. Collins Lee:** Read us the story, Eddie.

**Narr 3:** Tonight the cards and the wine are forgotten. The young men have gathered in No. 13 to hear Edgar read another of his stories.

**Narr 1:** He reads with passion, and his friends listen. They are **spellbound**. When the story ends, Edgar looks up expectantly. They do not always understand Edgar's stories. Now one boy breaks the mood.

**Ebenezer:** There's just one thing wrong with it, Edgar. The hero's name—Gaffy—comes up too often.

**Narr 2:** A roar of laughter erupts.

**Ebenezer:** Get rid of Gaffy and you'll have quite a story.

**Narr 3:** Enraged that they have not taken his work seriously, Edgar tosses the entire manuscript into the fire.

**Z. Collins Lee:** No! Stop! Don't

do that! They were only teasing you!

**Edgar:** Get out! Get out!

**Narr 1:** The students file from the room as the flames crackle and snap, devouring Edgar's words.

## SCENE 7

**Narr 2:** In Richmond, letters of debt for Edgar Poe have begun to arrive at the residence of John Allan. Furious, he calls for his carriage and travels to the university.

**Z. Collins Lee:** Is that your foster father?

**Edgar:** At last!

**Narr 3:** Their meeting takes place in No. 13. The room is cold and damp. John paces, his hands behind his back.

**John:** Why do you not burn a fire?

**Edgar:** I've no money for wood.

**John:** Because you have gambled it away.

**Edgar:** If you had provided the funds that you knew I required when you sent me here, I would not have been forced to try to win a few coins to feed myself and clean my clothes.

**Narr 1:** In the hallway, Z. Collins Lee and the others overhear the heated argument.

**Narr 2:** John flashes several debt notices in Edgar's face.

**John:** Two thousand dollars! Do you suppose that I will pay these?

**Edgar:** I supposed you would

honor your word and provide the education you promised on the day my mother died.

**John:** You forget yourself, sir. I am not your father and therefore not legally responsible for these notes.

**Narr 3:** The words sting, but what John Allan says next cuts deeper.

**John:** You will return to Richmond and work for me in the counting house and in that way clear your debts.

**Edgar:** Leave the university? But I have placed at the top of my classes. I intend to be a man of letters.

**John:** You, sir, are an **idler**, a gambler, no better than a thief!

## SCENE 8

**Narr 1:** Once Edgar returns to Richmond, he calls upon Elmira. Mr. Royster does not invite him inside.

**Mr. Royster:** Elmira is in North Carolina with relatives.

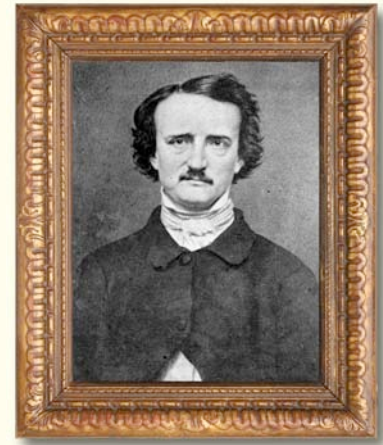
**Edgar:** She's gone? Surely you will give me her address so that I—

**Mr. Royster:** Elmira is engaged to be married to Mr. Shelton. She has quite forgotten about you.

**Edgar:** But we were engaged. We made a vow to each other!

**Mr. Royster:** How would you support her? I understand you were dismissed from the university—

**Edgar:** Is that what my foster father has told you? It's not true!



**Mr. Royster:** —for gambling and for drunken behavior.

**Narr 2:** Edgar feels a rage building inside him. He has been unjustly treated, abused by the very person who had sworn to protect him.

**Narr 3:** Weeks pass. Edgar works in the counting house, as required, but his relationship with his foster father is strained.

**Narr 1:** At last, Edgar rebels. One morning, reminded again by John Allan of his worthlessness, Edgar storms out of the house. He leaves with nothing, not even a hat or a coat.

**Narr 2:** For one day and night, he wanders the streets. On the second day, angry words flow from his pen in a letter to his supposed protector.

**Edgar:** (*writing*) Sir! My determination is to leave you and find some place in this wide

world where I will be treated—not as you have treated me. I request that you send me at once my trunk containing my clothes and books. Send also money enough to book passage to the northern cities. If you will support me for one month, I shall then be able to care for myself and live my life according to my own wishes.

**Narr 3:** He signs the letter Edgar Poe, purposely omitting the name Allan.

**Narr 1:** He receives no answer. On the third day, still without money and warm clothing, he reconsiders and writes a second, softer letter.

### **vocab**

**HEARTH:** the floor of a fireplace  
**SPELLBOUND:** enchanted, entranced  
**IDLER:** an inactive person



**Edgar:** (*writing*) Dear Sir, Be so good as to send me my trunk with my clothes—I am in the greatest necessity.

**Narr 2:** Still, no trunk, no books, and no money arrive.

**Edgar:** (*writing*) I have not tasted food since yesterday morning. I have nowhere to sleep at night but roam about the street. I am nearly exhausted. I beseech you. I have not one cent in the world. If you do not answer my plea, I fear for the consequences.

**Narr 3:** No word reaches him. Desperate, Edgar persuades the captain of a coal barge to allow him to work for his passage north. He flees Richmond in the night, an orphan still.

## SCENE 9

**Narr 1:** From here, Edgar's life story twists and turns, tumbles down blind alleys, then retraces its steps and strikes out in new directions, as if the poet were lost in a **labyrinth**.

**Narr 2:** In a way, he was.

**Narr 3:** In Boston, Edgar manages to publish his first book of poems. But it is a thin volume that earns not a single cent—a blind alley.

**Narr 1:** He turns another corner, enlisting in the Army. With his athletic abilities and his intelligence, he soon rises in the ranks. But an enlisted man can go only so far. Another dead end.

**Narr 2:** Swallowing his pride,

Edgar begs his foster father's forgiveness and asks for his help in securing an appointment to West Point. John Allan gives in. Yet after only a few months, Edgar is dishonorably discharged from the academy for failing to attend drills.

**Narr 3:** Edgar leaves West Point as he left Richmond, with nothing much but his pride and his imagination. He **wends** his way downriver to New York City, attempting to find work and to sell his stories.

**Narr 1:** Bouts of drinking stall him, but eventually he finds his way to Baltimore. There, he meets the mother and daughter who will change his life forever—his aunt Maria Clemm and his cousin Virginia.

**Maria Clemm:** Of course you must stay with us. You are family. I've not much money and food is often scarce, but you can live in the **garret**.

**Narr 2:** In this tiny room, among his own people at last, Edgar writes of murders and morgues, madness and menace—in short, of people's **predisposition** to evil.

## SCENE 10

**Narr 3:** Day after day, his affection deepens for Maria—whom he calls “Muddy”—and for 11-year-old Virginia—whom he calls “Sissy.”

**Maria:** Perhaps one day even yet Mr. Allan will reconcile with you.

**Edgar:** Should that happen, I won't forget you, Muddy. Or Virginia.

**Maria:** Someday Virginia might make you a devoted wife. She's awfully fond of you, Eddie.

**Edgar:** Sissy is just a child.

**Maria:** She won't always be so young. As her mother, I must think of her future. Her uncle would like her to come live with him.

**Edgar:** Muddy, don't send her away from me! I couldn't live if I lost her. You and Sissy are all I have in the world!

**Narr 1:** One day, word reaches Edgar that his foster father is dying.

**Edgar:** How often has he mocked my dependence on him and my failure to earn a decent living?

**Maria:** Surely on his deathbed he will find it in his heart to forgive you!

**Narr 2:** Edgar scrapes up enough money for the journey. But in Richmond, he is refused entry to the house.

**Narr 3:** Edgar pushes past old Dab, the butler, bounds up the stairs, and enters his foster father's bedroom.

**Narr 1:** The man's eyes are sunken, and his skin is **sallow**. When he sees Edgar, he explodes in a rage.

**John:** Get out! Get out!

**Edgar:** Sir! Please allow me to make amends before it is too late.

**Narr 2:** John reaches for a cane and swings it overhead.

**John:** Get out, you black heart!

**Narr 3:** Without surprise a few days later, Edgar hears of John Allan's death. He has died a wealthy man and has willed his estate to his two illegitimate sons.

**Narr 1:** The will makes no mention whatsoever of Edgar Poe.

## SCENE 11

**Narr 2:** It is a cold night 11 years later, 1845. The years have been both kind and cruel to Edgar. He has married Virginia, and for years they have been devoted to each other.

**Narr 3:** Yet—cruelly—like so many of the people Edgar has dared to love, she is dying of the very illness that killed his mother.

**Narr 1:** He has published stories and poems, and admiration for him as an author has grown.

**Narr 2:** However, his work earns him little money with which to live comfortably.

**Narr 3:** In the parlor of a home in New York City, a fire burns brightly. All eyes turn to the dark-haired man sitting in the corner.

**Narr 1:** “We would be so honored,” one of the guests begins, “if you should read your poem to us.”

**Edgar:** Very well, but I prefer that the lights be dimmed.

**Narr 2:** Edgar stands. Gone are the velvet coats and shiny buckles of his youth. His

clothes are well-worn and out of style. Gone too is the lean, athletic body. Years of poverty have beaten Edgar.

**Narr 3:** Still, his voice is strong and hypnotic as he recites the verse that has brought him respect at last.

**Edgar:** Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,/Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore . . .

**Narr 1:** The fire's flames cast long, birdlike shadows across the floor. The guests listen breathlessly.

**Edgar:** Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;/ And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.

**Narr 2:** As they listen, each guest wonders, Who is the woman Lenore of whom the poet has written so passionately? They know nothing of Eliza, Jane Stanard, Elmira Royster, or even of Frances Allan, who had died years earlier.

**Edgar:** And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, *still* is sitting . . .

**Narr 3:** Late that night, Edgar makes his way home to his

### **vocab**

**LABYRINTH:** a place constructed of intricate passageways

**WENDS:** directs one's course

**GARRET:** a room or unfinished part of a house just under the roof

**PREDISPOSITION:** natural tendency

**SALLOW:** of a sickly, yellowish color



small cottage. He enters quietly so as not to wake Muddy or Virginia. But he overhears them in the next room.

**Virginia Clemm:** You must never leave Edgar. He needs you. Promise me, and then I can die in peace.

**Maria:** Oh, child. I promise.

**Narr 1:** Virginia shivers on her straw mattress. Caterina, Edgar's brown cat, lies across her chest, providing some meager warmth.

**Edgar:** Are you better, Sissy?

**Narr 2:** He knows she is not, but he tries to keep a cheerful note in his voice.

**Virginia:** Did you read tonight?

**Edgar:** Yes. Shall I tell you all about it?

**Narr 3:** Virginia smiles weakly, then suddenly a shuddering cough seizes her. She turns her head to mask the blood she has spit up.

**Narr 1:** Edgar drapes his overcoat across her legs to warm her—he has nothing else to offer—then sits at her side. Her hand in his is as cold as stone.

## SCENE 12

**Narr 2:** He reads aloud as he pens the poem.

**Edgar:** 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.

**Narr 3:** Caterina leaps softly onto Edgar's shoulder. He lifts his head to look through the window at the **sepulchre** where Virginia lies, alone and cold. Inside his head he hears a familiar voice.

**Jane:** Do not linger long in those dark corners, Edgar.

**Edgar:** I cannot escape the dark. It haunts me! Torments me! I am alone, lost.

**Narr 1:** The spirit vanishes. The room is still. Edgar picks up his pen.

**Edgar:** (*writing*) 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 . . .

## SCENE 13

**Narr 2:** For months after Virginia's death, Edgar cares little if he should live or die. He drinks himself into stupors. His heart knocks so loudly at times, he wonders that Muddy doesn't hear it.

**Narr 3:** Eventually, with Muddy's encouragement, he pushes aside the premonitions of his own death and begins to work toward his dream of owning his own magazine.

**Narr 1:** In June 1849, Edgar prepares for a journey to Richmond to deliver a lecture and, he hopes, to raise much needed funds for his magazine.

**Narr 2:** In Richmond, he meets again his childhood sweetheart. Suddenly, new hope fills

his heart. Elmira Royster Shelton is now a widow. Her pleasure at seeing him is obvious.

**Narr 3:** For three months, he lingers, courting her, not once tasting liquor.

**Elmira:** I never knew until later that Father had destroyed your letters.

**Edgar:** You gave me your word once that you would marry me.

**Elmira:** That was a long time ago.

**Edgar:** Will you give me your word again? I must take the steamer from Norfolk to Baltimore, then the train to New York City. I've business there. When I return, tell me you'll be my wife.

**Elmira:** And take care of you and Muddy as well? My children say money—not love—is your marriage motive.

**Edgar:** Do you believe them?

**Elmira:** I don't know what to believe. Mystery swirls about you.

**Narr 1:** Elmira fondly smooths a lock of black hair from his forehead, then looks at him in alarm.

**Elmira:** You're feverish.

**Narr 2:** She presses her fingertips against his chest.

**Elmira:** Your heart pounds. Do not travel to Norfolk tonight, Edgar. You are not well.

**Edgar:** I fear leaving you. I

have such a cold feeling that I shall never see you again.

**Elmira:** Please stay.

**Narr 3:** He kisses her hand, then he turns and departs.

**Elmira:** (*aloud, to herself*) I married another man, but the love of my life was you. I never loved anyone else but you.

**Narr 1:** The words are spoken too late. He does not hear.

**Narr 2:** The steamer departs Norfolk at 4 a.m. as scheduled, with Edgar Poe listed among the passengers. The next morning, in a heavy rain, the ship docks at Baltimore.

**Narr 3:** Edgar steps onto the wharf and enters the labyrinth again. What happens next in those dark passages is mere speculation.

**Ebenezer:** Edgar Poe! Is that you? Rotten weather but what good luck to meet up with you! Come, I'll buy you a drink.

**Edgar:** I remember you. From the university.

**Ebenezer:** You were quite the scholar. Here's a tavern. Let's drink to old times.

**Edgar:** No, I must board the train. I've an appointment—

**Ebenezer:** This storm has delayed things all round. The train won't leave for hours.

**Narr 1:** Edgar rubs his forehead. His hands are clammy.

**Ebenezer:** Why, you're shaking. A brandy will warm you.

**Edgar:** No! I don't think so . . . perhaps just one.

**Narr 2:** Ebenezer guides him

into the tavern and out of the rain. The air is thick with smoke. It swirls and takes the shape of all the frightening things in Edgar's dreams.

**Edgar:** (*staggering*) I must get back to the steamer.

**Ebenezer:** What is your hurry?

**Narr 3:** Ebenezer pulls out a chair for him and waits.

## SCENE 14

**Narr 1:** A week passes. Neither Muddy in New York nor Elmira in Richmond has heard from Edgar. But on the evening of October 7, at the Washington College Hospital in Baltimore, Dr. Snodgrass composes a letter to Maria Clemm.

**Dr. Snodgrass:** (*writing*) I discovered him in this critical condition, delirious, wearing filthy clothes that were obviously not his. His condition was so deteriorated that I could do nothing for him. In his final hours, he became quiet and seemed to rest. My sympathy to you, madam.

**Narr 2:** The next morning, Edgar Poe is buried in Baltimore. The service lasts no longer than three minutes, for the weather is still raw and wet.

**Narr 3:** Only a few mourners stand over the fresh grave. Among them, an old gentleman named Master Clark and an attorney, Z. Collins Lee, who knew the poet as a friend in his youth.

**Narr 1:** No one else comes to grieve. Edgar Poe died as he had lived and loved—alone. ■

### \* vocab

**SEPULCHRE:** a place of burial; a tomb