

The Cask of Amontillado¹

The man Fortunato had done me a thousand wrongs. I bore them as best I could. But when he began to insult me, I vowed revenge. You who understand my nature, will know that I spoke no threats aloud. But to myself I vowed to be avenged, *sometime*. The point was settled in my mind. And since I had vowed revenge *without fail*, I must take no risk. I must not only punish, but punish without hurt to myself. I would not be truly avenged if I brought harm upon myself as well as upon him. Nor would I be *completely* avenged unless *he knew* that his punishment came from me.

Neither by word nor deed did I give Fortunato cause to doubt my good will toward him. I smiled in his face, as always, and he did not know that *now* I was smiling at thought of the punishment sure to be his.

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—though in all other things he was a man to be looked up to, and even feared. He prided himself on being a good judge of wine. He was vain on this point. Fortunato was a quack in painting and gems, but in the matter of old wines, he was a good judge. I should know, for I too am a judge of Italian wines.

It was about dusk one evening during carnival time, that I met Fortunato. He greeted me with great warmth, for he had been drinking much. He was dressed in the spirit of carnival, wearing a tight-fitting jester's costume, *gay* with many-colored stripes. On his head was a high, pointed cap

¹ A kind of wine, named after Montilla, a town in southern Spain.

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with bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never be done shaking his hand.

"My dear Fortunato," I said, "it is lucky we met. How well you are looking today. I have just bought a cask of what passes for amontillado, but I have my doubts that it is the real thing."

"Amontillado?" he said. "A cask? Impossible! And in the middle of the carnival!"

"I was silly enough to pay the full amontillado price. I should have asked your opinion, for I had my doubts. But you were not to be found, and I was afraid of losing the bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I am not sure of it. I should like your opinion. But if you are too busy, I will get Luchesi's advice! If anyone is a good judge, he is. I am on my way to him now."

"Luchesi cannot tell amontillado from sherry."

"And yet some fools will say that his taste is as good as your own."

"Come, let us go."

"Where?"

"To your vaults."

"My friend, no—I would not trouble you. You are in a hurry. And Luchesi will—"

"I am in no hurry—come on."

"My friend, no. I see you have a severe cold, and the vaults are very damp."

"Let us go anyway. My cold is nothing. Amontillado! You have been fooled. And as for Luchesi, he can't tell sherry from amontillado."

As he spoke, Fortunato put on a mask of black silk and took my arm. I let him hurry me on to my place.

There were no servants at home; they had all gone off to make merry in the carnival season. I had told them that I should not return until morning and that they were not to leave the house. This was enough, I knew, to cause them to

Handwritten signature:
M. J. X

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leave the place, one and all, the moment my back was turned.

I took two torches from their holders, and gave one to Fortunato. Then I bowed him through several rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed first down the long winding stairway, warning him to be careful as he followed. We came at last to the foot of the stairway, and stood together upon the damp ground of the catacombs² of the Montresors.³

Fortunato's step was unsteady, and the bells on his cap jingled as he walked.

"The cask," he said. "Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!"

"It is farther on," said I. "How long have you had that cough?"

He turned toward me, and looked into my face with the moist eyes of a drunken man. He could not reply for some minutes because of his cough.

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh! It is nothing," he said at last.

"Come," I said firmly, "we will go back. Your health is precious. You are rich, admired, loved. You are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed. For me, it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I would be blamed. Besides, there is Luchesi—"

"Never mind," he said; "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True—true," I said, "and, indeed, I do not wish to alarm you—but you should take care of yourself. A drink of this Médoc⁴ will defend you from the damp."

²An underground place for burial, made in the form of narrow rooms with alcoves set in the walls for tombs. Since wines are stored underground, there are found here both tombs and stores of wine.

³The name of the narrator's family. Both men belong to noble and rich families.

⁴A type of wine, named for the place it is made, Médoc, in southwest France.

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Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I took from a row that lay upon the mold.

"Drink," I said, handing him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me, making the bells jingle.

"I drink," he said, "to the peaceful rest of those that lie buried all about us."

"And I to your long life."

He again took my arm, and we walked on.

"These catacombs," he said, "go on a long way."

"The Montresors," I replied, "were a great family."

"I forget the motto of the Montresors' coat of arms."

"*Nemo me impune lacessit.*"⁵

"Good!" he said.

The wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled. My own fancy grew warm with the Médoc. We had passed through long walls of piled skeletons, and long walls of casks and bottles, now one, now the other. At last we entered the deepest part of the vaults. I paused again, and this time I made bold to take hold of Fortunato's arm above the elbow.

"We are below the river's bed," I said. "Moisture drips among the bones. Come, we will go back before it is too late. Your cough—"

"It is nothing," he said. "Let us go on. But first, another drink of the Médoc."

I broke and handed him a bottle of De Grâve.⁶ He drank it at a breath, laughed and threw the bottle upward, with a gesture I did not understand. I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the gesture—a strange one.

"You do not understand?" he said.

"No," I replied.

"Then you are not of the brotherhood—you are not of the masons."⁷

⁵ "No one injures me with impunity."

⁶ A wine made in the Gironde district of France.

⁷ Fortunato is thinking of the brotherhood of Freemasons.

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"Yes, yes," I said, "yes, yes."

"You? Impossible! A mason?"

"Yes, a mason," I replied.

"A sign," he said, "give the sign."

"It is this," I said, taking a trowel⁸ from under my cloak.

"You jest," he cried, drawing back. "But let us go on to the amontillado."

"Be it so," I said, putting the tool under my cloak and again offering him my arm.

He leaned on it heavily. We passed through a range of low arches, went downward, passed on, went down again, and came to a deep vault in which the air was so foul our torches seemed to glow rather than flame. At the farther end of the vault was another, a smaller one. Three sides of this vault were lined with human bones, piled to the top. On the fourth side, the bones had been thrown down and lay in a heap upon the ground. In this wall cleared of bones, could be seen an alcove, six or seven feet high, about three feet wide, and four feet deep. It was formed between two pillars that held the roof of the catacombs, and was backed by one of their circling walls of solid stone. It seemed to have been made for no particular use.

"Go in," I said. "The amontillado is in here. As for Luchesi—"

Fortunato lifted his dull torch and tried to see what was in the alcove, but the light was too feeble.

"Luchesi knows nothing," he said, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed at his heels.

In a moment he had reached the end of the alcove, and finding himself stopped by the rock wall, stood stupidly, at a loss. A moment more and I had chained him to the rock. Two iron rings were fixed in the wall; from one hung a short chain, from the other a padlock. It was the work of a few seconds to throw the chain about his waist and fasten it to

⁸ A tool used by a bricklayer or mason, to spread mortar.

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the wall with the padlock. He was too much surprised to struggle. Taking the key from the lock, I stepped back out of the alcove.

“Pass your hand over the wall,” I said. “You cannot help feeling the mold. The wall is *very* damp. Once more let me *beg* you to return. You will not? Then I must leave you. But I will first do what little I can for you.”

“The amontillado!” he cried, still lost in wonder.

“True,” I said, “the amontillado.”

As I spoke these words I was busy among the pile of bones heaped on the floor. Throwing them aside, I soon came upon building stone and mortar. With these, and by use of my trowel, I began rapidly to wall up the opening to the alcove.

I had scarcely laid the first row of stones when I knew that Fortunato’s drunkenness had largely worn off. The first sign of this was a low moaning cry. It was *not* the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long dogged silence.

I laid the second row of stones, and the third, and the fourth, and then I heard the chain rattling furiously. The noise lasted for several minutes. And so that I might the more enjoy the sound, I stopped my work and sat down upon the heap of bones. When the clanking at last stopped, I took up the trowel and laid the fifth, sixth, and seventh row of stones. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused and, holding the torch over the wall, threw a feeble light upon the figure within.

The loud and shrill screams which burst suddenly from the throat of the chained form seemed by their force to thrust me violently back. For a moment I paused, trembling with fear. I drew my sword and began to grope with it about the alcove, but on second thought I was calm again. I placed my hand upon the solid wall of the catacombs and lost all doubt. I replied to his yells—I aided, I outdid him in the strength of loud cries. I did this, and the clamor grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close.

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I laid the eighth, the ninth, the tenth, and a part of the eleventh row of stones. There was lacking only a single stone. I struggled with its weight, and set it partly in place. But now there came from within a low laugh that raised the hair upon my head. It was followed by a sad voice, a voice unlike that of the noble Fortunato:

“Ha! ha! ha!—he! he! he!—a very good joke indeed—a fine joke. We will have many a good laugh about this—he! he! he!—over our wine—he! he! he!”

“The amontillado,” I said.

“He! he! he!—he! he! he!—yes, the amontillado. But isn’t it getting late? They will be waiting for us, the Lady Fortunato and the rest. Let us be going.”

“Yes,” I said, “let us be going.”

“*For the love of God, Montresor!*”

“Yes,” I said, “for the love of God!”

But to these words I listened in vain for a reply. I tired of waiting. I called aloud, “Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again, “Fortunato!”

No answer still. I pushed a torch through the opening and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick—because of the dampness of the place. I hurried to finish my work. I forced the last stone into place; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry, I rebuilt the wall of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has moved them. *In pace requiescat!*⁹

⁹May he rest in peace.

3. When the Prefect of Police says that he has been asked to find the stolen letter, Dupin says, "And a wiser agent I suppose could not be found." With this answer, Dupin is being a little sarcastic. What is sarcasm? What are some other examples of sarcasm in this story?

The Black Cat

Finding the Main Idea

1. The author is mostly interested in telling how
(A) a cat avenges a murder (B) drunkenness can lead to violence (C) people can be cruel to their pets (D) the police solve a difficult case

Remembering Detail

2. Where is the narrator as he tells this story?
(A) In a hospital (B) In his cellar (C) In a prison cell (D) In his parents' house
3. The white spot on the second cat's breast begins to look like
(A) an ax (B) an eye (C) a corpse (D) a gallows
4. The narrator kills his wife when she
(A) is sleeping (B) threatens to leave him (C) stops him from killing the cat (D) catches him drinking in the cellar
5. What does the narrator do with his wife's corpse?
(A) He burns it. (B) He walls it up in the cellar. (C) He throws it in the well. (D) He buries it in the earth.

Drawing Conclusions

6. You can figure that the narrator will most probably
(A) get drunk (B) go insane (C) get married (D) be executed

Using Your Reason

7. The narrator says that the change in the white spot may be happening in his "fancy." By this he means (A) the white spot looks very fancy (B) he may be only imagining the change (C) everyone else notices the change also (D) the cat is probably just shedding some fur

Identifying the Mood

8. After he kills his wife, the narrator feels (A) untroubled (B) very guilty (C) sorrowful (D) frightened

Reading for Deeper Meaning

9. The author would most agree with which of the following? (A) Drunkenness leads to evil deeds. (B) Drunkenness is harmless. (C) Black cats are witches in disguise. (D) All cat owners are alcoholics.

Thinking it Over

1. What is a "conscience"? What does the narrator say that shows his conscience is bothering him about his cruel deeds?
2. The second cat may be seen as a symbol of revenge. In what ways does the cat act as a revenger?
3. Explain how the police are able to find the corpse. Do you think they would have found it had the narrator not started boasting? Why? What do you think caused him to start boasting? Explain.

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Finding the Main Idea

1. The author is mostly interested in telling how

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- (A) two men argue about fine wines (B) people celebrate during carnival time (C) the bones of the dead lie peacefully (D) one man gets revenge against another

Remembering Detail

2. What has Fortunato done to the narrator, Montresor?
(A) Insulted him (B) Robbed him (C) Lied to him
(D) Tried to kill him
3. Fortunato prides himself on being
(A) an escape artist (B) a master of insults (C) a good judge of wine (D) a person who can see into the future
4. What is Montresor carrying under his cloak?
(A) A gun (B) A knife (C) A trowel (D) The cask of amontillado
5. What does Montresor do to Fortunato deep in the catacombs?
(A) He stabs him. (B) He offers him a bargain. (C) He chains him to a wall. (D) He gives him the amontillado.

Drawing Conclusions

6. You can figure out that after the story, Montresor
(A) feels extremely guilty (B) lives for many years
(C) returns and frees Fortunato (D) is arrested and executed

Using Your Reason

7. At one point, the narrator says, "Fortunato was a quack in painting and gems." He would have meant the same thing if he had said that Fortunato
(A) knew nothing about painting and gems (B) was an artist and a jeweler (C) loved to paint pictures of ducks
(D) hated paintings and gems
8. Montresor has told Fortunato about the amontillado because Montresor wants to
(A) drink the wine with a friend (B) lure Fortunato into the catacombs (C) ... (D) ...

on the wine (D) find out how much the wine is worth

Identifying the Mood

9. More than anything else, Montresor feels
(A) sad (B) determined (C) forgiving (D) carefree

Reading for Deeper Meaning

10. Montresor would most agree with which of the following?
(A) Forgive and forget. (B) Thou shalt not kill.
(C) Love your enemy. (D) Let no one insult you.

Thinking it Over

1. Is there really a cask of amontillado? How do you know?
2. Montresor seems to try to discourage Fortunato from coming along with him to the catacombs. Why does Montresor urge Fortunato to go back?
3. What do you think is the author's purpose in having this story take place during carnival time? How does the fact that it is carnival time aid Montresor in his plan?
4. When the chained Fortunato starts screaming, Montresor is at first afraid. Why? Why does Montresor stop being afraid? How does he show he is no longer afraid?
5. How does the author foreshadow or hint at what Montresor has planned for Fortunato?

A Descent into the Maelstrom

Finding the Main Idea

1. The story is mostly about
(A) how two brothers die at sea (B) how to fish off the coast of Norway (C) how a man survives a terrifying ordeal (D) how to dive off a cliff overlooking the ocean