

CASK OF AMONTILLADO II

A fortnight had passed since the fateful day of Fortunato's entrapment. I had not told a soul of my dastardly deed. I pondered that no one would understand my reckless actions.

Over the last week, my sleep had gotten restless with the dreams of a demon cunningly and vindictively leading me to a man-sized tomb that I knew was to be my very own. I had not seen this place, but I knew that it was there that I was being led to. The dream told me of the demon's plans, but still I followed.

The demon, clothed in a jester's colorful suit made of satins and silks that was clean except for the rancid smell of spoiled grapes, carried nothing but a spade that looked very much like a mason's. The eyes of a demon, pupils red as the hottest fires, were bloodshot with his purplish fluids. His lips, cracked and oozing seemed to quiver each time his forked tongue moistened them. He was hunched. You could see his dark green clammy skin pushing at his motley, outlining his scaly physique.

My nightmare chimed with echoes of high-pitched bells that had attached themselves to the gruesome demon's headwear. As I had no choice but to follow the demon, my brain boiled with an utter terror that grew exponentially as I trailed his every step, as would a dog, or a shadow.

The terror seemed like it had peaked at the level of total breakdown. My mind should explode with horror with the thoughts of impending and agonizing death, but still expanded. I was consumed with horror and guilt. Death would now be a blessing.

I cringed every time the awful demon turned around and portrayed a smile crusted with dirt and putrid wines. I knew my vivisepture was imminent, but still I shadowed him.

I would awaken in a pool of my own sweat that stank from the drinking that I had done only hours before. The drinking was labored; trying to force the alcoholic sauce down my throat to drown out the horrid visions that have been saturated to my sleep. Each night in my dream, I got closer to my fate. Closer to the bones, closer to the mortar, closer to the brick. Closer to the shackle that would bind my

limb and body to an eternal restricted movement. My ankle would ache as my neck would if hanged till death.

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Alas, if only death would be that easy for me. But it would not.

I could not work. I could not sleep. I could not breathe without reflecting on my recent actions. Could I have been so selfish as to condemn a man for just his opinion of me? An opinion that I too expressed about him? How could I have been so hypocritical? How could anyone?

My friends have all shunned me as I look as I have been captured by disease. My eyes hallowed, my size diminishing judged from the clothes that hang upon my frame, and my color of a ghost gone ill. The appearance of my haggard body was trifle compared to my implacable vehemence of guilt coursing through my murderous veins. How can I vindicate my past to relieve my heart and mind of its gloom?

I must go back to the cask. Fortunato's catacomb is where I must go to encounter if he is still alive!

But what if he is not? It has been not quite a moon's passing since his first hellish day. Did he have enough air to live this long? Did he die from a lack of hope of discovery? Maybe the lack of nourishment did him in. The complete darkness of his encasement of which one's eyes could never adjust as well could drive a man to certain death. As a mole, burrowing through the ground with just the sense of its whiskers leading the way. This, of course, brings about the idea of animals and insects which have free passage through Fortunato's grave. A painful death of being eaten alive by things he could not see but could hear and certainly feel. The vermin leaving him to rot after getting their fill of his flesh, meat and muscle. Fortunato would be left behind to hear the decomposition of his body take place as well, breaking the silence of his private hell. One pushed upon him by a cruel mason, connoisseur, and friend. This friend whom is no better, if not worse, than the pests feasting upon him.

Oh, how could I have been so barbarous? How could I have so stolidly mortared a man into such a slow and agonizing death? A death imagined by no one so atrocious, so savage, so callous.

I can but try to relieve my pains. I must go now to see by chance that he is still alive.

It is a day's travel by foot, and I will need a heavy hammer to break through my revenge's mortar so as just to see if my good friend Fortunato is still alive. I shall give him my life in return for his forgiveness. I shall nurse him back to health. I shall get him counsel for the enduring of mental torture of his experiences. I shall be his eyes if he cannot see; I shall be his legs if he cannot walk.

But how do I get there? I have not been of good health myself. I will need a horse, or an ass to assist me in my journey; a horse or an ass to carry water and to carry the hammer to rescue him.

How will I lift the hammer to rescue him? I must bring a strapping but stupid boy with me to help.

No! No one must know of this! No one must know how much a vulgar, sad excuse of a man I have become. No one! I must live in my own hell alone for my excruciating brutality.

But I must live a thousand hells of my own to equal the hell I have put my good friend Fortunato through.

I shall steal a horse now, in the darkness, and leave very soon after.

The journey has been very trying on my worn bones and soul, but I have made it. If only just in the hope that my friend is still alive. The food and water that I stole and brought with me I have not touched for I have enough for just one person. A person who is much more deserving than myself shall receive this food. If he is indeed gone, I will leave the food for the scavengers who will undoubtedly be living off his carcass, for I will still not deserve the nutrients.

The hammer I untie off the back of the horse and let hit the ground. I did not want to be underneath as gravity performed its inevitable actions. It took me more muscle and clever thinking than I believed I had to fasten the tool to the livestock's

back. The thought of my friend waiting for me kept my spirit and mind alive to do the task. I dragged the hammer through the entrance and down into the crypt while holding up with all my strength the flambeaux in the other. I stopped to switch appendages and gather all my power to continue several times on my walk down. The trip was hours in minutes thinking about what I would I find.

I have arrived! The air was sticky with stillness and long since rotted bones. I listened for sounds of movement, but heard none...

I must will myself, for my Fortunato, to break this wall built of my hatred. My mind helped my arms to find the energy in the rest of my travel-weary body to lift the tool. It has been almost a month so the mortar has set. I swing with the hammer to hit the wall, and watch the wall recoil from my mustered force. Seeing the progress made, my mind easily gathered the strength to hit the wall again.

The wall was struck before I could see in. And I could not see Fortunato! Where could he have gone? The shackles that bound him were empty as if opened by the very key that had locked it weeks ago. He was free. I have been

The rotten grapes from my dreams suddenly filled my nostrils as never before. But I am not dreaming?!

I turned to see my dream demon hovering over me in the low cavern, smiling.

"You have saved me the trouble of searching you."

I screamed with the realization that my dream was my doom. The horrid terror that mushroomed in my brain at this point was real! The sudden fear and pain in my head brought tears gushing down my face. The pain I had felt so many times before in my dreams was but a trifle of what I suffered now. I had never imagined that the day would come where it would be real.

The demon watched me as I stepped back into the niche. I watched myself as I bent down and fastened the shackles to my ankle.

My horror intensified as the demon handed me my flambeaux and started resealing the niche. The mortar flowed from nowhere as it laid down between the layers of brick the demon placed in the growing rows in front of me. His smile grew bigger as

so my terror. The sickening sounds of the bells attached to his headdress rung relentlessly with each stoop he took for another brick.

I was now alone in now my grave. Demon just mortared the last brick sealing me in forever. Fortunato was free to go to the heavens, which he duly deserved after what was done to him. Faintly, I could hear the bells taper off on the moral side of the bricks and mortar. I felt, in a way, comfortable now with the events that just occurred. Although I still wondered if it was but a dream in wake.

"Again, in pace requiescat."

Life's air grew minimal as I watched the flambeaux's flame dwindle to nothingness. I expected to lose my breath, but sweat overtook my skin instead. The heat grew unbearable as I looked to my feet to see flames fuse from cracks in the corners of my new home.

"Now, I am free"

The weight of the granite I was connected to and myself pushed the ground out from underneath me as I dropped down into the fires of my own hatred and self-righteous revenge.