

## "The Cask of Amontillado" taken from Lit Charts

### Summary

The narrator of "Amontillado" begins by telling us about his friend, Fortunato, who had 'injured' him many times over the course of their friendship, but had now 'insulted' him. The narrator vowed revenge, but didn't make a verbal threat, just secretly plotted. He describes the delicate balance of how to redress a wrong, making sure the wrong-doer knows what he has done but not becoming obsessed. The narrator assures us that Fortunato had no idea of this plot, because he continued to be friendly to his face.

### Analysis

*The pattern in which an unknown injury is sustained and becomes the basis for a revenge plot is common in Poe's stories. Because the narrator does not make clear the nature of the original wrongdoing, we as readers have no way of knowing if the punishment fits the crime, which in turn raises the suspicion that the narrator might be unjust, disingenuous, or insane.*

### Summary

Fortunato was a wine connoisseur. For an Italian man, actual connoisseurship was rare – often it was only put on to show up foreigners, but Fortunato's appreciation for Italian vintages is sincere. This is an interest the narrator of "Amontillado" shares. And suitably, it was in a drunken state that Fortunato appeared to the narrator, dressed in a fancy costume of a striped dress and bells, during the carnival season.

### Analysis

*Like many of Poe's pairs of rivals, behind the hatred is a level of respect and kinship. The narrator and Fortunato have a lot in common. Whether the narrator and Fortunato run into each other at the carnival, or this meeting was cleverly engineered to seem like coincidence by the narrator, is never explained.*

### Summary

The narrator of "Amontillado" is very excited to see him and tells him about a predicament he has with some Amontillado wine, for which he has paid the price of a special vintage and is now unsure of its authenticity. He compliments Fortunato on his knowledge and says he was silly to buy the wine without his advice. Fortunato doesn't believe that such a wine can be found during the carnival season. He seems to be in a frenzy anyway, and now repeats the name 'Amontillado!' over and over.

#### Analysis

*The workings of the narrator's plan become clear as he manipulates his rival with flattery and the Amontillado's legendary name. Fortunato's character remains obscured by the costume and drunkenness of the carnival, so it is difficult to form an understanding of him. Yet while his manner is eccentric and tipsy, he does not seem cruel, raising the question of why (or whether) he deserves the narrator's vengeance.*

#### Summary

The narrator of "Amontillado" tells him not to worry, that he is going to visit another expert, Luchesi, and he can tell that Fortunato is busy. Fortunato scoffs at Luchesi's knowledge and responds that he himself is not busy. He insists they go to the narrator's vault right away to see the wine. The narrator now changes his excuse and says that Fortunato obviously is not well and mustn't venture into damp, nitre-covered wine-storage vaults. Fortunato won't hear of it, and takes the narrator by the arm, covering him with his strange cloak.

#### Analysis

*Rivalry is the vehicle of this story. The narrator tricks and manipulates his rival Fortunato by mentioning Fortunato's own rival in wine-tasting, Luchesi. The narrator feigns caring and innocence by insisting that the vaults are dangerous, but he is really appealing to Fortunato's sense of competition. He knows that by daring Fortunato, he can make him do anything. Fortunato's rivalry with Luchesi makes him manipulatable.*

#### Summary

They arrive at the narrator's house, which is empty of servants, as the narrator of "Amontillado" had expected. He had told them to stay in the house, but he had said that he would not return till morning, so he knew that they would have broken their word as soon as he left. He fetches two torches from the walls and goes right down, through the levels of the house, to the vaults below. As they walk toward the Amontillado, Fortunato begins to cough from the damp clinging to the walls. The narrator says they should go back, as he does not want Fortunato to get sick, but Fortunato denies that his cough is serious and demands that they go on.

### Analysis

*The narrator has used reverse psychology on his servants, manipulating them in the same way that he manipulates Fortunato. The scale of the narrator's deception comes into focus. He has arranged the whole thing. Now, the solitude of the Palazzo and the vulnerable position of Fortunato heightens the suspense. Furthermore, Fortunato's persistent cough and the confinement of their underground path to the Amontillado is a constant reminder of death.*

### Summary

The narrator of "Amontillado" suggests they drink some Medoc to protect them from the elements. Fortunato proposes a toast to the buried remains that surround them in the vaults, and the narrator proposes one to Fortunato's long life. They journey further and further into the catacombs. The narrator explains that his ancestors, the Montresors were a large, wealthy family. Fortunato asks what the family crest was, and the narrator describes a fancy arrangement of a gold foot stamping a serpent who has bitten it, and the motto '*Nemo me impune lacessit*', which means "No one can harm me unpunished". Fortunato is pleased with this motto and the wine is making him giddy again. It is affecting the narrator too.

### Analysis

*Wine is an important symbol in this story. Not only does it provide the narrator with his motive for bringing Fortunato down to the vault, it also shows us Fortunato's obsession when he repeats the word "Amontillado." It also provides the arena that these two men compete in – wine represents wealth and legacy as well as knowledge and sensitivity. And to top it all off, the wine creates a condition of drunkenness that slows the wits and quickens the emotions – perfect for the narrator's manipulations to be successful.*

### Summary

The narrator of "Amontillado" describes how the nitre is increasing as they go further in. They are now under the river bed, and there are bones and remains all around them, dripping with nitre. He suggests they take another drink. Fortunato empties the bottle and then lifts it in a strange symbolic gesture, which he explains is from a brotherhood, the masons. The narrator insists he too is one of the masons, and produces a trowel from under his cloak as his symbolic gesture. Fortunato is puzzled by this joke but they continue on, deeper and deeper, in search of the Amontillado.

### Analysis

*The dank catacombs under the river, with nitre dripping from the walls, is a very Gothic setting. Fortunato remains oblivious to the narrator's plans. The narrator's comment that he too is a mason is a dark joke—the narrator is not*

*a member of the masonic brotherhood, but he does plan to act like an actual mason when he walls Fortunato up alive in a top.*

## Summary

They come to the entrance of a dark crypt. Inside the crypt is another enclosure, narrower, and three of its walls lined with human remains and the fourth wall exposed and its bone decorations thrown down before it in a pile. Through this entrance is yet another recess which is completely dark and, the narrator says, leads to the innermost vault where the Amontillado is.

## Analysis

*Poe ramps up the Gothic atmosphere even further, with tombs within tombs, accessible only through narrow corridors. The final room is the most extreme dungeon.*

## Summary

The narrator of "Amontillado" mentions Luchesi again, but Fortunato is determined to go ahead. He disappears with his torch into the recess and reaches the end, which is stopped with a rock. Quickly, the narrator grabs him, and chains and locks him to the stone wall. He again draws Fortunato's attention to the nitre and tells him to go back, but Fortunato is obviously stuck now and responds in his frenzied voice with 'Amontillado!'

## Analysis

*The narrator expertly uses his rival's own vices to carry out his plan, so that it hardly seems like manipulation at all. It is Fortunato's own jealousy of Luchesi, his competitive spirit, and his eccentric passion for Amontillado that makes him step into the innermost vault. The narrator enacts his revenge still without any explanation for why he is doing it. He simply does it, quickly and cleanly. Fortunato's first thought, meanwhile, seems to be for the wine, further reinforcing his obsession with it.*

## Summary

The narrator of "Amontillado" now goes to the pile of bones and digs about until he finds some building materials hidden there and he starts to build a wall blocking in the recess. As he goes, Fortunato begins to make sorrowful noises and the narrator knows that the man is no longer drunk. He builds row after row of bricks until seven rows are in place. Now in the dim glow he can hardly see his captive. Fortunato begins to scream horribly. Suddenly worried Fortunato will

be able to pull himself free, the narrator checks the recess with his sword, but the strength of the stony walls satisfies him. He joins Fortunato in screaming, mockingly echoing his terror, until Fortunato falls silent.

#### *Analysis*

*The fact that the building materials are all ready shows just how carefully the narrator has planned this revenge. When the narrator pulls his sword to check the strength of the wall it is a reminder that he has been carrying a lethal weapon this whole time. He could have killed Fortunato in seconds. That he did not, that he chose to bury Fortunato alive, shows how important the game of torture is to this narrator's revenge.*

#### **Summary**

At midnight, the narrator of "Amontillado" has almost finished the wall. There is just one brick to place, but as he begins to slide it into position, Fortunato emits a low laugh then speaks in a sad voice, complimenting the narrator on a very impressive joke, but asks when he will be let out, because people are waiting for him. The narrator repeats Fortunato's phrases without answering his questions, but when Fortunato again falls silent, the narrator calls out his name. The narrator is disappointed when Fortunato does not respond. Now feeling ill from the damp, the narrator drops his torch into the recess and place the final stone to close the wall. He then puts the pile of bones in front of the new wall. It is now half a century later, he tells us, and they have not been touched. He ends his story by saying 'rest in peace' in Latin.

#### *Analysis*

*The narrator's carefully plotted game comes to its height, and the narrator seems to relish in not responding to Fortunato's despair in any meaningful way. And yet, when Fortunato goes silent, the narrator is disappointed. In this way, Poe engineers an unexpected twist to the murder—the sadness and emptiness that comes for the narrator when Fortunato disappears behind the bricks. Unlike Poe's other murderers, the narrator here is successful in his crime. But his quiet disappointment in the moment of that success raises the question of what the narrator will live for now that he has had his revenge.*