

“The Black Cat” Summary

On the eve of his death, an unnamed narrator opens the story by proclaiming that he is sane, despite the wild narrative he is about to convey. This narrative begins years before, when the narrator’s honorable character is well known and celebrated. He confesses a great love for cats and dogs, both of which, he says, respect the fidelity of friendship, unlike fellow men. The narrator marries at a young age and introduces his wife to the domestic joys of owning pets. Among birds, goldfish, a dog, rabbits, and a monkey, the narrator singles out a large and beautiful black cat, named Pluto, as his favorite.

Though he loves Pluto, the narrator begins to suffer from violent mood swings, predominantly due to the influence of alcohol. He takes to mistreating not only the other animals but also his wife. During this uncontrollable rage, he spares only Pluto. After returning home quite drunk one night, the narrator lashes out at Pluto. Believing the cat has avoided him, he vengefully grasps the cat, only to be bitten on the hand. In demonic retaliation, the narrator pulls a penknife from his pocket and cuts out one of the cat’s eyes. Though the narrator wakes the next morning with a partial feeling of remorse, he is unable to reverse the newly ominous course of his black soul. Ignored for certain now by the wounded cat, the narrator soon seeks further retaliation. He is overwhelmed by a spirit of PERVERSENESS, and sets out to commit wrong for the sake of wrong. He hangs Pluto from the limb of a tree one morning.

On the night of Pluto’s hanging, the narrator’s family’s house burns down, but he dismisses the possibility of a connection between the two events. The day

after the fire, which destroys all the narrator's possessions, he witnesses a group of neighbors collected around a wall that remains standing.

Investigating their shouts of amazement, the narrator discovers the impression of a gigantic cat—with a rope around its neck—on the surface of the wall. The narrator attempts to explain rationally the existence of the impression, but he finds himself haunted by this phantasm over the course of many months. One night, while out drunk, the narrator discovers a black object poised upon a large barrel of alcohol. A new black cat has appeared, resembling Pluto but with a splash of white on his fur.



As with Pluto, the narrator experiences a great fondness for the mysterious cat, which no one has seen before. The cat becomes part of the household, much adored by his wife as well. However, following the earlier pattern, the narrator soon cannot resist feelings of hatred for the cat. These murderous sentiments intensify when the narrator discovers that the cat's splash of white fur has mysteriously taken on the shape of the gallows, the structure on which a hanging takes place. The white fur reveals the mode of execution that claimed Pluto, and the narrator pledges revenge.

One day, descending into the cellar of the building with his wife, the narrator almost trips over the cat. Enraged, the narrator grabs an axe to attack the cat, but his wife defends the animal. Further angered by this interference, the narrator turns his rage at his wife and buries the axe in her head. Faced with the evidence of his crime, the narrator considers many options for the body's

disposal, including dismemberment and burial. The narrator eventually decides to take advantage of the damp walls in the basement and entomb the body behind their plaster. Without any difficulty, the narrator creates a tomb in the plaster wall, thereby hiding the body and all traces of his murder. When he finally turns to the cat, it is missing, and he concludes that it has been frightened away by his anger.

On the fourth day after the murder, the police arrive unexpectedly at the narrator's apartment. Cool and collected, the narrator leads them through the premises, even into the basement. Though facing the scene of the crime, the police do not demonstrate any curiosity and prepare to leave the residence. The narrator, however, keeps trying to allay their suspicion. Commenting upon the solid craftsmanship of the house, he taps on the wall—behind which is his wife's body—with a cane. In response to the tapping, a long, loud cry emanates from behind the wall. The police storm the wall and dismantle it, discovering the hidden corpse. Upon its head sits the missing cat.