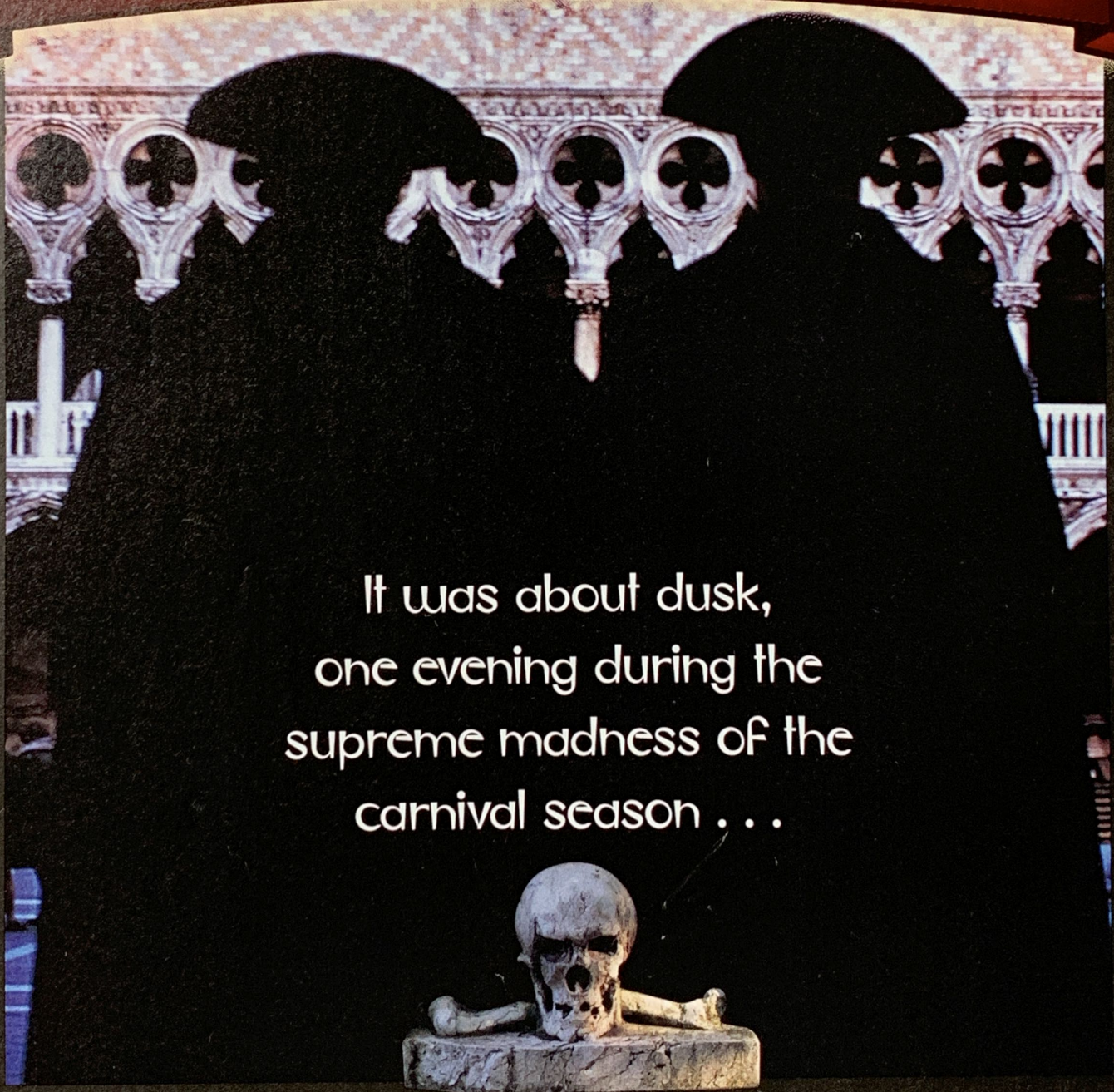



THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

Edgar Allan Poe



It was about dusk,
one evening during the
supreme madness of the
carnival season . . .

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I gave utterance to a threat. At length I would be avenged; this was a point definitively settled—but the very definitiveness with which it was resolved precluded the idea of risk. I must not only punish, but punish with impunity. A wrong is unredressed¹ when retribution overtakes its redresser. It is equally unredressed when the avenger fails to make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.

It must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I given Fortunato cause to doubt my goodwill. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face, and he did not perceive that my smile *now* was at the thought of his immolation. 

He had a weak point—this Fortunato—although in other regards he was a man to be respected and even feared. He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine. Few Italians have the true virtuoso spirit. For the most part their enthusiasm is adopted to suit the time and opportunity—to practice imposture upon the British and Austrian millionaires. In painting and gemmery, Fortunato, like his countrymen, was a quack—but in the matter of old wines he was sincere. In this respect I did not differ from him materially: I was skillful in the Italian vintages myself and bought largely whenever I could.

It was about dusk, one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season, that I encountered my friend. He accosted me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking

1. **unredressed** (un'ri·drest') *v.* used as *adj.*: not set right or not made up for.



DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

1. What does the narrator's smiling at the thought of Fortunato's death tell you about his character?

much. The man wore motley.² He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells. I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand.

I said to him, "My dear Fortunato, you are luckily met. How remarkably well you are looking today! But I have received a pipe³ of what passes for amontillado, and I have my doubts."

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

"I have my doubts," I replied; "and I was silly enough to pay the full amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

"Amontillado!"

"I have my doubts."

"Amontillado!"

"And I must satisfy them."

"Amontillado!"

"As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchesi. If anyone has a critical turn, it is he. He will tell me—"

"Luchesi cannot tell amontillado from sherry."

2. **motley** (mät'lē) *n.*: multicolored costume worn by a clown or jester.
3. **pipe** *n.*: barrel.

Vocabulary

precluded (prē·klōōd'id) *v.*: made impossible in advance; prevented.

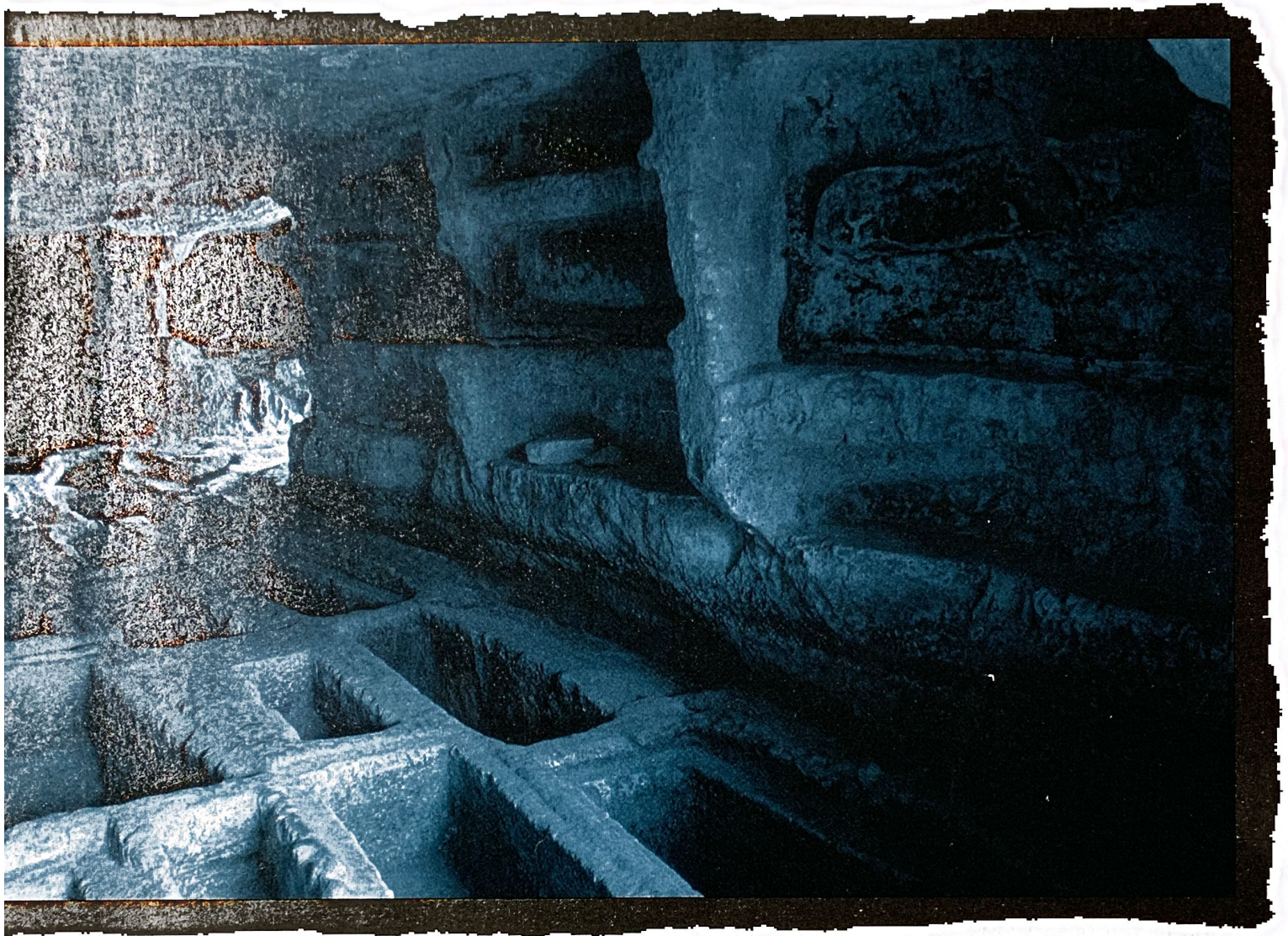
impunity (im·pyōō'ni·tē) *n.*: freedom from punishment or harm.

retribution (re'trə·byōō'shən) *n.*: punishment.

immolation (im'ə·lā'shən) *n.*: destruction.

connoisseurship (kän'ə·sūr'ship) *n.*: expert knowledge.





“And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own.”

“Come, let us go.”

“Whither?”

“To your vaults.”⁴

“My friend, no; I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have an engagement. Luchesi—”


“I have no engagement; come.”

“My friend, no. It is not the engagement, but the severe cold with which I perceive you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably damp. They are encrusted with niter.”⁵

“Let us go, nevertheless. The cold is merely

4. **vaults** (vôlts) *n.*: storage cellars.

5. **niter** (nīt'ər) *n.*: salt deposits.

nothing. Amontillado! You have been imposed upon. And as for Luchesi, he cannot distinguish sherry from amontillado.”

Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm. Putting on a mask of black silk and drawing a roquelaure⁶ closely about my person, I suffered him to hurry me to my *palazzo*.⁷

6. **roquelaure** (rāk'ə·lôr') *n.*: heavy knee-length cloak.

7. **palazzo** (pä·lät'sô): Italian for “palace.”

Vocabulary

impose (im·pōz') *v.* (used with *upon*): take advantage of.



DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

2. How does the narrator lure Fortunato to his palace? What does the narrator's strategy tell you about him?

There were no attendants at home; they had absconded to make merry in honor of the time. I had told them that I should not return until the morning and had given them explicit orders not to stir from the house. These orders were sufficient, I well knew, to ensure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

I took from their sconces two flambeaux⁸ and, giving one to Fortunato, bowed him through several suites of rooms to the archway that led into the vaults. I passed down a long and winding staircase, requesting him to be cautious as he followed. We came at length to the foot of the descent and stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors.

The gait of my friend was unsteady, and the bells upon his cap jingled as he strode.

“The pipe,” said he.

“It is farther on,” said I; “but observe the white web-work which gleams from these cavern walls.”

He turned toward me, and looked into my eyes with two filmy orbs that distilled the rheum⁹ of intoxication.

“Niter?” he asked, at length.

“Niter,” I replied. “How long have you had that cough?”

“Ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!—ugh! ugh! ugh!”

My poor friend found it impossible to reply for many minutes.

“It is nothing,” he said, at last.

“Come,” I said, with decision, “we will go

back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; 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 cannot be responsible. Besides, there is Luchesi—”

“Enough,” he said; “the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough.”

“True—true,” I replied; “and, indeed, I had no intention of alarming you unnecessarily—but you should use all proper caution. A draft of this Médoc¹⁰ will defend us from the damp.”

Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mold.

“Drink,” I said, presenting him the wine.

He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

“I drink,” he said, “to the buried that repose around us.”

“And I to your long life.”

He again took my arm, and we proceeded.

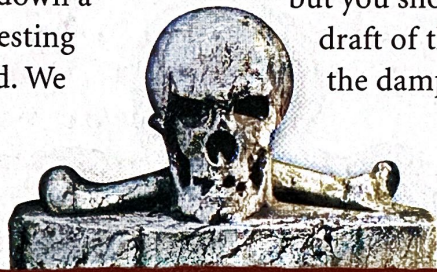
“These vaults,” he said, “are extensive.”

“The Montresors,” I replied, “were a great and numerous family.”

“I forget your arms.”¹¹

“A huge human foot d’or, in a field azure; the foot crushes a serpent rampant whose fangs are embedded in the heel.”¹²

“And the motto?”



“The drops of moisture trickle among the bones.”

8. **sconces** (skän'siz) *n.*: wall fixtures that hold **flambeaux** (flam'bōz') *n.*, candlesticks or flaming pieces of wood.

9. **rheum** (rōōm) *n.*: watery discharge.

10. **Médoc** (mā·dōk'): type of red wine.

11. **arms** *n.*: coat of arms, a group of symbols used to represent a family.

12. **foot d'or . . . heel**: The Montresor coat of arms shows a huge golden foot against a blue background, with the foot crushing a snake that is rearing up and biting the heel.

“*Nemo me impune lacessit.*”¹³

“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 walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons¹⁴ intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs. I paused again, and this time I made bold to seize Fortunato by an arm above the elbow.

“The niter!” I said. “See, it increases. It hangs like moss upon the vaults. We are below the river’s bed. The drops of moisture trickle among the bones. Come, we will go back ere it is too late. Your cough—”

“It is nothing,” he said; “let us go on. But first, another draft of the Médoc.”

I broke and reached him a flagon of de Grave.¹⁵ He emptied it at a breath. His eyes flashed with a fierce light. He laughed and threw the bottle upward with a gesticulation I did not understand.

I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement—a grotesque one.

“You do not comprehend?” he said.

“Not I,” I replied.

“Then you are not of the brotherhood.”

“How?”

“You are not of the Masons.”¹⁶

“Yes, yes,” I said, “yes, yes.”

“You? Impossible! A Mason?”

“A Mason,” I replied.


“A sign,” he said.

13. *Nemo me impune lacessit* (nā'mō mā im·pōō'nā lä·ke'sit): Latin for “Nobody attacks me without punishment.”

14. **puncheons** (pun'chənz) *n.*: large wine casks.

15. **flagon of de Grave**: narrow-necked bottle with a handle and sometimes a lid, containing a wine from the Graves region of France.

16. **Masons**: Freemasons, a secret society of people who believe in brotherhood, giving to the poor, and helping one another. Members use secret signs and gestures to recognize one another.

“It is this,” I answered, producing a trowel¹⁷ from beneath the folds of my roquelaure. 

“You jest,” he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. “But let us proceed to the amontillado.”

“Be it so,” I said, replacing the tool beneath the cloak and again offering him my arm. He leaned upon it heavily. We continued our route in search of the amontillado. We passed through a range of low arches, descended, passed on, and, descending again, arrived at a deep crypt in which the foulness of the air caused our flambeaux rather to glow than flame.

At the most remote end of the crypt there appeared another less spacious. Its walls had been lined with human remains, piled to the vault overhead, in the fashion of the great catacombs of Paris. Three sides of this interior crypt were still ornamented in this manner. From the fourth the bones had been thrown down and lay promiscuously¹⁸ upon the earth, forming at one point a mound of some size. Within the wall thus exposed by the displacing of the bones, we perceived a still interior recess, in depth about four feet, in width three, in height six or seven. It seemed to have been constructed for no especial use within itself, but formed merely the interval between two of the colossal supports of the roof of the catacombs and was backed by one of their



DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

3. Why might Montresor be carrying a trowel? What can you conclude about his plans?

17. **trowel** (trou'əl) *n.*: flat tool with a pointed blade, especially used by a mason, a person who builds with stone or concrete. The Freemasons probably began as associations of stoneworkers.

18. **promiscuously** (prō·mis'kyōō·əs·lē) *adv.*: randomly; in a disorganized way.

Vocabulary

recoiling (ri·kōil'in) *v.* used as *adj.*: moving backward, as in fear.

circumscribing walls of solid granite.

It was in vain that Fortunato, uplifting his dull torch, endeavored to pry into the depth of the recess. Its termination the feeble light did not enable us to see.

“Proceed,” I said; “herein is the amontillado. As for Luchesi—”

“He is an ignoramus,” interrupted my friend, as he stepped unsteadily forward, while I followed immediately at his heels. In an instant he had reached the extremity of the niche, and finding his progress arrested by the rock, stood stupidly bewildered. A moment more and I had fettered¹⁹ him to the granite. In its surface were two iron staples, distant from each other about two feet horizontally. From one of these depended a short chain, from the other a padlock. Throwing the links about his waist, it was but the work of a few seconds to secure it. He was too much astounded to resist. Withdrawing the

19. fettered (fet'ərd) v.: chained.

key, I stepped back from the recess.

“Pass your hand,” I said, “over the wall; you cannot help feeling the niter. Indeed it is *very* damp. Once more let me *implore* you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you. But I must first render you all the little attentions in my power.”

“The amontillado!” ejaculated my friend, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

“True,” I replied; “the amontillado.”

As I said these words, I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar. With these materials and with the aid of my trowel, I began vigorously to wall up the entrance of the niche.

I had scarcely laid the first tier of the masonry when I discovered that the intoxication

Vocabulary

endeavored (en·dev'ərd) v.: tried.

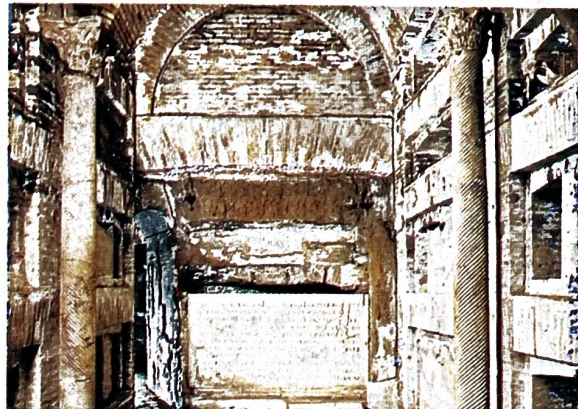
A CLOSER LOOK

The Other Man in the Wall


On July 12, 1845, a letter appeared in a New York newspaper. The letter writer was describing his recent travels in Italy. He said that he had an amazing experience in the little town of San Giovanni when he visited the church of San Lorenzo. He was shown a niche covered with a sort of trapdoor in the wall of the church. Inside the niche was an upright human skeleton. The writer examined the skeleton and concluded that the victim had been walled in alive and suffocated. The writer supposed that the motive had been revenge. He guessed that the man had been tied securely and then walled in, brick by brick. The writer also guessed that the men involved were nobles (like Fortunato and

Montresor)—no one else, he figured, could have gotten control of a church to perform the gruesome deed.

The year after this letter was published, Poe wrote his famous revenge story “The Cask of Amontillado.”



Crypt of the popes. Catacomb of S. Callisto, Rome, Italy.

of Fortunato had in a great measure worn off. The earliest indication I had of this was a low moaning cry from the depth of the recess. It was *not* the cry of a drunken man. There was then a long and obstinate silence. I laid the second tier, and the third, and the fourth; and then I heard the furious vibrations of the chain. The noise lasted for several minutes, during which, that I might hearken to it with the more satisfaction, I ceased my labors and sat down upon the bones. When at last the clanking subsided, I resumed the trowel and finished without interruption the fifth, the sixth, and the seventh tier. The wall was now nearly upon a level with my breast. I again paused and, holding the flambeaux over the mason-work, threw a few feeble rays upon the figure within. 

A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back. For a brief moment I hesitated—I trembled. Unsheathing my rapier,²⁰ I began to grope with it about the recess; but the thought of an instant reassured me. I placed my hand upon the solid fabric of the catacombs and felt satisfied. I reapproached the wall; I replied to the yells of him who clamored. I reechoed—I aided—I surpassed them in volume and in strength. I did this, and the clamor grew still.

It was now midnight, and my task was drawing to a close. I had completed the eighth, the ninth, and the tenth tier. I had finished a portion of the last and the eleventh; there remained but a single stone to be fitted and plastered in. I struggled with its weight; I placed it partially in its destined position. But now there came from out the niche a low laugh

20. **rapier** (rā'pē·ər) *n.*: slender two-edged sword.



DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

4. What can you conclude about Montresor's state of mind when he stops his work to enjoy Fortunato's cries?

that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognizing as that of the noble Fortunato. The voice said—

“Ha! ha! ha!—he! he! he!—a very good joke indeed—an excellent jest. We will have many a rich laugh about it at the *palazzo*—he! he! he!—over our wine—he! he! he!”

“The *amontillado*!” I said.

“He! he! he!—he! he! he!—yes, the *amontillado*. But is it not getting late? Will not they be awaiting us at the *palazzo*—the Lady Fortunato and the rest? Let us be gone.”

“Yes,” I said, “let us be gone.”

“*For the love of God, Montresor!*”


“Yes,” I said, “for the love of God!”

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud—

“Fortunato!”

No answer. I called again—

“Fortunato!”

No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick—on account of the dampness of the catacombs. I hastened to make an end of my labor. I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I reerected the old rampart²¹ of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat.*²² 



DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

5. Do you think Montresor's “heart grew sick” because of the dampness or for some other reason? Support your conclusion.

21. **rampart** (ram'pärt') *n.*: wall resembling one built for protection or defense.

22. ***In pace requiescat*** (in pä'chā rā'kwē·es'kät): Latin for “May he rest in peace.”

Vocabulary

obstinate (äb'stə·nət) *adj.*: stubborn.

succession (sək·sesh'ən) *n.*: series.