

WEIRD TALES

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

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*Walter Scott Story offers
a new conclusion to
Edgar Allen Poe's
"Cask of Amontillado"*

The Sequel

SOBBERED on the instant—the padlock had clicked when Montresor passed the chain about my waist and thus fastened me to the wall—I stood upright in the little dungeon, the blood running cold in my veins.

With maniacal laughter, he withdrew from the niche, whipped a trowel from under his robe and began to wall up the narrow opening. I knew it was not a joke, a drunken jest. I saw that his drunkenness had fallen from him. The dying flambeau fell from my nerveless hand and cast a fitful bloody glow upon the whitened, dripping walls. I shook the chain frenziedly.

"For God's sake, Montresor!" I cried.

He replied with a horrible, mocking laugh, and, like a devil from hell, lifted his voice with mine to show that it was idle to call for help.

I had always distrusted Montresor. I knew him to be a serpent. He feared me and was jealous of my person and attainments. In spite of all his fawning and his smiles, I knew he hated me deeply for the injuries I had heaped upon him and for the open insults I had added to them. And yet I swear he had never in the slightest suspected that it was not Giovanna, the tenor, who was successful with his wife, but I!

"Fortunato!" he called, and his hoarse tone echoed in a ghastly way

through the gloomy catacombs of his ancestors and re-echoed along the winding crypt.

I made no reply. Cold beads of fear started from my brow as I strained against the chain and listened to the soft thud of the stones he was building into the opening to make my tomb and the accompanying tinkle of his trowel. Even then, I admired, perforce; the cleverness with which he had secured his revenge.

It was the night of the carnival. He had found me in the streets, dazed with wine, and, pretending that he wanted my judgment on a cask of sherry, had lured my staggering feet into the gloomy passages under his palazzo. And he had brought me into this narrow niche in the castle walls to entomb me alive where no one would ever find me. It was clever!

My memory fails me now, but I doubt not I cried out many times for pity and mercy; and I take no shame in thinking this may have been so. I recall his words and his horrible mouthings as he worked with more haste and zeal than skill.

But I was a brave man always. I did not yield myself to fate. It was unthinkable. I, Fortunato, to die walled in by Montresor! I cursed him and his line. I wrenched at the chain with ferocious strength, more eager to have

him by the throat than to be free to live. I called upon all the saints and particularly to my patron saint. You shall see that I was not unheard.

The wail grew high—to his breast—and in the light of his flambeau set somewhere in the wall outside I could see Montresor's sweating face as he labored with the stones.

Suddenly he thrust his torch through the opening, now no larger than his head—and to deceive him I prostrated myself upon the floor and laughed the laugh of a dying man.

I heard the *thud* of another stone, and looked up quickly. My flambeau had died out: Montresor's had disappeared. And there was no opening! I was in a tomb of stone!

Absolute darkness surrounded me, and the walls seemed to press in upon me like icy blankets. And silence as absolute as the darkness reigned.

I leaped to my feet. Silence! Silence, absolute silence, save for my own labored breathing. Maria! Suppose the mortar hardened ere I could throw my weight against the poor wall he had built. Then I were lost!

I called out aloud to my holy saint. Lucky it was that I had the bodily strength of two. I strained upon the chain wildly; I seized it in my hands and tore at it with savage determination. I would not die thus! In desperation, frantic with rage and fear, I made one last violent, prodigious effort to free myself, with strength enough to make the palazzo tremble, and in that last great effort the staples of the chain tore loose from the half-rotten stone in which they were fastened.

Hot tears of joy welled in my eyes. I vowed a hundred candles to the Virgin: but I could not then take time to give thanks.

Throwing myself upon the wall Montresor had just reared, my feet desperately braced on the rough floor, I fought for liberty like a tiger. Heavens! It gave!—the wall gave!

It yielded like a stiff canvas against the push of a hand, gave slowly, but surely—tilged outward, then went

rumbling down! I thrust myself through the jagged opening into the catacombs. I was free!

What joy if Montresor had been there, even though he wore his rapier and I had but my poinard!

It was very dark, and yet I could see a gleam of light in the direction from which we had come. Montresor crazed with the thought of sweet revenge, I drunk with wine, I paused and thought. Should I find him in the streets in this gay time and slay him. No! I laughed insanely, yet clearly. No! There was a better thing to do.

With haste and no mean skill, I builded up the wall anew, closing the opening of what might have been my tomb—had I been a weak man—and against this new wall erected a rampart of old bones; then, thrusting the dangling ends of the chain within my doublet, began to retrace my feet toward freedom.

I struck my foot against some small, soft object, and halted with a start. I leaned over. I had kicked against Montresor's mask, and I put it over my face.

I knew that all of his servants were away to enjoy the carnival, but it would do no harm to wear this mask—and it served my purpose. I passed through the crypt and walked back swiftly and stealthily through the range of low arches through which I had come staggering to an awful doom.

Soon I was above in my false friend's rich suites in the cheerful glow of many lights. But all was quiet. No one stirred. I was alone—safe!

I went light-footed through the deserted house—I could hear the shouts and laughter of the merry people in the street—until I came to the passage leading to the plaza.

There I stopped, with the blood jumping through my veins, like wildfire. In this hall, in the corner upon a low settee, lay Montresor, sprawling in a heavy stupor, as drunk with wine as I had been when I had trustfully entered within his doors. I paused over his body. Within my bosom was the dag-

ger with, which I never part. And yet I let him lie there unharmed.

When I elbowed my way, masked, through the square, it was twelve o'clock. I was in time to keep my appointment with his wife! I laughed. What a jest!

And Montessor's wife was awaiting me in the usual place. Such a beautiful woman! I really loved her—and I hoped he did.

I was as clever as I was brave—I was, indeed, an exceedingly clever man. I had seen my creditors pressing and all things turning toward ruin, and that was why I had converted everything possible into gold and precious stones.

That night I crept unseen into my own house, from which my servants, like Montessor's, had stolen away to enjoy the carnival, and, securing all the wealth I had secreted, was up and away,

my chain stricken off by an obscure armorer. I have no doubt that my body-servant was executed for the theft of my fortune—as indeed he should have been for watching my belongings so poorly. But I know not.

Then we left the city while the streets were still crowded and gay—Montessor's wife and I—and went to England, where we have lived a long life very happily.

Years ago I heard a vague rumor that Montessor believed his beautiful wife had gone away with Giovanna, the tenor, who disappeared at about that time. But it was not so. As for Lady Fortunato—she may have guessed the truth.

And Montessor will believe until he dies that my bones lie crumbling in the little walled-in dungeon below his palazzo.
