

# Montresor



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The murder of Fortunato, executed in a gruesome manner in Edgar Allan Poe's 1846 tale *The Cask of Amontillado*, is a classic example of the premeditated crime. Its perpetrator, Montresor, was actuated by malicious intent, the circumstances surrounding it showed evident premeditation and meticulous planning, and he executed it in such a way as to avoid suspicion and punishment.

Montresor's motive was simple: to avenge an insult, of which details the author does not tell us. He confides that he is of a vindictive nature, not be satisfied with the simple act of inflicting punishment on his tormentor. He must avenge himself in cold blood, ensuring that the victim would know he delivered the fatal blow, and escape unpunished (1).

Montresor's plan was simple enough: let Fortunato accompany him to the underground wine vaults and there, through treachery and deceit, chain him to the wall and entomb him alive. He cunningly devised a plan to lure Fortunato into his trap. Fortunato according to the author, "prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine" (1). He knew his friend would not be able to resist showing off his expertise in judging old vintages like the Amontillado. Himself being skilled in Italian wine, Montresor had the perfect cover for inviting his prey into the catacombs.

To escape suspicion, Montresor had to do it at such time when people would least notice something was amiss. He thought the height of the carnival season, particularly at night when merrymakers would be wildly drunk and carousing on the streets, would be the perfect time to carry out his plan.

The author does not tell us if he wore a costume, but Fortunato was dressed as a clown, bells and all, and people would not have recognized him, or

remembered who he was last seen with. “The man,” described the author, “wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting part-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells”(1).

Montresor the avenger complimented his friend on “how remarkably well” he looked, feigning goodwill and friendship so as not to arouse any suspicion, of which there really was no need. His friend clearly had no idea what he was up to. Then the plotter subtly released the bait: he told Fortunato of his purchase of “a pipe of what passes for Amontillado” and his doubts thereof. He had gone to the extent of buying the ancient cask in order to have a credible and irresistible cover for extending an invitation to his quarry. Knowing Fortunato well, Montresor pretended to be on his way to consult Luchresi, another vintage expert, whom Fortunato detested. He appealed to Fortunato’s vanity, saying, “And yet some fools will have it that his taste is a match for your own”(1).

Thinking like a criminal, Montresor had carefully avoided making any threats against Fortunato, knowing any slight hostility or animosity between them could later on be picked up by the police and lead to suspicion against him. On the contrary, he was careful to cultivate his friendship. On the night appointed, as they met at the carnival, his friend accosted him “with excessive warmth”. Montresor greeted him with equal pleasure, although for a different, sinister reason.

On their way to the catacombs, Montresor continually feigned concern for Fortunato, who was being wracked by violent coughing, entreating him to return, although he knew his friend in his drunken state would not turn

back. He actually added to his intoxication by making him drink some more from the bottles of Medoc that lay about their path (2).

Montresor showed sardonic wit as they proceeded on their way. Fortunato was asking him for a sign that he was indeed a member of the Masonic brotherhood as Montresor claimed. In reply Montresor produced a trowel from the folds of his roquelaire. Fortunato the clown laughed it off as a joke (3).

Passing through the catacombs, they finally arrived at the predetermined scene of the crime, which lay at the remotest end of the crypt. Here was an interior crypt or recess whose contents of skeletal remains had been thrown off. It was “backed by one of their circumscribing walls of solid granite”(4).

Taking advantage of Fortunato's weakened and drunken state, while he was bewildered upon finding himself in a cul-de-sac, Montresor quickly bound him to the granite wall. Then Montresor produced from the pile of bones a quantity of building stone and mortar and with his trowel began mixing them and walling up the entrance of the niche.

Even after having secured his victim, Montresor was still feigning concern for Fortunato, showing him the dampness caused by the nitre, and entreating him to return. The realization by Fortunato of his doomed state was slow in coming. It only came later when, having seen the wall rising higher and higher, and as his intoxication gradually wore off, he saw the horrible reality of the crime being committed against him. Before he was completely enclosed, Fortunato apparently lost his sanity.

“ A succession of loud and shrill screams, bursting suddenly from the throat of the chained form, seemed to thrust me violently back,” writes the author. Fearful that his victim might have escaped, he unsheathed his rapier (4). Here is another proof that Montresor exercised forethought, arming himself for the trip just in case things went awry.

As we consider the facts, it is clear that Montresor thought of every detail to carry out his vow of revenge, of which two foremost considerations must be satisfied: 1) the avenger was not to be caught, and 2) he must “ make himself felt as such to him who has done the wrong.” All his acts pointed to careful planning and execution of the crime: cultivating affection towards Fortunato, buying the cask of Amontillado, bringing the mortar and stone to the secret niche, waiting for the height of the carnival season to carry out the plan. The police must have looked for Fortunato in the usual places except in the crypt.

Knowing he was in frail health, they must have written him off as having drunk away the night and ended up a victim of some drunken brawl or robbery. The old rampart of bones that covered the niche was not disturbed for half a century (5). Even if they could produce some circumstantial evidence against Montresor, like being last seen with him, such evidence would not stand in court, as the corpus delicti must first be proved. His crime was not found in his lifetime. Thus he lived up to the motto of the Montresors: *nemo me impune lacessit*.

#### WORK CITED

Poe, Edgar Allan. “ The Cask of Amontillado”. 15 February 2007.