

# THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

By Steven Schutzman

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Carnival night provides walk-ons for actors as revelers. These actors can develop their own costumes and bits to help portray the celebration.

Celebrating revelers should contrast with MONTRESOR's smoldering stillness, his mysterious presence, his dark intense watching for FORTUNATO. Like a hunter, MONTRESOR is intent on his prey and the revelers could notice and back away from him.

MONTRESOR's asides to the audience revealing his real feelings and intentions, create the play's creepy suspense and its dramatic irony, i.e. what FORTUNATO thinks is happening is not what is happening at all. It should be clear that MONTRESOR wants the audience to see the beauty and justice of his plan. Yet, the audience should sense that MONTRESOR is a madman. After all, he gives no reason for his revenge, only that FORTUNATO insulted him. This vagueness of motivation is part of the genius, horror and relevance of Poe's story, i.e. that revenge, as incomprehensible as it is murderous, can build up inside people.

FORTUNATO is not flat out drunk but tipsy enough not to be able to sense what the audience does about MONTRESOR. FORTUNATO recognizes that MONTRESOR is odd but not that he is dangerous. GINA senses the danger and that is why she watches the two when they leave at the end of Scene 1.

The MONTRESOR castle can be suggested by a few artifacts, a coat of arms, old furniture etc., to establish the family wealth and ancient bloodlines.

The most important setting in the play is the catacomb winding under the castle. Amplified footsteps, voices and dripping water can create its cold, claustrophobic atmosphere. The shining walls and piles of bones can be, but don't have to be, realistically portrayed since the dialogue has ample descriptions of the place and it would be difficult to create, rather than suggest, the long, winding tunnel. FORTUNATO should be bound by real chains which rattle at the end of the play.

Large cardboard bricks can be used for the wall that MONTRESOR builds to entomb FORTUNATO. Small ones would take too long.

It is suggested that FORTUNATO disappear behind the wall until he is no longer visible at the end of the play. It is important that the audience not see, but imagine, the horror of being walled in. FORTUNATO's scream, amplified perhaps, is the moment when the suspense built up throughout the play climaxes in a moment of absolute blood-curdling fright.

Everyone involved in the play should read Poe's story.

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### SCENE 1

**SETTING:** *Venice on Carnival night. There are sounds of revelry. In contrast, MONTRESOR is intense and watchful, waiting in shadows, Stage Left. MONTRESOR wears a black silk mask on his forehead and holds a trowel upright in his hand as if it were a scepter. His arm is stiff across his waist. FORTUNATO and GINA enter; GINA as a pirate and FORTUNATO in the striped shirt of a clown, wearing a fool's cap with jingling bells. FORTUNATO, tipsy, laughs and slugs from wine bottle, his arm around GINA as MONTRESOR, unseen, watches.*

FORTUNATO: It's a naughty little wine.

**(FORTUNATO tries to kiss GINA. SHE coyly pushes him away.)**

GINA: But not as naughty as the bloke drinking it.

FORTUNATO: If I were this wine's parent I would send him up to bed without his supper. **(slugs on wine bottle)** Up to your room and to bed you disobedient brat!

GINA: And why's that, Fortunato?

FORTUNATO: **(wagging finger at bottle)** For speaking out of turn and so boldly when he should have waited a minimum of seven more years before opening his mouth. Barely out of short pants and he's trying to act the man already.

GINA: You lost me; the way you carry on about wine.

FORTUNATO: The grape, my dear Gina, was bottled too young and dressed itself up as something it wasn't, the little fake.

GINA: What about me? I'm dressed up too, a pirate of the high seas.

FORTUNATO: Careful before I board thy ship. En garde.

**(FORTUNATO and GINA mock duel. FORTUNATO breaks into a fit of coughing.)**

GINA: With a cough like that, I don't need a sword. The feather in my cap could knock you down.

FORTUNATO: It's nothing my dear; believe me, just the cooling night air off the canal that's giving me fits.

**(GINA wields her sword at FORTUNATO again.)**

GINA: Look at me; I'm the terrible Jean LaFitte.

FORTUNATO: Everyone still knows what you are. You can't hide that.

GINA: Still, you'd be the more polite gentleman not to say it.

FORTUNATO: I say what I like. Besides it's carnival night. We're all masquerading for fun while this naughty pretender of a wine really means to fool people. And it would fool every gentleman in Venice but one.

GINA: And who might that be, do tell?

FORTUNATO: You're looking at him.

GINA: It's just a wine.

FORTUNATO: Not just, never just, never say just a wine to those who know about wines. But then again, your people tasted more wine with the soles of their feet than their mouths, no?

GINA: Again, you insult me, Fortunato.

FORTUNATO: Not only you. Your ancestors too, don't forget.

GINA: Careful before you make me mad.

FORTUNATO: Ah, don't let it bother you, my dear. Insulting people is just what the rich do because we have too much time on our hands. Besides, what's the good of being superior if you can't look down on humanity? Don't be upset. We do it to everyone and most of all each other because... because... Oh I can't remember why but it's fun. All in good fun. I love it. No one takes it seriously and you shouldn't either. **(GINA notices MONTRESOR hidden in the shadows.)** Now let's you and me...

GINA: **(interrupting)** Who's that man over there who seems to be watching us so intently?

FORTUNATO: Who cares? **(slugs on bottle)** Aggh. Into the canal with you. Canal water, now there's the vintage your label truly deserves.

**(FORTUNATO tosses the bottle barely missing MONTRESOR who smiles icily, burning coldly with his plan.)**

GINA: Careful. You almost hit the man.

FORTUNATO: Wait a minute, why that's... no...

GINA: You know him?

FORTUNATO: **(tipsy; screwing up his eyes)** Couldn't be...yes, yes, why yes, it's Montresor! Montresor, not a bad fellow, really, and he comes with the finest of labels.

GINA: Label? Is he a person or a wine?

FORTUNATO: By his label I meant his family bloodline. Montresor comes from the old aristocracy, though the actual man has lost some taste with time. Alas, some bloodlines just don't age well. The Montresor castle, it's said, is built above catacombs.

GINA: Catacombs? What are catacombs?

FORTUNATO: Deep caves wherein the bones of his ancestors are said to be piled high against the walls.

GINA: Why put them there instead of the graveyard?

FORTUNATO: Family tradition, I suppose.

GINA: Creepy.

FORTUNATO: Montresor's not a bad fellow though. Really quite harmless, I should think.

GINA: Such fire in eyes. His eyes seem to have collected the flames of all the torches set round the canals this carnival night. Burning eyes that could set fire to the things they look at.

***(Lights up on MONTRESOR; down on FORTUNATO and GINA.)***

MONTRESOR: ***(to audience)*** The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult I had vowed revenge. You, who so well know the nature of my soul, will not suppose, however, that I even once gave utterance to a threat. At length, I would be avenged; this was a point definitely settled, but it must be understood that neither by word nor deed had I ever given Fortunato any cause to doubt my good will. I continued, as was my wont, to smile in his face...

***(Lights up on FORTUNATO and GINA. MONTRESOR hides his trowel and then approaches them.)***

MONTRESOR: Ah, my great and good friend, Fortunato. Let me embrace you.

FORTUNATO: Montresor, Montresor. Come here and I will embrace you.

MONTRESOR: ***(to audience)*** He met me with excessive warmth, for he had been drinking too much. And I, I of course was so pleased to see him I thought I should never have done with wringing his hand. ***(as HE shakes his hand excessively)*** Fortunato, Fortunato, you are luckily met tonight.

FORTUNATO: The luck is mine.

MONTRESOR: No, mine, good fellow.

FORTUNATO: No mine. I insist.

MONTRESOR: Well, what if we divide the luck in two? Eh, eh? Then we can both number ourselves among the lucky chaps of the world.

FORTUNATO: Done, good friend, down the middle.

***(MONTRESOR and FORTUNATO laugh heartily.)***

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MONTRESOR: But how remarkably well you are looking. And who's this?

FORTUNATO: This, my dear man, is Gina. We met somewhere at some point for some reason and have been having fun with each other ever since.

MONTRESOR: A lovely girl. And what have you come as, Gina?

FORTUNATO: She's a lovely girl come as a lovely girl advertising she's a lovely girl. **(GINA slaps FORTUNATO playfully.)** Pardon me, she's the terror of the high seas. But what's your get-up?

MONTRESOR: **(drawing his black mask down)** You do not comprehend, Fortunato? I'm surprised. Then you are not of the brotherhood.

FORTUNATO: Ah, the brotherhood. You too? A mason? Impossible. Let's give the secret sign then, brother.

***(FORTUNATO begins to give sign but MONTRESOR cuts off gesture by producing the trowel. MONTRESOR raises mask.)***

MONTRESOR: The only sign I need is this one.

FORTUNATO: A trowel for laying brick? What? Surely you kid me now. A trowel?

GINA: But that's what masons use. I've watched them. A trowel or whatever it is to lay stones and bricks for walls.

FORTUNATO: Yes, yes, my dear, but that's not our brotherhood. I hate to see a man at physical labor. Ha! We don't use tools or ever get our hands dirty but practice the secret, magical crafts and mysteries of freemasonry.

MONTRESOR: My friend is pretending ignorance, Gina. Don't listen to him. Just as a man needs the solid, protecting walls of a house to have his sweetest dreams, the solid material of the stone masons and the mysteries of the freemasons are interdependent and entwined. Humans need real stone to make their dreams come true. Why else would we build crypts to house the dreaming dead? So I've come as a Mason, in both senses of the word, strong of arm and free in my mind. For what good is an idea that doesn't take on physical form, like the idea of beauty visits us in your form Gina. God doesn't operate that way and neither should man.

FORTUNATO: You're speaking quite colorfully tonight, sir.

MONTRESOR: I've thought long and hard on it.

***(MONTRESOR now gives the secret sign that FORTUNATO began, though MONTRESOR does it with incredible intensity as if measuring the other man out for clothes. FORTUNATO has a nervous fit of coughing.)***

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MONTRESOR: (*while FORTUNATO is coughing*) Easy there, my friend.

FORTUNATO: Nothing, nothing at all. Just an annoying little cold that doesn't like the cooling night air.

MONTRESOR: Such coughing sets your foals bells to jingling. You surely look the clown tonight.

FORTUNATO: In this costume, I have struck the tuning fork of my nature and found it's perfect note. Ping, ping, jing- a-ling. Ping, ping, jing-a-ling.

MONTRESOR: You're too modest. Your connoisseurship in painting, gems, tapestries, and of course in fine wine is legend. And that is why you are luckily met by me tonight because just this day I have received a cask of what passes for Amontillado, though I have my doubts.

FORTUNATO: Amontillado? How could that be? Amontillado? A whole cask of it? Impossible! And in the middle of carnival.

MONTRESOR: As I said, I have my doubts about it's authenticity and I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without first consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found and I was fearful of losing a bargain.

FORTUNATO: Amontillado! Exquisite Amontillado!!!!

MONTRESOR: I have my doubts.

FORTUNATO: Amontillado!! Sublime Amontillado!!!!

MONTRESOR: Doubts. And I must satisfy them.

FORTUNATO: Amontillado!!! Divine Amontillado!!!!

MONTRESOR: As I see you are most pleasantly engaged, I will find my way to Luchresi. If anyone has a critical turn it is he. He will tell me if the label lies.

FORTUNATO: Bah! Luchresi cannot tell Amontillado from an ordinary Sherry.

MONTRESOR: And yet some will have it that his taste is a match for your own.

FORTUNATO: Who?

MONTRESOR: Oh the various fools such as one always finds around.

FORTUNATO: Fools is exactly right. Come let us go.

MONTRESOR: Where?

FORTUNATO: To your vaults.

MONTRESOR: No, my friend, I will not impose upon your good nature. I perceive you have a most pleasant engagement. Luchresi...

**(FORTUNATO gives GINA some money.)**

GINA: But...

**(FORTUNATO gives her more money.)**

FORTUNATO: I have no engagement anymore... Come.

***(FORTUNATO takes MONTRESOR's arm and leads him off.)***

MONTRESOR: My friend, it is not the engagement but the severe cold with which you are afflicted. The vaults are insufferably dank and damp and encrusted with nitre and you know how breathing in the acrid scent of nitre leads to chills and fits of coughing. I should be sick if anything happened to a dear friend like you doing me a favor.

FORTUNATO: The favor is mine. Amontillado! The cough a mere nothing. Amontillado! I'm the only one who can tell you if you've been swindled on this purchase. Amontillado! And as for Luchresi, he can't distinguish Amontillado from the water in the canals. To your vaults without delay.

GINA: Goodbye.

FORTUNATO: ***(completely ignoring her)*** Amontillado! Think of it! Even though I suspect it can't be true and someone's taken advantage of you, Montresor. So many pretenders about in the world these days. But if it is true, I'm your man for the tasting and the drinking. Amontillado!

MONTRESOR: ***(to audience)*** Thus speaking, Fortunato possessed himself of my arm and I suffered him to hurry me to my palazzo.

***(FORTUNATO takes MONTRESOR's arm. MONTRESOR draws the black mask down over his face and smiles at the audience. The two men exit, leaving GINA alone watching them go. End of Scene 1.)***

## SCENE 2

**SETTING:** MONTRESOR castle. Enter FORTUNATO and MONTRESOR.

MONTRESOR: ***(to audience, mask still down)*** There was no one at home. My servants had absconded to make merry at the carnival. I had told them, you see, 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 insure their immediate disappearance, one and all, as soon as my back was turned.

FORTUNATO: Why, your palazzo is strangely deserted, no? Not a man here to open the door for us or to take our cloaks.

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MONTRESOR: (**mask up**) Or to hold the torches in the catacombs. My servants have made off for the carnival no doubt. Not only are they not at their jobs now, but they'll be worth nothing tomorrow morning after a night of celebrating.

FORTUNATO: The rascals! But let's go...

MONTRESOR: You have to watch them every minute when they're supposed to be watching over us. Perhaps we should pay ourselves their wages, too.

FORTUNATO: Pay ourselves wages?! You're in fine form tonight. That's a good one. Ha, ha...

**(FORTUNATO's laughter causes him to break into another fit of coughing from which HE finally recovers.)**

MONTRESOR: Go?

FORTUNATO: To your vaults. The cask!

MONTRESOR: (**as HE produces a bottle of wine**) Absolutely not. We will stay up here tonight and drink this Medoc I hope is worthy of you. We can go down for the Amontillado another time. The vaults are dank and deep, as I said, and with that cold of yours...

FORTUNATO: It is nothing, my friend. Lead me to this alleged Amontillado of yours and say no more about my silly cold.

MONTRESOR: (**lowering his mask and speaking to audience**) I took from their sconces two torches, and giving one to Fortunato, led him down into the vaults. (**MONTRESOR lights the torches; keeps one himself and hands one to FORTUNATO and takes his arm. FORTUNATO, tipsy, walks unsteadily.**) (**to audience**) First this long and winding staircase. (**to FORTUNATO**) Careful, my friend, careful.

**(FORTUNATO's unsteady walk makes his cap jingle.)**

FORTUNATO: Because in each an angel dwells  
Man loves the sounding of the bells

MONTRESOR: (**to audience**) Then down we went into the caves, the damp catacombs of the Montresors. The gait of my friend was unsteady and the bells upon his silly cap jingled as he strode.

FORTUNATO: (**singing**) When grape is ripe  
We'll drink a pipe  
And when it's done  
We'll all feel young

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