

SUMMARIES OF THE NINE EDGAR ALLEN POE SHORT STORIES USED IN THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH

The Red Death has devastated the country. Prince Prospero attempts to escape the plague by entertaining a thousand friends at a masked ball locked in his castle, a voluptuous abbey containing seven rooms, each of a different colour: blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet and the seventh room black with scarlet windows. The black room contains a gigantic ebony clock and when it chimes every hour the guests become increasingly disconcerted, yet the revelry continues. In the midst of it, a mysterious figure enters and makes his way through each of the rooms. When Prospero sees the stranger he is enraged. He confronts him, tears off his mask and instantly falls down dead. The Red Death has entered the castle...

THE BLACK CAT

A couple live happily in a house with their cat. The husband begins drinking heavily and becomes violent, ultimately hanging their favourite cat. Their house burns down and in the wreckage the husband sees the image of the hung cat in the newly laid plaster work. In time, they get a new cat, but the husband continues drinking and paranoia sets in. He attempts to kill the new cat with an axe but the wife intervenes and is killed in error. The husband bricks her up in a wall and when the police visit they can't find any incriminating evidence. As they turn to leave, they pass by the wall where the dead wife is buried. There is a loud cry and the wall falls down revealing the corpse. Sitting on the dead body is the cat the husband tried to kill.

WILLIAM WILSON

A story of schizophrenia. William Wilson (a pseudonym) goes to school with a boy who has the same name as him. The namesakes bully and annoy each other. One night Wilson visits his namesake whilst he sleeps and sees he has become his doppelganger. He leaves the room in horror. After some months Wilson goes to Eton but one night is visited by his doppelganger who whispers their name in his ear before vanishing. Wilson goes to Oxford and hustles one of the rich students in a card game. The doppelganger mysteriously enters after Wilson has won the last game and reveals Wilson's tricks. Wilson is expelled from Oxford. He travels through European cities but is always followed by this doppelganger until eventually he stabs his pursuer, and himself, to death.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

The narrator is summoned by Roderick Usher. On arriving at Usher's house the narrator finds Usher and his sister Madeline in a bad way. The narrator is unable to lift Usher's spirits. Usher falsely informs the narrator that Madeline has died (knowing that she has merely had a fit) and they both bury her alive. The narrator tries to soothe Usher by reading to him, meanwhile Madeline claws her way out of the tomb. Bloodied, she finds her brother and kills him and herself in a fall. The narrator flees the house and once on the road he turns Battersea Arts Centre and sees The House of Usher split and fall.

BERENICE

Egeus buries the still living Berenice. He pulls her teeth out after she has been buried. A household disturbed by terrifying cries, finds the violated grave of Berenice and sees the disfigured and still-breathing body. A member of the household points out that Egeus dug up the grave.

LIGEIA

The narrator is married to Ligeia, who he absolutely adores. Ligeia dies. The narrator remarries Lady Rowena Trevanion, whom he loathes. In their second month of marriage Rowena is taken seriously ill. The narrator is sitting next to her and sees a shadow as she dies. As she lies on her deathbed Lady Rowena's body is prepared for the grave. The narrator witnesses a vision; the shrouded body gets up from the bed and walks to the middle of the apartment. The narrator rushes forward, and shrinking from his touch, the bandaging falls away from the face and reveals Ligeia.

THE SYSTEM OF DOCTOR TARR AND PROFESSOR FETHER

The narrator visits a private insane asylum, seemingly well run by superintendent Monsieur Maillard. The narrator dines with the doctors. As dinner progresses things become a little stranger until the dinner party is transformed into a debauched and chaotic arena for the inmates.

THE TELL TALE HEART

A man, threatened by his uncle, kills him while he sleeps and buries the heart under the floorboards. After neighbours report screams, the police come to investigate. They sit on top of the place where the heart is buried. The nephew hears the beating heart underfoot; it slowly gets louder. The police remain oblivious. The beating becomes increasingly maddening for the nephew, until he rips the floorboards up and reveals the beating heart.

THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO

During the carnival, Fortunato leads Montresor down into his wine cellar on the pretence of testing the amontillado he has just bought. In a cavern of the long underground passage, he forces Montresor into a niche and fixes him to the wall with a manacle and proceeds to brick up the entrance.