

The Mask of the Red Death

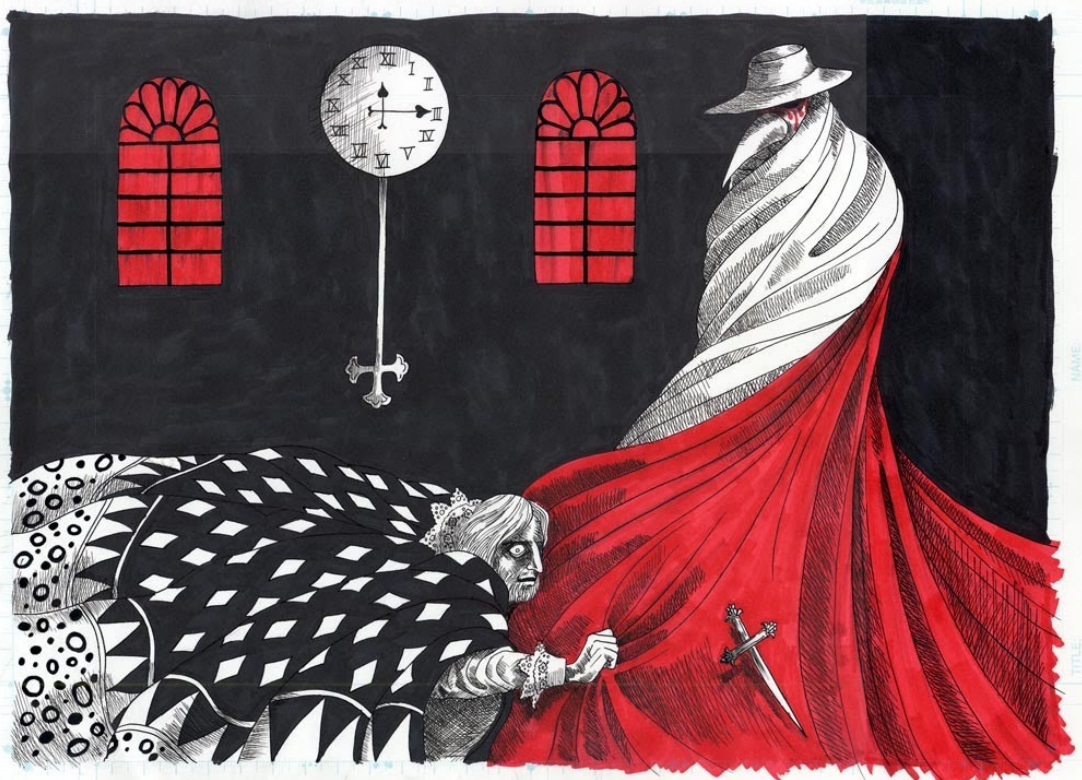


A terrible disease called the Red Death has struck the country. It is incredibly fatal, horribly **gruesome**, and it has already killed off half the kingdom. But the ruler of these parts, Prince Prospero, does not seem to care about his poor, dying **subjects**. Instead, he decides to let the kingdom take care of itself while he and a thousand of his favourite knights and ladies shut themselves up in a fabulous castle to have one never-ending party. Wine, women, music, dancing, fools—Prospero's castle has it all. After the last **guest** enters, no one else can get in—the Prince has welded the doors shut. That means no one can get out, either...

About five or six months into his stay, Prospero decides to have a spectacular **masquerade** ball (a ball where the guests wear masks and costumes). The

setup is **weird and wild**, just like the Prince who designs it. The ball takes place in a suite of seven rooms, each one dressed up in a different color: blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet, and black. The black room, which looks like death, is awfully **creepy**—it is got dark black walls, blood red windows, and big black clock which chimes so eerily every hour that everybody at the party stops dancing and laughs nervously. Most of the **frolicking** masqueraders are too weirded out to go into the black room.

Anyway, the party's **in full swing** and everybody is having a wild time when the clock strikes midnight. Everyone stops dancing and falls momentarily silent, as usual. Then some of the dancers notice a guest no one had seen before, wearing a scandalous costume. Whoever the new guest is, he's decided to dress as **a corpse**, a corpse who died of... the Red Death. He's so frighteningly lifelike (deathlike?) he **freaks everybody out**, and he slowly starts "stalking" through the frightened crowd. When Prince Prospero sees the ghostly guest, he's furious that someone would have the nerve to wear such a costume and orders him to be **seized** and unmasked. But no one has the guts to do it, including Prospero himself.



The Red Death masquerader passes within a few feet of the Prince and starts to walk through the rooms, **heading** toward the black room. Prospero loses it and runs after him in a **rage**, drawing his dagger as he approaches. But just as Prospero reaches the edge of the black room, the corpse-like guest suddenly whirls around to face him, and Prospero falls to the ground, dead. The shocked crowd throws itself at the guest, only to discover in horror that there is nothing underneath the mask and costume. The Red Death itself has come to the party. One by one the guests die, spilling their blood all over Prospero's **lavish** rooms. The candles go out, leaving only "darkness, **decay**, and the Red Death."

1/ VOCABULARY

WRITE THE WORDS IN YELLOW AND LOOK UP THEIR MEANING IN THE DICTIONARY.

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|--|
| 1 | Gruesome | very unpleasant or violent, usually involving injury or death |
| 2 | Subjects | an area of knowledge studied at school or university |
| 3 | guest | someone who comes to visit you |
| 4 | masquerade | behaviour that is intended to prevent the truth about something unpleasant or not wanted from becoming known |
| 5 | weird and wild, | Very strange and unusual, |
| 6 | creepy | strange and frightening |
| 7 | frolicking | gerund or present participle: frolicking |
| 8 | in full swing | to move easily and without interruption backwards and forwards or from one side to the other, |
| 9 | a corpse, | a dead person's body |
| 10 | freaks everybody out, | being in a nervous or emotional state |
| 11 | seized | to take hold of something quickly and firmly |
| 12 | heading | words at the top of a piece of writing that tell you its subject |
| 13 | rage | strong anger that you cannot control |
| 14 | lavish | large in quantity and expensive or impressive |
| 15 | decay | to gradually become bad or be destroyed |

2/ THE STORY

- **PROSPERO MAKES A HUGE MISTAKE. WHICH ONE?**

The mistake was that he did not care for his poor dying subjects and left the kingdom to take care of itself.

- **WHY IS A CLOCK SO IMPORTANT IN THIS STORY?**

Because the parties end at midnight and then they need to know what time it was

- **WHICH MORAL CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE STORY?**

We can learn that in this life one should not be so selfish as one who only thought about himself, not about the poor.