

LBRIS

We know
books

Edgar Allan Poe

American Horror

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n. track

end



These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the passages linked to the listening activities.



I was sick from the terrible suffering. Then, finally, the judges of the Spanish Inquisition ¹ gave their sentence. I was condemned to death. I looked at the seven white candles on the table, and then I lost consciousness.



track 02

After this I remember that some tall men picked me up and began to carry me. They took me down and down and down — my descent seemed unending. Finally, we came to a point where all was still and quiet and damp.

Sound and motion returned. I became aware of my heart inside of me, and I heard the sound of its beating. I lay without thinking for a long time. Then, very suddenly, I began to think,

1. **Spanish Inquisition** : (1478-1834) A law court of the Roman Catholic Church established to punish heretics—people who had other religious beliefs.

and I became horribly afraid. I wanted to know where I was and what my condition was.

So far I had not opened my eyes. I felt that I lay on my back and that I was not tied up. I wanted to open my eyes and look around, but I did not have the courage.

Finally I opened my eyes and all around me was the blackness of eternal night. I had trouble breathing. I tried to reason in order to understand my situation.



end

First, I was certain that I was not dead. I knew that the Spanish Inquisition used the auto-da-fés² to carry out its death sentences. They had had one the night before my trial. Perhaps they had sent me back to the dungeon³ to wait a number of months for another one. But this was not the situation because in that moment the Spanish Inquisition needed new victims. Also, the cells of the dungeons in Toledo⁴ all had some light.

Then I had a frightening idea and I fainted again. When I recovered, I moved my arms about wildly. I felt nothing. But I did not walk because I was terrified that I was in a tomb. Finally I began to walk. Fortunately, at least, I was not buried alive — the worst fate of all. Still, I knew that something horrible awaited me. Perhaps they were going to leave me here to die of starvation.

Then, I felt what seemed to be a wall. It was very smooth, damp and slippery.⁵ I decided to measure the distance around my dungeon. But it was dark. I was going to take a knife out of

2. **auto-da-fés** : Portuguese for “act of faith”: this was the public execution of a heretic—usually by burning.
3. **dungeon** : an underground prison in a castle.
4. **Toledo** : Spanish city that became the center of the Inquisition.
5. **slippery** : wet and difficult to walk on or to hold.

my pocket and place it in the wall. This way I would know where I started walking from. But they had taken my clothing, and now I wore a long wool shirt. For a long time I did not know what to do. I was totally confused. Then I decided to tear off⁶ a piece of the edge of my long shirt, and lay the piece against the wall.

I started to walk. But the floor was very slippery, the dungeon seemed very big and I was very tired. I succeeded in walking with great effort, and I tripped⁷ and fell. I was so tired that I slept for some time.

When I awoke, I felt around in the total darkness with my hand and discovered a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water. I ate and drank immediately. Then I got up and walked around, and finally I reached the piece of shirt. Before I fell I had counted 52 steps and then after I started again I counted 48 more. I reckoned that there were two steps in a yard,⁸ and so the distance around the entire dungeon was 50 yards.

I had no object in my research. I certainly did not hope to find a way out of this dark dungeon. A vague curiosity pushed me. I then left the wall and decided to cross the floor. As I walked, the torn part of my shirt got tangled between my legs and I fell face down on the floor. I was rather confused after the fall and at first I did not notice something unusual: my chin was on the floor of the dungeon, but my lips and the top part of my head were lower than my chin and touched nothing. Then I felt cold moist air coming up against my forehead. I put forward my arms and was terrified to discover that I had fallen to the edge of a circular

6. **tear off** : pull into pieces.

7. **tripped** : knocked his foot against something.

8. **yard** : a unit of length equal to 91.9 centimetres or 36 inches.

pit. I felt with my hand on the wall of this pit and pulled off a piece of stone. I dropped the stone and listened. It bounced against the sides of the pit for many seconds and finally I heard the sound as it hit some water at the bottom. Then, above me, I heard the sound of the quick opening and closing of a door, while a light flashed in the darkness for a second.

I realized the horrible fate I had avoided. There were two kinds of torture — physical and psychological. I, it seemed, had to suffer the second kind. Now every part of my body was shaking from fear. I moved slowly back to the wall, away from the pit. My fear was so great that I stayed awake for many hours. At last, I fell asleep.

When I awoke, again I found a pitcher of water and a loaf. I was very thirsty and I drank all the water. I think there was a drug in the water because I soon slept very deeply. I do not know how long I slept but when I woke there was light in the dungeon and I could see.

One of the first things I noticed was its size — it was much smaller than I had thought. Its whole circumference was only about 25 yards. This bothered me greatly. How could that be? Obviously, in my horrible situation, this had very little importance. But I still desperately wanted to understand my mistake. Then I understood. After I had put down the piece of my shirt I walked slowly around the room and then I stopped and slept. At this point I had almost arrived at the piece of shirt, but when I awoke I did not go forward. Without realizing it, I had turned around and went back to the beginning again.

Now, I could also see the shape of the room. It was square and the walls were made of large iron panels. There were horrible pictures of devils and skeletons on these panels, but they were all rather blurred and faded.⁹ I could also see the circular pit in the center of the dungeon.

I managed to see all this with great difficulty because I was tied to a low wooden platform by a single long leather belt. This belt formed a kind of a spiral¹⁰ all along my body. Only my left arm was a little free, and with great effort I took some meat from a plate. But I then noticed to my horror that they had taken away the pitcher. I say to my horror because the meat was very spicy and it greatly stimulated my thirst.

I looked up and saw that the ceiling too was made of large panels of iron. Then I noticed an interesting picture on the ceiling directly over me. It was an image of Father Time,¹¹ but instead of holding a scythe he was holding what seemed to be the picture of a pendulum — the pendulum itself and the gears of its machinery. For some reason it attracted my attention greatly. While I looked at it, for a moment I thought it moved. Then a second later I was certain that it really did move. The pendulum was going back and forth.

9. **faded** : less bright.

10. **spiral** : a shape that winds round and round.

11. **Father Time** : a personification of time.

1 Comprehension check

Match the phrases in column A with those in column B. There are two phrases in column B that you do not need to use.

A

- 1 The narrator knew he was not in a dungeon of Toledo
- 2 The narrator moved his arms about
- 3 The narrator tore off a piece of his shirt
- 4 The narrator first realized there was a pit
- 5 The narrator pulled off a piece of stone from the wall of the pit
- 6 When there was finally light in the dungeon, the narrator still found it difficult to observe his prison
- 7 The picture of Father Time was unusual

B

- A because he held a pendulum.
- B because his chin was higher than his forehead.
- C because he wanted to know how deep it was.
- D because he wanted to know if they had buried him alive.
- E because it was cold and damp.
- F because he was tied down.
- G because it was completely dark.
- H because he wanted to measure the dungeon.
- I because he heard something fall and hit its sides and then the bottom.

2 In the dark

Which of the illustrations below shows how the narrator walked in his prison, when he tried to estimate its size?

