

THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM

A Dramatic Monolog

by
Edgar Allen Poe



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I was sick--sick unto death with long agony; and I felt that my senses were leaving me. The dread sentence of death--was the last distinct sound which reached my ears. After that, the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum. The figures of the judges vanished from before me; all sensations appeared swallowed up in a mad rushing descent as of the soul into Hades. Then silence, and stillness, and night were the universe.

I had swooned; but shadows of memory tell of tall figures that lifted and bore me in silence down--down--still down--till a dizziness oppressed me. They tell of a sudden motionlessness as if those who bore me had paused from the wearisomeness of their toil. After this flatness and dampness; and--the madness of a memory!

I strove to imagine where I lay, yet dared not open my eyes. It was not that I feared to look upon things horrible, but that I grew aghast lest there should be nothing to see. At length, with a wild desperation I unclosed my eyes. My worst thoughts, then, were confirmed. The blackness of eternal night encompassed me. I started to my feet and thrust my arms above and around me. I felt nothing; yet dreaded to move, lest I should be impeded by the walls of a tomb. Cold perspiration burst from every pore. The agony of suspense grew intolerable and I moved forward, with my arms extended, and my eyes straining.

As I continued cautiously onward, my outstretched hands encountered a wall, seemingly of stone masonry--very smooth, slimy, and cold.

I had little hope, but a vague curiosity prompted me to continue my research. Quitting the wall, I proceeded with caution, for the floor was treacherous with slime. I had advanced some ten or twelve paces in this manner, when I fell violently on my face.

While I still lay prostrate, I put forward my arm, and shuddered to find that I had fallen at the very brink of a circular pit. Groping about the masonry, I succeeded in dislodging a small fragment, and let it fall into the abyss. For many seconds I hearkened to its reverberations as it dashed against the sides of the chasm in its descent; at length, there was a sullen plunge into water, succeeded by loud echoes. Another step and the world had seen me no more.

Shaking in every limb, I groped my way back to the wall--resolving there to perish rather than risk the terrors of the well.

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