

© **Scripts for Stage** *This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from <https://scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/masque-red-death-performance-licence/>*

Production Notes

There are four speaking characters and one non-speaking character. Some additional non-speaking background cast can be used to add depth to the scene if required.

Characters

Narrator	Narrator (M/F)
Prince Prospero	Protagonist (M)
Dame	A noble guest (F)
Duke	A noble guest (M)
The Red Death	A hooded figure. Non-speaking (M/F)

Scene 1 – Castle chamber

(Lights up. The Narrator enters dressed in Gothic clothing, carrying a large book which he reads from.)

Narrator: This is the story of the Masque of the Red Death.

(Red Death enters into a spotlight upstage centre, front of tabs. He is a tall figure in a red velvet cloak with hood. The figure inside cannot be seen save for skeletal hands and the face which is covered by a mask in the shape of a human skull. SFX. Eerie wind, thunder and ghostly whispers.)

Narrator: The Red Death had long devastated the country; no plague had ever been so fatal or so hideous. It travelled as blood and blood was its calling card. It was said to give sharp pains, dizziness and profuse bleeding from the pores bringing the end of the victim.

(Red Death raises a skeletal finger towards the audience)

Narrator: Once the Red Death takes hold there is no stopping it and within half an hour, its job is done.

(SFX. Crack of thunder, spotlight off. Red Death should exit through the tabs. Once he has exited from the stage, the tabs open. A jaunty fanfare

plays, the lights rise and Prince Prospero enters holding a flute of champagne and wearing elaborate opulent clothing.)

© **Scripts for Stage** *This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from <https://scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/masque-red-death-performance-licence/>*

Prince: Welcome! Welcome one and all to my palace. The Palace of Prince Prospero. We have food to last a year, drink to last for two and entertainment of which you will never tire. I care not of this Red Death – I care not that half the townsfolk have surrendered to its fatal embrace; I have called you all to my presence, a thousand healthy and happy friends.

(Several revellers enter, stage chatting and acting generally jovial. They are all dressed to represent high social standing.)

Prince: Among you are Knights and Dames and we all will retire to the deep seclusion of this Castellated Palace.

Dame: **(Breaking from the throng and approaching the prince)** This is quite a magnificent place you have here Prince Prospero.

Prince: **(Smugly)** Yes, it is isn't it? I designed it myself don't you know? It has many many rooms, each a reflection of a different part of my personality.

(The Dame purrs with admiration)

Prince: It is majestic, imposing yet dignified I feel.

(The Dame giggles and returns to the throng. The Prince has not yet finished and grabs the Duke who happens to be walking past on his way somewhere else. The Duke, irritated by the Prince's grabbing of his arm, attempts to remain amiable)

Prince: I was just saying how amazing my palace is.

Duke: Oh?

Prince: Yes, it is strong and tall with huge iron gates.

Duke: **(Confused)** Yes, we know. We brought furnaces and huge hammers. You made us weld the bolts so that nothing and nobody could get in *or* out; no matter how sudden our impulse of anguish or rage.

Prince: So I did. Ha! Well, we have enough food and wine to see us through this horrid plague. Those beyond my walls will no doubt fend for themselves – it is folly for us to pay sympathy or mind to them. There is nothing we can do but to revel and see this disease out.

© **Scripts for Stage** *This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from <https://scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/masque-red-death-performance-licence/>*

Duke: Indeed. So, where is this entertainment you promised?

Prince: We have fools, improvisation, ballet dancers, musicians, beauty and wine!

(Depending on the scale of your production, each of these could be represented by an actor dressed as a Jester, a medieval actor, a ballet dancer, a musician playing a lute or similar and a woman in a large French style aristocratic dress and holding a fan)

Prince: Within there is only decadence – without is the *Red Death*. How long has this merriment lasted? Five, six months?

Duke: Nearer seven I'd say. This is a fabulous party!

(Something catches the Duke's eye and he wanders off downstage)

Prince: And now, friends and revellers - the pièce de résistance, a Masquerade ball!
(Each guest fetches a mask from downstage and returns centre stage with a partner. There is music and dancing as the Prince explains how the ball shall proceed.)

Prince: The ball shall take place amongst seven rooms. Only one shall you see at any time as they are far spaced and irregular. A window of stained glass dictates the colour of each as you can see, this is the blue room.

(A wash of blue turns the stage that colour as the dancing continues)

Prince: The second, purple with its ornaments and tapestries

(The wash turns purple)

Prince: The third green

(The stage is washed in green)

Prince: The fourth lighted in Orange, the fifth white and the sixth, violet.

(The stage is washed in orange, white and violet light in turn)

Prince: The seventh, black.

(The lights go out, the half tabs open and all the guests who are on stage, exit. The volume of the music lowers but does not fade entirely. The lights come up dimly in a red wash to light the stage sufficiently for the audience to see. There is a large ebony grandfather clock downstage. Spotlight on the prince)

© Scripts for Stage *This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from <https://scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/masque-red-death-performance-licence/>*

Prince: It is shrouded in black velvet tapestries which hang on the ceiling and down the walls. The carpets just as such but in this chamber only, the colour of the stained glass does not reflect the colour of the furnishings. Its glass is scarlet, a deep blood colour. Because the braziers in the corridors beyond cast shapes around the room so ghastly in the extreme and produce so wild a look upon the faces of those who enter, none of my guests were so bold to set foot within this black chamber.

(SFX. The clock ticks)

Prince: On the western wall there is a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum can be heard swinging, dull, heavy, monotonous. When the hour strikes –

(The music stops. SFX. Clock chimes)

Prince: The sound is so clear and deep and musical but so peculiar that the musicians in the blue room pause momentarily. The Waltzers cease and there is brief unnerving of the guests.

(The Duke enters)

Duke: As that clock chimes, the brightest grow pale and the aged take hands to their foreheads in confusion and meditation. But –

(The clock ceases to chime. SFX. Ticking and light music as before)

Duke: As the echoes cease, the laughter returns, the music begins once more and each whispers in promises that when next the clock chimes, it will not hold them in similar emotion. Yet, when again the clock chimes –

(SFX. Clock chimes, more eerily than before)

Duke: So returns the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

(Lights out. Half tabs close. The revellers return, the music plays at normal volume and the lights rise again with the blue wash of the blue room. The Duke joins the revellers down stage.)

Prince: Among the crowd move the anonymous faces hidden behind the grotesque and maddened masks.

© Scripts for Stage *This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from <https://scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/masque-red-death-performance-licence/>*

Prince: There is much of the beautiful,

(A reveller moves upstage to show off their ‘beautiful’ mask)

Prince: The bizarre,

(A reveller shows off their ‘bizarre’ mask)

Prince: The terrible

(A reveller shows off their ‘terrible’ mask)

Prince: And of that which would have excited and disgusted.

(Several other revellers show off their masks by sweeping upstage, around the prince and ‘showing’ their costumes and masks to the audience. SFX. Clock chimes. The entire company freeze. The chimes stop, the music begins once more and the revellers begin moving and chatting again)

Prince: Laughter and revelry returns but will it again be silenced by the chiming of the clock in the black chamber? An hour hence and once more the chiming began – the chiming of midnight.

(SFX. Clock chimes twelve times as the Prince speaks. The Red Death enters and passes amongst the guests. He turns his face to the audience to reveal his skull mask, smiling and sinister.)

Prince: All six rooms were filled with revellers but the last, the black room contained none. And as the clock struck, a presence was felt among us. A presence that

none of us had noticed before – rumour passed by whispers around the castle and there arose at length a buzz, a murmur of surprise and then finally –

(Lights off with the final chime of the clock. The company exit apart from the Prince and the cloaked figure. The stage is washed with red once more and the cloaked figure stands downstage with his back to the audience, facing the clock.)

Prince: Terror. Of Horror. Of Disgust.

(The Duke enters)

© Scripts for Stage *This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from <https://scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/masque-red-death-performance-licence/>*

Duke: Nobody of ordinary appearance could have caused such a stir among the guests. This guest has pushed the boundary of what this night is about. Even the hearts of the reckless have been shaken and even those who are utterly lost, to whom life and death are equally humorous, this is a matter in which even they cannot find humour.

Prince: **(Quietly, to audience)** It is felt by all present that this figure bears neither wit nor propriety with his gaunt and deathly appearance. Had he come? Had he assumed the robes and persona of the Red Death?

Duke: He has indeed assumed the appearance of the Red Death – his robes daubed in blood and even his mask sprinkled with the scarlet horror.

(The Prince approaches the figure slowly. As he nears him, the ‘Red Death’ turns to look over his shoulder and fix the Prince with a gaze. SFX. Crack of thunder.)

Narrator: When the eyes of Prince Prospero fell upon the spectral image he was gripped by convulsion, in the first instance with a strong shudder or terror but the next his brow reddened with rage

(The Prince falls to his knees, his back to the audience as the Red Death fixes him with a stare. SFX. Cracks of thunder.)

Prince: Who dares?

(The rest of the revellers enter, remaining stage left and are taken aback by what they see)

Prince: Who dares to insult us with this mockery? Seize him; unmask him that we may know whom we must hang at sunrise from the battlements!

(Some revellers make a half-hearted attempt to help the Prince by moving towards the figure. The figure turns to face the audience and fixes the Prince with a full glare. The company recede towards the wings.)

Narrator: No attempt was made to arrest the figure as he fixed the Prince with his deathly stare.

(The Prince removes a dagger from inside his cloak)

Prince: Unhand me stranger before you perish at my hand

(The Prince raises the dagger. The Red Death raises a hand and the dagger falls from the Prince's grasp and hits the stage. The Prince follows, falling at the feet of the Red Death, dead.)

Narrator: The Prince lay dead and summoning the wild courage of despair, the throng of revellers threw themselves into the black apartment and grabbed at the figure, robes, mask and all.

© Scripts for Stage *This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from <https://scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/masque-red-death-performance-licence/>*

(The revellers crowd around the figure removing the mask and robes. The actor inside these is concealed sufficiently to exit from the stage without being seen or perhaps transforms into one of the company trying to unmask him so he blends into the scene)

Narrator: The figure who had stood tall within the shadow of the ebony clock gasped in unutterable horror as they removed the disguise to find no tangible form beneath.

(The revellers break, one holding the empty robe and another, the mask. SFX. Crack of thunder. Lights flash as lightning. Lights off and the tabs close.)

Narrator: And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night and one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-stained halls of their revel. They died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock expired with the last of the revellers and the flames

of the braziers went out and darkness and decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.

(SFX. Thunder. Red and white spotlights flash and illuminate the stage. Along with the thunder, a spooky laugh could be added as the lights fade off.)

© **Scripts for Stage** *This script must not be copied, printed or performed without the permission of Scripts for Stage. Copying and performance licences can be obtained from <https://scriptsforstage.co.uk/wp/product/masque-red-death-performance-licence/>*