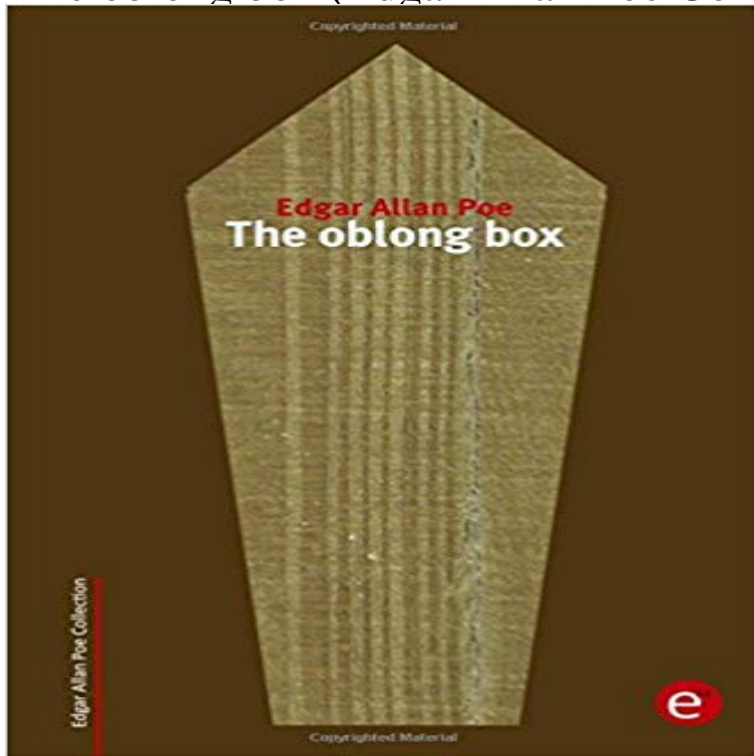


The oblong box (Edgar Allan Poe Collection)



The story opens with the unnamed narrator recounting a summer sea voyage from Charleston, South Carolina to New York City aboard the ship Independence. The narrator learns that his old college friend Cornelius Wyatt is aboard with his wife and two sisters, though he has reserved three state-rooms. After conjecturing the extra room was for a servant or extra baggage, he learns his friend has brought on board an oblong pine box: It was about six feet in length by two and a half in breadth. The narrator notes its peculiar shape and especially an odd odor coming from it. Even so, he presumes his friend has acquired an especially valuable copy of *The Last Supper*. The box, the narrator is surprised to learn, shares the state-room with Wyatt and his wife, while the second room is shared by the two sisters. However, for several nights, the narrator witnesses his friends surprisingly unattractive wife leaving the state-room every night around 11 o'clock and going into the third state-room before returning first thing in the morning. While she is gone, the narrator believes he hears his friend opening the box and sobbing, which he attributes to artistic enthusiasm. As the Independence passes Cape Hatteras it is caught in a terrible hurricane. Escape from the damaged ship was made via lifeboat, but Wyatt refuses to part with the box and issues an emotional plea but was denied by Captain Hardy. Wyatt decides he cannot part with the box and returns to the ship, ties himself to it with a rope. In another instant both body and box were in the sea--disappearing suddenly, at once and forever. About a month after the incident, the narrator happens to meet the captain. Hardy explains that the box had, in fact, held the corpse of Wyatts recently deceased young wife. He had intended to return the body to her mother but bringing a corpse on board would have caused panic among the passengers. Captain Hardy had

arranged, then, to register the box merely as baggage. As passage was already registered with Wyatt and his wife, so as not to arouse suspicion, a maid posed as the wife.

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