

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

by Matthew P. Burkholder
based upon the short story by
Edgar Allan Poe

Cast in order of appearance:

Man

Manservant/Townsperson

Roderick Usher

Angelica/Lady Madeline Usher

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Before directing, designing or performing this play I request that you thoroughly read the original text. Admittedly I have made alterations and additions to the text for the purposes of the stage and development of an alternate plot, that does not diminish the benefits of reading the original work. There are a great number of intricacies that I would have liked to include, but it was simply too awkward to work into the script (In other words the monologues are wordy as hell, lets not make it any worse). Also it will help a great deal in understanding the concepts and ideas included in one of Poe's masterpieces. Also, Man is not named for this reason. Poe never felt obligated to name him, I likewise do not feel inclined or obligated.*

Prologue

(Lights up on a stage bare except for one chair slightly downstage center in a spot-light. Man enters slowly and deliberately and sits in the chair, looks at audience for a few moments, then he speaks . . .)

Man -I have gone through a most unusual series of events these past few days. I shall endeavor to explain them to you, and I assure you it is a completely true story, although I doubt very much that you will believe me. The course of events began with a letter. *(Manservant enters with letter on a tray, Man takes it and Manservant exits.)* A letter. Upon first glance it seems like a harmless piece of paper, but by opening it, you unleash all the power of Pandora's box. I still have not determined whether the news was good or bad. I will let you be the judge. The letter was

Usher

from a good friend of mine from school, Roderick Usher. Although as boys we had been intimate associates, I really knew of my friend. I was aware, however, that his ancient family had always been noted, time out of mind, for a, how shall I put this, a peculiar sensibility of temperament. They were all renowned artisans, and in recent history known for performing repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity. The family was also noted for the fact that the Usher's never put forth an enduring branch; what I mean to say is, the entire family lay in the direct line of descent, and always had. Oh, of course there were records of the occasional affair, but only on a rare occasion did these affairs result in a child. How do I know this? To tell you would get ahead of the myself. This unique character of the family permeated the character of their property. When they were prosperous the land was prosperous, and when they were sickly, so the land. The nearby villagers noted this, which resulted in their merging the family itself and the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the "House of Usher"-- an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion. Now, let me get to the root of the matter. The letter arrived while I was in the midst of a matter of great personal importance, it reached me in a distant part of the country, and it had admitted of none other than a personal reply. (*refers to letter*) Roderick spoke of acute bodily illness- of a mental disorder which oppressed him - and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best, and indeed only personal friend. He somehow believed that the cheerfulness I alone could provide would aid his malady. It was this and the indisputable *heart* that went with his request which allowed no room for hesitation. I obeyed accordingly forthwith to what I still considered a very singular summons.

(Man rises and Angelica - played by Madeline - enters)

SCENE 1

Man- Angelica, my dear sweet beauty.

Angelica- No.

Man- I beg your pardon?

Angelica- No. Now come get your coat. We are late enough as it is.

Usher

Man- I...I must leave.

Angelica- Nicolas and Vivian have already left for the Opera house.

Man- I have received word from...

Angelica- Faust is by far my favourite opera. I simply wouldn't miss it for the world. For the world.

Man- You know how this troubles me. If it weren't so urgent I would ignore it. You know I would. Angelica, this simply cannot be put off.

Angelica- What is it this time? A business deal in Brussels? A disaster in Bonn? No, wait, I know. It's my personal favorite, you're married, you have managed to keep it secret all this time but your wife has just returned from the Americas unexpectedly. Is that it?

Man- No. And I'm afraid it isn't anything any more believable. I have received this letter from a childhood friend and must fly to him immediately.

Angelica- A childhood friend. Well, that is a new one. I can't honestly say that I've heard that one. Wait. A letter. Aha, a potential hole in the story. Let me see it.

Man- It is rather personal and I must say even I don't understand much of it.

Angelica- The letter. Thank you. Exquisite handwriting. My, my, my. "I am tormented by both the radiant and the luminous"? "The Ravings become ever louder and more persistent"? "You, my only true friend in this purgatorial netherland, must to me at once at my generosity for only your presence could possibly stave off the inevitable madness with a joyous respite." Heavens. Who is this?

Man- A dear friend from school, Roderick Usher.

Angelica- "perhaps your arrival may return Madeline from the brink. Her love for you has never faltered, as I'm sure yours for her."? And who pray is Madeline?

Man- Roderick's younger sister who it seems developed an admiration for me, but I assure you it was not mutual. There was never more than a passing interest.

Angelica- And what did she look like?

Man- Angelica, truth be told I don't remember.

Angelica- Oh surely you at least remember her hair color.

Man- (*without thinking*) Brunette, may I have that letter back

Usher

please?

Angelica- And her eyes?

Man- Blue with gold flecks, I really must pack.

Angelica- Complexion?

Man- *(responses become progressively trance-like)* Purest white, and my train ticket to purchase.

Angelica- What was her favourite dress?

Man- A flowing pale yellow pure silk gown with lace trim. I must go.

Angelica- Her favourite color?

Man- Emerald green. Goodbye Angelica *(snatches letter and leaves)*

Angelica- For someone who meant so little, you certainly remember a good many details. I hope your train derails and you die a horrid, painful, bloody death. Damn.

SCENE 2

The train depot. A corner of the stage is lit. Man has just stepped off the train with his luggage - two rather large bags - and sees a townspeople passing by. The townspeople, played by Usher's Manservant, is a man of few words, very gruff, and not at all hospitable to strangers. The antithesis of the Manservant.

Man- Excuse me, sir? *(dropping his luggage)* Oh heavens.

TP- Pack lighter.

Man- I hope...I beg your pardon?

TP- Pack lighter next time.

Man- Ah, wise advice. Thank you, and I hope to thank you again, I was wondering if you could direct to my destination.

TP- Where?

Man- I am going to visit my friend, we attended the university together, Roderick Usher.

TP- Turn back *(TP begins to leave, Man grabs him by the arm)*

Man- Excuse me?

TP- Turn around and return from where you came. Daft fool.

Man- I am afraid that is not an option, now could you please direct me to his home?

TP- No.

Man- Is this journey to be plagued by negation. Listen, I will keep this brief so that you may understand. I don't know what

Usher

personal argument you have with the Usher family, but Roderick Usher happens to be a friend of mine in need and I will get to his house one way or another. What is the way.

TP- *(long pause, then TP points)* There.

Man- Thank you.

TP- *(as he is walking away)* May you be devoured a thousand times over by the evil that resides within the House.

Man- And a very good evening to you. *(TP grunts a goodbye)*
(during this next section of his monologue the lights begin to come up very dimly on the set)

SCENE 3

As I approached the mansion an overwhelming sense of gloom permeated my soul. Perhaps it was the townspeople I encountered that sparked it, but a flicker of fear grew in my bowels. It was as though I had passed from early afternoon to dusk in a matter of minutes. The trees surrounding the sanctum were completely defoliated and the silence of the area was unnerving. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior of the house and the discoloration of the ages had been grave. The House of Usher had an almost glorious antiquity. No portion of the masonry had fallen. It was a wild inconsistency. The whole was easily better than the sum of its parts. Each individual stone was crumbling away and yet the overall structure remained intact. The wood-work was rotted but none of the usual odor of decomposition disturbed the pure stagnant air. In fact, there were no noticeable odors at all, except for my own sweat and cologne. I crossed the short causeway over the tarn and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. *(Man goes to center where he is met by Manservant, they are all that is fully lit on the stage)*

Scene 4

Manservant- Good evening sir, may I take your coat?

Man- Thank you.

Manservant- I hope the roads were passable.

Man- Yes, it was quite a pleasant walk, very little mud. In fact it appears you could use some rainfall.

Manservant- *(As he speaks he begins wiping the Man down with a*

Usher

damp cloth) I am sure you are exhausted but Master Roderick has been awaiting your arrival and has asked me to conduct you to his studio immediately.

Man- Very well. What are you doing.

Manservant- You are wearing cologne?

Man- Yes.

Manservant- The master cannot tolerate odors. They cause very painful convulsions.

(Manservant starts walking away, lighting comes up where he walks, staying dark until he gets there, finally he arrives at Roderick Usher who has been sitting motionless onstage. Manservant whispers in Usher's ear, Usher awakes with a bolt.)

Rod.- NOOOOOOOOO! *(obviously disoriented as though awakened at the worst point of a nightmare, about to give his manservant a sound thrashing for this disturbance, but then sees Man)* My good friend! How can I possibly thank you for responding so swiftly. God's greatest blessings be upon your soul. My dear friend. *(to Manservant)* Thank you, you may go. *(to Man)* I have been waiting so anxiously for you, to see you fills my empty heart with joy. *(He motions for them to sit and they do for some moments in silence, Man studying Rod. Until the Man finally speaks)*

Man- Roderick is it really you? you look so tremendously different.

Rod.- Yes, my friend it is I.

Man- You look nothing like you did. I honestly doubt whether I am speaking to the same childhood friend I knew so well. Roderick, you look as you did that All-Hallows Eve when we found ourselves lost in the deep woods outside the university. You were terrified then. Do you remember how frightened you were when Rachel came up behind you with that mask? You dropped your lantern and were off into the deepest part of the wood. Why we spent the better part of the evening trying to find you. *(Rod. smiles at the memory, then notices the smile)*

Rod.- Oh, my dear friend this is perhaps the greatest gift you could have given me. I have not smiled in many, many, months. I knew that you could lighten the mood of this evil house.

Man- Yes evil. You know you have the townspeople quite spooked. What have you been doing up here. Raiding graves and raising the dead?

Usher

Rod- I wish it were that simple.

Man- I...beg your pardon? That simple? Rod, why am I here? You said in your letter you were ill but frankly the letter was so cryptic...

Rod.- You bring me to the cause of my malady. It is an age old family evil and I despair that there is no remedy.

Man- Then why am I here?

Rod- *(He has a painful attack of sorts)* Ah! hmmmmmm! *(beat)* It shall soon pass.*(Crosses to the window to close the drapes)*It is a mere nervous affliction.

Man- What do you mean by nervous? Roderick?

Rod.- Hm? Oh, It is a morbid acuteness of the senses. I can endure only the most insipid food; wear garments of silk and cotton only, anything else is sheer pain; the scents of all flowers are oppressive; even faint light is torture; and there are few sounds that do not inspire me to horror. I have a great assortment of stringed instruments which create the only sounds that bring me comfort. *(long pause)* I shall perish, I must perish in this deplorable folly. Thus, thus, and not otherwise, shall I be lost. I dread the events of the future.

Man- We all fear the future to some degree.

Rod- Not the events of the future in themselves, but in their results. I shudder at the thought of any, even the most trivial, incident that may operate on this intolerable agitation of the soul. To be blunt, I am cursed. I have no dislike of danger, except in its absolute effect - terror. In this unnerved - in this pitiable condition - I feel that the period will sooner or later arrive when I must abandon life and reason together, in some struggle with the grim phantasm, FEAR.

Man- Fear, Roderick? What is there to fear?

Rod.- Can you not feel it? Can you not hear it? Are you blind? It is everywhere. I feel it. I hear it. I see it, day and night. I am surrounded by it, as are you, the moment you entered the house it wrapped its tendrils around your very soul. The taint is visible. There is a soul that this house bears, some form or substance that this my family mansion has used to obtain influence over my spirit.

Man- Roderick, you must come to your senses. *(Rod. reacts to the irony of this statement, Man continues not noticing)* This is a

Usher

house, nothing more. It may be the gloomiest dwelling I have ever entered, but nonetheless it is merely a mass of wood, stone and mortar.

Rod.- Have you looked at the physique of the grey walls and turrets? If you look in the tarn at your reflection you will see that you are not the same man you know yourself to be. The disparate parts of the mansion all work together to bring down the morale of your existence.

Man- You are letting it work its magic on you, you can fight it.

Rod.- Listen to yourself, you are already beginning to see it as an entity, not merely a "mass of wood, stone and mortar" as you said.

Man- I refuse to listen to this any more. I have had a very long and wearying journey and . . .

Rod.- Wait, you may not go to bed just yet.

Man- I may not?

Rod.- There is more I must tell you of this house.

Man- Tell me tomorrow.

Rod.- Please, I don't have the strength to argue. Sit for a moment longer. It may mean the difference between your surviving the night or being absorbed by the darkness.

Man- Very well but be quick about it.

Rod.- There is more. A more tangible cause to my torment. My sister, if you recall her, has taken ill.

Man- Madeline is ill! In what way?

Rod.- Ah, you do recall her.

Man- How could I not? Her beauty was legendary.

Rod.- The doctors cannot trace her illness to any earthly reason, leading me to believe the cause emanates from this maleficent mansion. Her decease will leave me, hopeless and frail, the last of the ancient race of the Ushers. She has remained my sole companion for more years than I care to count, and is my last relative on God's unholy Earth. She will leave me as the last of the Ushers, hopeless and frail. *(as he finishes he drops his head in his hands and Madeline enters up left, silently x's stage, Man follows her with his eyes until she exits off right he then looks instantly to Rod. to see his response, but his head remains in his hands, if possible there are tears trickling around his fingers.)*

Man- The doctors don't know what it is? Surely they must have some

Usher

idea.

Rod.- "A settled apathy, a gradual wasting away of the person, frequent although transient affections of a partially cataleptical character." Their usual diagnosis for that which they cannot diagnose.

Man- Roderick, there must be a doctor you haven't called in.

Rod.- You suggest I send for another doctor, spend more of this family's wealth on another person's long journey here so he can tell me "No, no she's just depressed, she will come out of it shortly."? She has been declining to this point for three years. I remember the first signs. She slowly stopped talking. She walked through the halls with an open book, she would turn the pages without looking at them. I encouraged her to take walks outside, which she did, but day by day where e'er she walked the grass and flowers would die, she would lay under trees, and their leaves turned brown as she rested. Eventually the entire estate was dead land and she could not stand to step outside of the sanctuary of this house. She has never succumbed to the disease and taken to bed though, thank the Lord. She fights the spirit of the House with all her soul. When she dies, when she succumbs to the Usher curse, then I will be lost. It is her strength that keeps me as alive as I am.

Man- Perhaps she will recover if she is fighting so hard.

Rod.- Perhaps. Well, I have certainly kept you up long enough. I shall have my servant show you to the guest chamber. If you need anything else simply ring the bell, he is at your disposal as my guest.

Man- Thank you Roderick, and likewise if you need to talk, please come to my room at any hour.

Rod.- Good night. Thank you for risking your life in this endeavor. I pray you at least survive. (*exits. Manservant enters*)

Manservant- Follow me please.

(Man rises and follows Manservant out)

Scene 5

(Man's bedchamber. Manservant enters and leads Man into the room. He looks around, sees his luggage has been opened and sorted. He

Usher

stops for a moment and surveys the room then turns to Manservant who has been standing patiently nearby.)

Man- Thank you. I believe I will be very, ahem, comfortable.

Manservant- If you need anything please don't hesitate to pull the cord. I am used to requests at odd hours from master Roderick. And sir?

Man- Yes?

Manservant- A few suggestions, first for master Roderick's sake, wear no cologne, bathe carefully, walk lightly, speak gently. If you anger him you anger the spirit of the house. Next for yourself. Lock your door, say your prayers with conviction and beware your dreams. They are the doorway to your soul. If you let them plague your waking hours you are as good as gone.

Man- Thank you, I think.

Manservant- Believe me, I know how insane I sound. Perhaps more than anything the master said to you, but by keeping these things in mind and living by them, you may escape. If I can help you I will, but I fear there is little I can do. It's all I can do to keep myself sane. I hope to see you in the morning.

Man- May I ask you one question before you leave?

Manservant- Please.

Man- Does that disorientation ever stop?

Manservant- You mean near Lady Madelines room?

Man- Yes.

Manservant- I wish I could tell you it does, but no. My advice is to take a deep breath two doors away and hold it until two doors past. Then the effects are diminished and you can simply tell yourself to keep walking forward. That at least is what has worked for me.

Man- It's unnerving.

Manservant- To be honest the first time I encountered it I became lost in that short section of hallway for a good hour. It seems I simply staggered out of the affected area and eventually regained my senses. Fortunately for you, I was guiding you your first time through.

Man- Thank you.

Manservant- Will there be anything else just now?

Man- No, you have been most helpful. Thank you.

Usher

Manservant- I will leave you then. Good Night. sir.

Man- It wasn't my imagination. Well, I don't know if that makes me feel better or worse. Good god Roderick what is going on? (*he prepares for bed*) A house that has an active soul? I simply cannot accept that. It isn't possible. Houses are inanimate objects. If he had simply said it was haunted, I may have accepted it. At least it's something that is conceivable, but a house itself? No. It can't be. It's simply not possible to believe in this day and age. However, I must admit there is more here than I have been prepared for in my lifetime.

Our Father which art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come Thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory
Forever and ever.
Amen.

Just my imagination. Just my imagination. God, deliver me from evil . (*He retires to bed. Man rolls back the sheets of the bed and begins to remove shoes, and dons a robe that has been provided. x's to the bookshelf to find a book that interests him. x's back to the bed, lights a candle and begins to read. Lights shift to indicate time from early evening to late night.*)

Scene 6

(*A knock at the door.*)

Man- Come in. (*Rod. enters slowly*) Good evening Roderick, or should I say good 'morrow it must be nearly one o'clock. What are you doing up?

(*Beat*)

Rod.- She has succumbed.

Man- I beg your pardon?

Rod.- She has taken to her bed. After all this time the mansion has had its way and she has succumbed to the prostrating power of

Usher

the destroyer.

Man- Is she dead?

Rod.- Soon.

Man- (*Remains silent, unsure how to respond to this*)

Rod.- You are the only living person in this hell now.

Man- Perhaps she is merely resting. It is quite late.

Rod.- You don't understand yet. You will. You will. She has not been in that bed since childhood. It is the way in which the house works it's way upon her. For me the house ... has other means. I only wish she could have seen you, or you her. It may have given her an ounce more strength. The last ounce she needed. But now, with her gone, my time is not far behind. I am sorry I have brought you into this.

Man- Don't be silly. Even if I had known exactly what was going on...or believed it...I would have come to you.

Rod.- And Madeline.

Man- ...and Madeline.

Rod.- She loves you. She always has. She will until her death. Even after.

Man- She has an admiration for me.

Rod.- No, she loves you passionately. As I love you like a brother.

Man- Rod, that was a childhood crush she had on me, not love.

Rod.- She has never so much as looked at another man. Many have pursued her, none have succeeded. She waited for you.

Man- I had no idea.

Rod.- Ha. So what is the name of the latest conquest?

Man- I beg your pardon.

Rod.- Who are you bedding?

Man- That's a rather crude way to put it.

Rod.- It is an honest and straightforward way to put it.

Man- Blunt at least.

Rod.- Who is she?

Man- Her name is Angelica, and we are speaking of engagement.

Rod.- Of course, how else could you lure them to your web?

Man- Roderick, I resent this line of questioning.

Rod.- I apologize.

Man- I should hope you would.

Rod.- I truly had always hoped one day I could call you brother.

Usher

That you would truly be a member of the House of Usher.

Man- I would hope that you would still call me brother, even without the ties of wedlock. We are the closest of friends. I know blood brothers who are not so close as we.

Rod.- If you only understood. With the House of Usher there must be a true sharing of self, of body, of blood to be brothers. As it is we must remain friends.

Man- I see.

Rod.- I don't mean to seem cold but that is how it is within the House of Usher. Now I must retire. I am sorry to leave on such a somber note.

Man- No, no, quite all right. Please let me know if there is any change in her condition.

Rod.- Yes. I will. Good night.

Scene 7

(Lights up slowly on Rod. and Man in Roderick's studio. There are several stringed instruments about the room including guitars, lutes, violins, and cellos. Rod. is putting the finishing touches on a painting. Man looks about picking up instruments and occasionally plucking the strings. He comes across a cache of Rod.'s paintings.)

Man- These are yours?

Rod.- Yes.

Man- They are stunning.

Rod.- Yes.

Man- There is an utter simplicity to them. A sense of nakedness, a baring of the soul that I can't quite describe. They make me shudder and yet I can't say exactly why.

Rod.- Yes.

Man- May I look at this one that you are working on now?

Rod.- *(after a long pause)* Yes.

Man- *(Man walks to Rod. uncomfortably and looks at the painting over his shoulder)* You certainly have an eye for the abstract.

Rod.- What do you see?

Man- Me? I'm certainly no art critic.

Rod.- Tell me what you see.

Man- Well, the swirling muted colors into no particular center

seem to represent a sort of freedom of movement. That cube in lower right corner though is, what, a tunnel of sorts?

Rod.- A tomb.

Man- A tomb. Yes, of course a tomb. I don't see where the light is emanating from, no torch or candle. Where then?

Rod.- It is life.

Man- Ah, Yes. Well it definitely has a certain ghastly splendor about it Roderick.

Rod.- Thank you for your comments. *(Rod. x's to a guitar)*

Man- Play something for me my friend, for old times sake.

Rod.- *(strums a very dissonant chord)* I do not think you will enjoy my new pieces.

Man- Then play for your pleasure, I will read. *(Rod begins to play for himself as Man reads. The music ranges from very harsh to almost heartbreakingly melodic. Stopping momentarily he begins a new song and speaks this verse, Man listens intently)*

Rod.- In the greenest of our valleys,
By good angels tenanted,
Once a fair and stately palace -
Radiant palace - reared its head.
In the monarch Thought's dominion -
It stood there!
Never seraph spread a pinion
Over fabric half so fair.

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,
On its roof did float and flow
*(This - all this - was in the olden
Time long ago)*
And every gentle air that dallied,
In that sweet day,
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid
A wingéd odour went away.

Wanderers in that happy valley
Through two luminous windows saw
Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well tuned law,
Round about a throne, where sitting

Usher

(Porphyrogene!)

In state his glory well befitting,
The ruler of the realm was seen.

And all with pearl and ruby glowing
Was the fair palace door,
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing
and sparkling evermore,
A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty
Was but to sing,
In voices of surpassing beauty,
The wit and wisdom of their king.

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,
Assailed the monarch's high estate;
(Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow
Shall dawn on him, desolate!)

And, round about his home, the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but a dim-remembered story
Of the old time entombed.

And travellers now within that valley,
Through the red-litten windows, see
Vast forms that move fantastically
To a discordant melody;
While, like a rapid ghastly river,
Through the pale door,
A hideous throng rush out forever,
And laugh - but smile no more.

Rod.- *(Man claps softly, Rod. winces in pain)* Please, stop.

Man- That was stunning. What is the poem entitled?

Rod.- "The Haunted Palace."

Man- A intriguing piece, not to mention your accompaniment. It hasn't the melodiousness I recall from your older pieces, from our youth, but it has a haunting power to it.

Rod.- Thank you.

(Long pause)

Usher

Man- I have been thinking about our conversation last night.

Rod.- Yes?

Man- About brothers. I truly consider you a brother and would like to be thought of one by you.

Rod.- I see.

Man- So what exactly must I do, short of marrying Madeline, to be your brother?

Rod.- This. *(Rod. holds up a dagger which seems to have been ready)*

Man- Oh my.

Rod.- Your blood and mine must flow together.

Man- How much?

Rod.- You must trust me completely.

Man- You know I do.

Rod.- Give me your right hand. *(Rod takes Man's hand and cuts the palm, and does the same to his, then they clasp hands. Rod pulls Man to his feet and they stand facing one another. Rod then pulls Man to him and kisses him passionately.)* Welcome to the House of Usher. Now if you will excuse me I must look in on our sister. *(he exits)*

Man- Oh dear God. What have I done?

SCENE 8

(Man's chambers. He sits bolt upright in bed. After catching his breath for a moment he leaps from the bed and pulls the cord to call the Manservant.)

Man- A dream. It had to have been a dream. I need a stiff drink. Where is he? There is a logical explanation for it. *(a knock at the door)* Who is it.

Manservant- It is I. Did you ring for me?

Man- *(rushing to unbolt and open the door)* Thank god. I need to ask you something.

Manservant- What is it. You're sweating. Tell me your dream.

Man- You warned me. You did. Beware your dreams. Tell me, who am I?

Manservant- Master Roderick's brother.

Man- How did I come here?

Manservant- Master Roderick sent for you when the Lady Madeline took ill.

Usher

Man- What is my name?

Manservant- You are clearly shaken by your dream. Would you like a brandy sir?

Man- I want an answer. What is my name?

Manservant- You will have all of the answers in good time. For now you need to rest.

Man- I've been resting. That is what has gotten me into this condition.

Manservant- I'm sorry master Usher.

Man- Do not call me that! Do you hear me? Never call me that!

Manservant- Forgive me sir. What shall I call you?

Man- Call me by my name.

Manservant- But Usher is...

Man- Get out.

Manservant- May I get you anything?

Man- Get out!

Manservant- Sir?

Man- Get out! GET OUT!

Manservant- Yes sir. Good night sir.

Man- This cannot be happening. This simply cannot be happening. I was not born into the House of Usher. Do you hear me? I was not born into this family.

Mad- (*appearing onstage unnoticed*) Hello brother.

Man- Angelica? Oh thank the Lord.

Mad- Angelica? Who is Angelica?

Man- Mad... Madeline? What are you doing out of bed? What are you doing up?

Mad- Roderick will ask that same question one day.

Man- I beg your pardon?

Mad- Pardon granted. It is time you learned something of the House of Usher. I am to be your tutor.

Man- I see. Another dream.

Mad- We are an ancient line. It has been ages since new blood entered into it. Until now.

Man- Until me.

Mad- The men of the Usher line have been known to spread their seed but never once has it taken root. Many have tried to escape the House but in the end it claims them.

Man- What of the women? Surely they have married outside of the

Usher

family.

Mad- Only rarely and long ago. There is a sharing of blood. The seed of the man enters into the House of Usher, and if he is judged to be worthy he lives and the seed takes root.

Man- And if he is judged to be unworthy?

Mad- He dies. It was centuries ago that new blood entered the House, near the beginning of the line, but now you are my brother. Now there can be a House reborn. You have already passed the test, your blood and ours flows freely in the House of Usher.

Man- What of Roderick? Why can the house not be reborn through you two. Through him? Why did I have to get involved?

Mad- Roderick cannot produce seed.

Man- What?

Mad- You must allow the House to be reborn through me, brother. The lands will prosper. The curse ended. Without you the House will fall.

Man- This is a twisted tale you weave.

Mad- I live it. You have no idea the pressures the spirits of our ancestors torture us with. There are no other Ushers. We are the last. We three.

Man- You two!

Mad- We three. Your blood runs through Roderick's veins as well as mine. *(she holds out her right hand to show him her scar)* You are an Usher. You made the decision. Now you have a duty to fulfill. *(she drops her clothing)* I am your bride. By the laws of the House of Usher, you must maintain the family line.

Man- I...I can't.

Mad- If you find me unattractive, think of Angelica.

Man- No, I cannot.

Mad- The pressure is unbearable. The House will begin to pressure you as well. Save yourself the pain.

Man- Madeline, *(she kisses him gently)* What have I done.

Mad- Come brother, come lay with me. Let my fertile soil take your seed. It will grow, and you shall be free.

Man- Until that child needs a partner.

Mad- With luck it will be a girl. You can father an entire line of Ushers. You will be Noah and the world will be reborn.

Man- Dear God! I will have no part of this sickening...

Mad- I grow weary. Come to me. It will be beautiful. Relax.

Usher

Relax. *(She takes him to the bed. Lights fade as Roderick enters the room in silence)*

SCENE 9

(Man's chambers. He and Roderick are sitting up, Roderick finishes playing a song on the guitar)

Man- Marvelous as always. We spent many hours held rapt by your music at the collegium. Have you ever heard from anyone else from those happy days?

Rod- Your memories differ from mine Brother.

Man- You jest.

Rod- I do not. While you remember happy days. I remember sorrow. While you remember sitting rapt, I remember boredom. I seem to recall people sitting and offering empty compliments to my monotonous musical ramblings. They were shallow people we associated ourselves with in those days. Now it is you and I alone. As brothers should be.

Man- You didn't seem to find Rachel shallow back then.

Rod- Rachel.

Man- Rachel. You spent many an hour wooing that one.

Rod- You mean I wasted many hours. She was a trollop.

Man- Roderick. Come now. She was a beautiful girl, of remarkable manners if I recall. You were hopelessly in love with her and desperate to bring her home to meet your family. What ever happened?

Rod- You know as well as I.

Man- Do I?

Rod- Madeline told you.

Man- I...

Rod- The men of Usher are resigned to a life with the women of Usher.

Man- But...

Rod- I mentioned Rachel to father once. His advice was to have my way with her and send her away. He had his concubines. As you will.

Man- Roderick. I have left my business affairs unattended far to long. I must leave. *(a rumbling in the house)*

Rod- You cannot. You must stay here. Your child needs a father,

Usher

and I am no fitting father. You will not leave and there is an end to it.

Man- Angelica is certainly...

Rod.- No.

Man- Very well, what shall we talk about? We have reminisced about our entire childhood, we have brought each other up to date about our private lives, you have explained to me that your mansion is killing you and Madeline, and that I am now to remain incarcerated in the House of Usher. What shall we talk about. Frankly I think we have exhausted every topic of conversation.

(beat) Shall I leave?

Rod.- No! You must stay. If nothing else just sit and be a living presence.

(Long pause)

Man.- Oh, this is thrilling. Let us at least play a game of some sort.

Rod.- What?

Man- A game. Let us play Twenty-Questions. Think of something and I shall try to guess what it is. *(Rod. looks at Man quizzically)* Think of something. Do you have it?

Rod.- Yes.

Man- Now I shall try and guess what it could be. Is it animal, vegetable or mineral.

Rod.- All of those and more.

Man- That's impossible.

Rod.- That isn't a question.

Man- Very well. Is it a sentient thing?

Rod.- Of course.

Man- Of course? You say that as if it were a given.

Rod.- It is.

Man- Don't be ridiculous, it rules out any plants and statues or buildings except of course if you believe your stories about *this* house.

Rod.- That is it.

Man- This house? You really do believe that it is sentient.

Rod.- All things are in some way. The smallest pebble has a soul and the power that any human being has, it is merely channeled differently. Have you never seen the strength that a tree has? The roots of a tree can knock down a wall. Different minerals

Usher

have different uses and some have power. Artists have the power to reveal the image, the soul of a stone. Artists can also see into the soul of a plant. Each thing that exists has a certain radiance, a glow that cannot be extinguished. But humans, their glows can be extinguished quite easily. There are pebbles that have been alive since the beginning of time, and yet we humans, we are mortal and die so easily, so very easily.

Man- And so this is why you believe this mansion is alive?

Rod.- This mansion in particular. The pebbles and stones that surround the mansion have been arranging themselves for ages, all leading up to the day when they may bring about the fall of the house of Usher. The fungi that overspreads the stones, and the decayed trees which stand around, above all in the long endurance of the arrangement, and its reduplication in the still waters of the tarn all have a life force and a will greater than yours mine. The evidence of the sentience can be seen in the gradual yet certain condensation of an atmosphere of their own about the waters and the walls. The result is discoverable in that silent, yet importunate and terrible influence which for centuries has molded the destinies of my family. All this makes me the man you see before you now. It is what I am.

(Rod goes back to his guitar and the lights fade to him playing, simultaneously recorded music of the same style takes its place.)

Scene 10

(Dining room, a long table separates Roderick and Man. Long pause as Man eats in silence and Rod. sits with his food untouched until Rod. breaks silence-)

Rod.- The Lady Madeline is no more.

Man- What?

Rod- Madeline has died and taken with her the last hope of the House of Usher.

Man- Oh my God. Oh dear God. When did this happen.

Rod.- I intend to preserve her corpse in the cellar vault for a fortnight.

Man- Why?

Rod.- *(looks harshly at Man)*

Man- It was my child Roderick.

Rod- It was the child of the House of Usher. You as an individual hold no ownership. I intend to lay her in the cellar vault and will need your assistance.

Man- I'm afraid I don't understand.

Rod.- I have been led to this resolution by consideration of the particular malady, the natural inquisitiveness of the medical world, they have made very obtrusive and eager inquiries. And quite frankly the family burial-ground is very remote and exposed. Is that a sufficient explanation?

Man- Entirely.

Rod.- I will need your help. *(Beat)* I am asking your help.
(Beat) Will you help me?

Man- Yes, I will.

Rod.- Thank you. We will do it tonight.

Man- Tonight! When?

Rod.- Is immediately following dinner all right?

Man- Yes, yes I suppose.

Rod.- Good. *(Rings bell, Manservant enters and clears table before Man is done eating.)*

Man- Roderick!

Rod.- *(getting up and leading off)* Come along.

Man- Roderick, come back here this instant. Servant bring me my plate! Roderick, I will not do this on an empty stomach.
Roderick! Damn. *(He exits following Rod.)*

Scene 11

(Scene has shifted to the vault. The scene remains empty momentarily. Rod. and Man enter carrying a hand made wooden coffin. They set it on the ground, Rod. pulls out a large key to open the large metal door. He turns the key with some effort. Returns the key to his pocket and pulls on the door, unable to open it. Man joins Rod. to help. They open the door to a loud grating sound and a flurry of sparks and dust.)

Man- How deep are we?

Rod.- Very deep.

Man- It's cold down here

Rod.- We are immediately below the guest chambers.

Man- My room? *(Rod nods "yes", Man looks uncomfortably upward and*

shivers)

(They remove the lid of the coffin, both look upon the deceased. Man looks at Rod momentarily then back at Madeline, he notices a striking similarity)

Man- She was beautiful. Amazing.

Rod.- What?

Man- Even in death her complexion has a fresh, youthful glow. She was always beautiful.

Rod.- Yes.

Man- She looks so alive.

Rod.- She was my twin. Did you know that? *(Man shakes head "no")* She was. We always knew what the other was thinking. Now she is gone and my mind and soul are empty. She is half of what I was, and I was half of what she is. Come let us close the lid. I felt all that she felt, and she all that I felt. Occasionally we shared experiences. *(It occurs to man that he is speaking of his encounter with Madeline. They slowly, meticulously screw the lid on in silence. Carry it into the vault, come out, close the door with equal difficulty, but do NOT lock it. They exit.)*

Scene 11

(Man's Chambers, Man sit's writing a letter)

Man- Dearest Angelica. I hope this letter arrives safely. I don't know how much longer I will be held here. Know that I think of you and long to hold you in my arms again. You have no idea. The letter from Roderick which you read held only a fraction of the insanity I have encountered here. I hope to return soon. I love you. All my love, *(A knock at the door. Man quickly folds letter and seals it)* One moment. *(hides it under other papers. Rises and opens door)*

Manservant- I hope I haven't disturbed you Master Usher.

Man- *(No longer reacts to being called Usher)* No, not at all. I am actually rather pleased to have the company.

Manservant- I am sorry sir. I am not here to offer my company. I am here to tender my resignation.

Man- I see. May I ask why?

Manservant- This mansion does not, forgive me, this is as odd to say as it is, I'm sure, odd to hear, this mansion no longer likes

Usher

me.

Man- Not odd at all. I too have come to an acceptance of this mansion as an entity.

Manservant- Then I hope I can look to you for a good recommendation?

Man- By all means. If you would do this one last service for me?

Manservant- I will try.

Man- Would you please see that this correspondence sees its way safely to London, England. To one Angelica Hughes.

Manservant- That I will sir.

Man- Thank you. Have you spoken to Roderick about your resignation then?

Manservant- I had hoped you would be so kind as to pass my regrets on to him and tell him of my departure. To be frank I cannot be in his presence but I feel queasy.

Man- Consider it done.

Manservant- Thank you Master Usher. You are an honorable man. I hope that you are able to escape with your life.

Man- I hope the same to you.

Scene 12

(Roderick sits on a chair center in the same place as Man was at the top of the show in a mildly green light, man stands to the left of him a separate pool of pink or amber light, while he speaks He changes to his bedclothes.)

Man- And now, some days of bitter grieving having elapsed, an observable change came over the features of the mental disorder of my friend. My brother. His ordinary manner had vanished. His ordinary occupations were neglected or forgotten. The halls silent of his music. He roamed from chamber to chamber with hurried, unequal, and objectless step. The pallor of his countenance had assumed, if possible, a more ghastly hue - but the luminousness of his eye had utterly gone out. The once occasional huskiness of his tone was heard no more; and a tremulous quaver, as if of extreme terror, habitually characterized his utterance. There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was labouring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage. At times again I was

Usher

obliged to resolve all into the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness, for I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound. It was no wonder that his condition terrified - that it infected me. I felt it creeping upon me, by slow yet certain degrees, the wild influences of his own fantastic yet impressive superstitions

(Lights fade)

Scene 13

(Man is alone in his chambers, he is lying in his bed with his eyes wide open. He throws off covers and sits bolt upright. He x's to the sitting area, there is a lightning flash and thunder clap a few moments later, a storm is approaching. X's back to the bed and tries to sort out the mess. He sits in frustration, he begins to appear more and more nervous. He throws himself back on the pillows. He hears something, slowly rises, x's to doors UC. X's back to bed and begins to put on his clothes, he isn't going to get any more sleep tonight. While he is dressing Rod. appears with a lantern from the side door unnoticed. He steps in. Man feels a presence)

Man- Roderick. You nearly scared me to death. Actually tonight your presence is a relief.

(Rod stands motionless, Man notices a look of restrained hysteria on his face)

Man- Roderick? What is wrong?

Rod- *(after a long pause then suddenly)* And you have not seen it? You have not then seen it? - but stay! you shall. *(He sets down his lamp, goes to the front of the stage and flings open an imaginary shutter. Man is affected by the heavy wind and cold air, Rod is not.)*

Man- *(Man leads Rod from window to a seat)* You must not - you shall not behold this! These apparitions, which bewilder you, are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon - or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn. *(Rod. sits nearly motionless except for his uncontrolled trembling)* Let us close this casement; - the air is chilling and dangerous to your frame. *(x's to finish dressing, grabs a covering from the bed and puts it over Rod.'s frame.)* Well, what shall we do on this

saturnine eve? (*glances around room and sees bookcase*) I will read for you. What shall I read? Roderick? Here's one, 'Mad Trist' of Sir Launcelot Canning. One of your favourite romances no doubt. I will read and you shall listen, and so shall we pass this terrible night together. (*Roderick does not respond, he merely sits terrified and motionless and listening and occasionally darting his eyes quickly as if he heard something.*)

"Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart, and who now mighty withal, on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had just drunken, waited no longer to hold parlay with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and maliceful turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, (*Here the rain sound effects should increase, sound effects follow the text throughout accordingly*) And fearing the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and with blows, made quickly the room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling herewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarumed and reverberated throughout the forest. (*at the completion of the sentence there is a very loud sound as though a bent nail were being pulled through a very tight piece of wood. Man finally hears the sound and starts, thinks nothing of it and returns to the book, Rod. becomes more and more agitated. It is the sound of Mad. breaking out of her coffin.*) But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the maliceful hermit; but in the stead thereof, a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanor, and of a fiery tongue, which sate in guard before a palace of gold, with a floor of silver; and upon the wall there hung a shield of shining brass with this legend written -

Who entereth herein, a conqueror hath bin;
Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win;

And Ethelred uplifted his mace, and struck upon the head of the dragon, which fell before him, and gave up his pesty breath, with a shriek so horrid and harsh, and withal so piercing, that Ethelred had fain to close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never before heard (*and as we hear a muffled screaming Rod. brings his hands up to his*

Usher

ears and begins mumbling inaudibly and rocking side to side, Man pauses abruptly. This time he knows he heard it. Lightning flash, thunder follows harder upon. Man returns to the narrative, And now, the champion, having escaped from the terrible fury of the dragon, bethinking himself of the brazen shield, and of the breaking up of the enchantment which was upon it, removed the carcass from out of the way before him, and approached valorously over the silver pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming but fell down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty great and terrible ringing sound. (now a sound of metal scraping against stone, long and reverberating. Man leaps to his feet; Rod. makes no change in his rocking. Man places his hand upon Rod.'s shoulder, Rod shudders, smiles slightly and looks up at Man.)

Rod.- Not hear it? - yes, I hear it, and have heard it. Long - long - many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it - yet dared not -

Man- Calm yourself Roderick, it is probably just the storm (*but the look on his face betrays his lie*)

Rod.- oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! I dared not - I *dared* not speak! WE HAVE PUT HER LIVING IN THE TOMB!

Man- How could you possibly have heard . . .

Rod.- Said I not that my senses were acute? I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movements in the hollow coffin. I heard them - many, many days ago - yet I dared not - I *dared not speak!* And now - tonight - Ethelred! (*He begins to laugh*) The breaking of the hermit's door, and the death cry of the dragon, and the clangor of the shield! Say, rather, the rending of her coffin, and the grating of the iron hinges of her prison, and her struggles within the coppered archway of the vault! (*He grabs the Man's arm and pulls him to him*) Oh whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? I have heard her footstep on the stair. Have I not heard her footstep on the stair?

Man- No, Roderick, it is the branches on the roof.

Rod.- Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart?

Man- No, Roderick, it is only the wind.

Rod.- (*Rod springs to his feet and points to the door*) MADMAN!

Usher

MADMAN! I TELL YOU THAT SHE NOW STANDS WITHOUT THE DOOR! (*at the completion of his line there is a lightning flash, thunder clap and the doors fly open to reveal Madeline simultaneously. Madeline is wrapped like a mummy, with a shroud over her head. Her fingers and much of the rest of her are covered in blood, indicating that she suffered a great deal of bitter struggle. She stands there motionless for a moment. Finally a low moan escapes her throat, raising to a death cry as she rushes in and flings herself upon her brother. A coat of arms over the door drops to the ground and the entire mansion begins to shake. Man rushes out as we see the House of Usher crumble before us. When it is over Man weaves his way through the rubble to a small pool of light*)

Man- As I watched in amazement at the mass of wood, stone and mortar tumble into the tarn, I remembered something that Roderick had said to me once. "All things have sentient life, guided by the powers of nature, and the powers of nature never have liked the Ushers much." He had chuckled when he said it, but indeed the powers of the mansion ultimately had their way with Roderick, Madeline, in fact the entire Usher line. In actuality the House of Usher brought about the final fall of the House of Usher. All but me. All but me. ALL BUT ME!

The End