

## **Peter Hammill**

### **"Act One"**

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THE CHORUS The chorus has often an unenviable role to play,  
often a distasteful task to perform;  
summoned as witness to uncounted crime,  
she's the silent accomplice of all,  
then she turns and comments on the action.  
She hears... observes, but must never betray her emotions  
She moves, unseen, the characters oblivion of her presence;  
a simple stage device.  
She cannot hide, cannot take sides.  
It his curse that she must stay and comment on the action...  
A young man named Montresor lately received an urgent  
letter from a dear friend of childhood,  
Roderick Usher by name,  
In which his friend begged him to come  
with all speed to the family seat.  
So, during the whole of a dull, dark and soundless day  
in the autumn of the year,  
when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens,  
he had been passing through  
a singularly dreary tract of country  
'till he found himself,  
as the shades of night drew on,  
within view of the melancholy house of Usher  
MONTRESOR: That must be the house.  
There is no other within many miles.  
But surely not... It's just an empty shell,  
devoid of life;  
a sterile outcrop of stone amid the mire.  
But there can be no doubt, this is the house!  
And yet it looks so dark, so forbidding , so dead.  
That great crumbling facade,  
windows just like vacant eyes  
that peer upon the stagnant,  
glistening blackness of the lake...  
I have never seen anything like it!  
The gloom, the rotting dankness of the place...  
It must be my imagination,

the darkness and the cold...  
Yet still, far beneath the plane of thought  
and quite against my will,  
my heart begins to tremble  
in mad anticipation of the House  
and I am forced to recognise  
a consciousness of fear;  
a cold and senseless fear,  
nameless, formless, chilling to the bone...  
No, it's just the leaden air that makes me  
forget myself, the weather and the dusk.  
This must be all that sets my teeth on edge  
and the hairs at the nape of my neck to attention.  
And what of his sister?  
This does not speak of her  
but I understand she, too, lives with him  
here in the House of Usher,  
home of the family for five hundred years or more.  
It's a strange place, a strange house,  
an even stranger clan;  
all either saints or mad,  
not an ordinary man among them;  
geniuses all...  
But, all time-honoured as it is,  
the Usher race has put forth no enduring branch.  
And so from sire to son, from sire to son  
the patrimony and the name have been passed.  
Through all their ancestry no cousins,  
aunts of bastards  
disturb the singular symmetry  
of the family tree.  
Well then, so I am here; I have come;  
and it is too late, too dark to run.  
But what a chilling sight,  
this palace crouching in the night...  
Ah, there! A light!  
I am awaited; I am expected;  
I shall not disappoint my friend.  
End of Act One

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