

It was late autumn. The weather was wet and the wind had blown all the leaves from the trees. I was riding my horse across the wet, empty land. I was traveling alone. I was going toward a dark and strange house-the House of Usher.

Why had I come to this lonely place? I knew Roderick Usher-the owner of the house. We were old friends, but we had not met for many years. A few weeks ago, I had received a letter from Roderick.

*I am ill-very ill. Please come and visit me. I am going mad! I want your help. We have been friends since we were boys. Please come!*

*Roderick Usher*

I had been riding all day and it was now late. The pale sun was low in the sky when I arrived at the House of Usher.

A large lake of black water surrounded the house. I stopped by the lake and looked at the house. Roderick Usher's house was a large black building. Its many windows were like empty eyes. Suddenly, I felt cold...and a little afraid.

In front of me, a narrow road went across a bridge toward the house. I walked my horse along the narrow road until I reached the walls of the house.

I knocked on the front door and a servant opened it. He took my horse to a stable. Then he led me inside the house.

We climbed many stairs to his master's room. Lamps burned along the walls, but they gave little light. The long corridors and stairways were full of dark shadows.

The servant opened a big, wooden door and I looked inside a large room.

At first, I did not recognise the man who was lying on a sofa. Then I saw that it was Roderick Usher. My friend had changed! He looked pale and ill. We were the same age, but he looked much older than me. His hair was silver-gray, and as soft as the web of a spider. I thought that Roderick was asleep because his eyes were closed. But as I entered the room, he sat up. Then he opened his eyes. They shone strangely in the weak light from the lamps.

I walked toward him.

"Welcome, my oldest and dearest friend!" he said.

But he did not shake my hand or come near me.

"Please excuse me," he said. "I don't wish to be rude. But I'm ill. I can't touch another man's hand. Please sit down. Rest a moment. A servant will take you to your room very soon. Then we shall have dinner and talk."

"I'm glad that you have come," he went on. "I have no one to talk to. My sister lives with me, but she is sick."

At that moment, a woman walked into the room. She was very pale and her eyes shone strangely. She wore a black dress with a high collar. The collar covered her long neck. She did not look toward me and she did not speak.

Roderick Usher spoke to her.

"Madeline," he said. "Madeline...this is my old friend..."

Madeline did not reply. She crossed the room slowly. Then she turned and went through a doorway. Madeline left the room as silently as she had entered it.

Roderick Usher put his hands over his face.

"My sister has a strange illness. She is neither awake nor asleep. I fear that she'll not live long."

He rang a bell and a servant took me to my room. I lay on the bed and rested for an hour before dinner. I thought about Roderick and his sister. They were both behaving strangely. I did not feel comfortable in the house. But I could not leave immediately.

I felt more comfortable at dinner. Roderick asked me about my life. He looked happier. I forgot about his sister and the strange old house.

Roderick Usher looked after me well for several days. We ate and drank and talked. We read books in the library. I painted pictures. Roderick played the guitar.

I did not see Madeline again. And I did not ask about her. Roderick had been alone for too long. He talked about happier days. We talked about the time when we were boys. But sometimes Roderick suddenly stopped talking. He stared in front of him. Then he turned his head to the left, then to the right. Was he listening to something? There was a look of sadness and fear on his face. I, too, felt afraid at these times.

I did not like this House of Usher. But I had come a long way to visit Roderick. I could not leave my friend. He wanted me to stay with him.

As the days passed, Roderick became more quiet and sad. One evening, he suddenly came into my room.

"Madeline is dead," he said.

I was shocked. I did not know what to say. I did not know what to do.

"I need your help," said Roderick Usher. "Madeline had been very ill. She was going to die. I knew this. But she mustn't be buried near a church. She'll lie in this house.

I'll keep her body in a room under the house. Will you help me?"

My friend's words frightened me. But I did not ask any questions. I do not know why.

We carried Madeline's body down many steps to a room under the house. No one had been in the room for many years. There were soft, gray spiders' webs hanging from the ceiling. The air was cold and damp. There were several lamps burning on the walls. But they gave little light.

A wooden coffin was in the center of the room. I helped Roderick to put his sister's body in the coffin. She wore a white dress. Her face was as white as her dress.

Roderick looked at his sister for a long time. "Madeline will rest here," he said sadly.

His face was pale and I saw the bones of his skull beneath the skin. He had not eaten for several days.

Madeline was not breathing and her heart was not beating. But Madeline's body was not cold. Then I knew, and I was afraid! She was dead, but she was not dead!

Roderick fastened the lid on the coffin. Then he led me out of the room.

"No one will ever come here again," he said. "Madeline is resting now. No one will wake her."

But, from that moment, Roderick Usher never rested. He did not sleep. How long can a man live without sleep? He walked from room to room. He stared in front of him. He turned his head to the left, then to the right. Was he listening to something? Was Roderick Usher mad?

I, too, could not sleep. I lay on my bed and thought about the strange House of Usher. Suddenly, my bedroom door opened and Roderick came into the room. He was holding a lamp. His eyes were bright and wild.

"Did you hear it?" he said. "Did you see it?"

"Hear what?" I asked. "See what?"

"You will understand soon," he said.

He pulled back the curtains and opened the window. It was dark outside and there was a storm. The wind was blowing and rain was falling. Then a flash of lightning lit the sky.

A few seconds later, there was a crash of thunder. The wind blew into the room. It screamed as it blew around the room. The door crashed shut and the flame in the lamp went

out. Suddenly there was a loud noise and the floor of the room moved.

"I can hear the softest sounds," Roderick said. "I can hear everything. I can hear her!"

"Who can you hear?" I asked loudly. I covered my face because the wind was blowing into my eyes.

"Madeline!" Roderick replied. "I can hear her! She's coming here! She has opened her coffin. She's coming up the stairs. She's coming for me!"

The strong wind blew around the room again. It blew the door of the room open. Outside, lightning flashed again and again.

Suddenly I saw Madeline Usher. She was standing in the doorway. She was wearing the white dress. But it was no longer white. Her dress was covered in blood.

Madeline had broken out of her coffin! She had torn her hands and her face. There was blood on her fingers, her face and her dress.

Madeline's eyes were open but she saw nothing. She stared in front of her. She held her hands out toward her brother.

Slowly, Roderick went toward her. And she closed her blood-red arms around his body. Roderick gave a terrible scream and fell to the floor. Madeline fell with him. Their bodies lay on the floor and they did not move. They were both dead.

I ran from the terrible House of Usher. I ran across the narrow bridge. When I reached the other side of the lake, I turned around.

I looked back at the house. The wind was still blowing around the house. It made the sound of a wild animal. And I could see the wind! It was black and terrible! Lightning flashed in the sky and thunder crashed.

Then a bright flash of lightning hit the house and the walls broke. Slowly, the house started to fall. With a great roar, the house fell into the lake. Then the water of the lake covered the House of Usher, and there was silence.