

Peter Hammill, Act Five

CHORUS Late that evening the Lady Madeline
again succumbed to the power
of her dark afflictions.
Her brother and her friend sat by her
and Montresor, although familiar with many
of the gross and wonderful
phenomena of morbid flesh
marvelled at the depth and completeness of her coma.
Life so exactly mirroring death
that only the merest of involuntary pulses
betrayed the presence of a Spirit hiding within.
In the cold hours before dawn they broke their vigil
and Montresor retired to a restless sleep
only to be woken as a grey light spread from the east
across the leaden tarn.

(Usher and the Herbalist enter)

USHER Montresor,
she is dead.

She is dead,
I sat by her,
I watched her;
I am alone.

USHER, That she should die so,
MONTRESOR, that she should die so young,
HERBALIST fate is cruel, fate is hard.

Why must innocence be punished?
Need a flower fall so fast?

Why must innocence be punished?
Was her soul too good to last?

Now the punishment is finished
And the fever... the fever called 'Living'...
that fever's conquered at last.

USHER Will you do something for me?

MONTRESOR With all my heart

USHER I wish my sister to be entombed
in one of the vaults beneath the House.

The family burial ground is remote,
to lead her cortege there would
require a strength of will I do not command.
Will you help me bear her?

MONTRESOR Of course, of course I will...

USHER Come then, before I fully realise my loss.
End of Act Five