

# Peter Hammill, Act Three

(Immediately afterwards, Madeline Usher enters, in a trance)

MADELINE Carriages at seven  
I shall wear the flower he gave me  
It's so cold here  
deep beneath the lapping water...  
The water  
The water  
My love  
Head against his shoulder,  
'cross the lawn I hear the music...  
Silent blackness,  
In the lake I'm sinking slowly...  
Oh, how lovely,  
nothing could be more becoming...  
Underwater,  
floating in the icy darkness...  
Count the candles  
'May I dance with you this evening?'...  
On the surface  
Swans are feeding high above me...  
Hold him tightly  
round and round the floor we're spinning  
Breathing water  
I am drowning  
Watch the sun rise  
driving home across the meadows...  
All is darkness  
I can feel myself dissolving  
The water  
The water  
The darkness  
The darkness  
My love  
Head against his shoulder  
Floating in the icy darkness  
Hold him tightly  
I can feel myself dissolving  
Oh how lovely  
Deep beneath the lapping water  
Count the candles  
I am drowning I am drowning  
Count the candles  
Floating in the icy darkness  
Hold him tightly  
I can feel myself dissolving  
Oh how lovely  
Deep beneath the lapping water  
Count the candles  
I am drowning  
Oh how lovely  
I am drowning I am drowning  
Oh how lovely  
Oh how lovely  
Oh how lovely  
Oh how lovely  
MONTRESOR Stop, Madeline, look at me!  
My god, man, what is wrong with her?  
USHER Yes, it's right you should know,  
She is dying!  
I have not dared to speak of it.  
A chronic catalepsy had drained her of her youth.  
I have watched her waste away and could do nothing!  
A period of health is followed by sudden coma,  
death-like sleep.  
It can last a full day or more,

no movement, no colour, no flame in the cheeks.  
MONTRESOR What, then of these dreaming visions?

USHER The recovery, ah, this is even worse!

She rises and moves about the house  
but her mind still sleeps...

You see her now a mindless ghost:

Beautiful, dead eyes stare in sleep, unrecognising.

She speaks in dreams, sees only dreams,  
she haunts the house in hideous sleepwalking  
and may not be restrained, for like some automaton  
she tirelessly thrusts and tears herself  
against her fetters,  
heedless of injury.

And so she walks and then she wakes,  
remembering nothing, so weak that she can  
barely build up strength before she is struck down again.

Month after month each attack worse than the last.

Death will not wait long.

Her final days are flickering past.

Dear God,

helpless,

helpless!

MONTRESOR But what is the word from her doctors?

Do they hold out no hope, nor offer any treatment?

USHER MONTRESOR CHORUS

They do not understand  
her case

and cannot treat a case

they do not understand

He does not understand

You're dealing with a case

Who is her doctor,

a specialist I trust?

Yes indeed, one of

the foremost rank

You're dealing

with a case

Then he will help her,

Montresor oh, yes,

no more of this he surely must You do not understand  
now

no more talk He does not

of cures, please, understand

Or of doctor.

I bless you concern,

but know that she

will walk no more tonight.

When she wakes soon

she will need my care.

I must be there, so,

dear friend, goodnight.

(Usher exits with Madeline, leaving Montresor alone. The Herbalist enters)

THE HERBALIST Good evening, sir.

And you must be the friend of Mister Usher.

I'm so pleased to meet you, sir,

but have little time to spare

for knowledge such as mine is wanted everywhere.

In poor dwellings, yes, but some as great as Usher's.

My card...

MONTRESOR 'J. Ducrow, Esq. Herbalist,

Doctor of Natural Medicine'...

HERBALIST At your service, and it could be, sir,

that you have need of my panaceas now...

I have Mandrake juice that will slake any fever,

cures to convince you though you be an unbeliever now...

Laugh - would you? - at these seeds of mine.  
You question the cure's causes,  
but Logic and Reason do not answer,  
and Nature runs her courses.  
I have purest poppy for the soundest of sleeps;  
a pure cake of hemp plant  
that's a warranted surcease of worldly sorrow.  
Lying words will be believed  
if perfumed by this pastil,  
or my elixir's guaranteed  
to bend the will of fairest womankind.  
Scheme, would you, for a worldly gain?  
Lust after a frigid virgin?  
My herbs can grant your secret cravings  
and my price is modest!  
MONTRESOR No! No!  
HERBALIST And my price is modest...  
MONTRESOR No, thank you! No!  
HERBALIST Oh it's very modest...  
MONTRESOR No, no thank you!  
No!  
No thank you,  
No!  
HERBALIST Perhaps a poultice of Toadbane  
for weakness of the manly parts,  
caused by too much wine or age,  
perhaps by over-frequent natural indulgence...  
Applied with skill, it will  
revive the fleshy passions of a corpse...  
...of a corpse  
MONTRESOR I said no  
I meant no!  
HERBALIST Well then, Good-day...  
MONTRESOR So that is Usher's idea of a doctor!  
That wretched mountebank can't help them.  
I confront madness face to face!  
And whatever it's cause, it lies within this place  
I breathe an atmosphere of sorrow;  
an alien despair makes my courage fail,  
like the collapse of an opium vision,  
the hideous dropping of the veil  
CHORUS Tormented by a thousand doubts and fancies,  
he will not sleep tonight.  
Chilled by the gloom of his surroundings,  
mortal, half-dead mortar.  
MONTRESOR CHORUS

He will not sleep!  
I see simple solutions  
He will not sleep!  
State them laud and clear,  
but the echoes of the House He will not sleep!  
shout 'Unreason!'  
The one thing that I fear.  
The evil that is done  
cannot be undone.  
The evil that will come  
cannot be prevented.  
The evil that is done  
Yet somehow I must help  
these two tormented souls,  
cannot be undone.  
for if I cannot, who will?  
The evil that will come  
These are the friends

I've loved so dearly...  
cannot be prevented  
Leave!  
No! What a monstrous thought!  
Depart!  
How could I even think of it!  
Go!  
Abandon those who have need of me!  
Leave!  
Oh, but what a temptation,  
Depart!  
to run like a thief in the night,  
Go!  
And yet now I cannot  
because it is too late    Before it is too late,  
I feel myself bound up in    before you are bound up in  
the web of fear and pain,    the web of fear and pain,  
the evil that surrounds me.    the evil that surrounds you.  
It cannot be undone.  
It cannot be undone.  
The evil that will come  
cannot be prevented.  
End of Act Three