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## The Fall of the House of Usher

Continued from last issue

my clothes with haste, for I felt that I should sleep no more during the night, and endeavored to arouse myself from the pitiable condition into which I had fallen by pacing rapidly to and fro through the apartment.

I had taken but few turns in this manner when a light step on an adjoining staircase arrested my attention. I presently recognized it as that of Usher. In an instant afterward he rapped with a gentle touch at my door and entered, bearing a lamp. His countenance was, as usual, cadaverously wan; but, moreover, there was a species of mad hilarity in his eyes, an evidently restrained hysteria in his whole demeanor. His air appalled me, but anything was preferable to the solitude which I had so long endured.

"And you have not seen it?" he said abruptly after having stared about him for some moments in silence—"you have not then seen it? But stay! You shall." Thus speaking and having carefully shaded his lamp, he hurried to one of the casements and threw it freely open to the storm.

The impetuous fury of the entering gust nearly lifted us from our feet. It was, indeed, a tempestuous yet sternly beautiful night, and one wildly singular in its terror and its beauty. A whirlwind had apparently collected its force in our vicinity, for there were frequent and violent alterations in the direction of the wind, and the exceeding density of the clouds (which hung so low as to press upon the turrets of the house) did not prevent our perceiving the lifelike velocity with which they flew careering from all points against each other, without passing away into the distance. I say that even their exceeding density did not prevent our perceiving this. Yet we had no glimpse of the moon or stars nor was there any flashing forth of the lightning. But the under surfaces of the huge masses of agitated vapor, as well as all terrestrial objects immediately around us, were glowing in the unnatural light of a faintly luminous and distinctly visible gaseous exhalation which enshrouded the mansion.

"You must not—you shall not behold this!" said I shudderingly to Usher as I led him, with a gentle violence, from the window to a seat. "These appearances 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. Let us close this casement. The air is chilling and dangerous to your frame. Here is one of your favorite romances. I will read, and you shall listen, and so we will pass away this terrible night together."

The antique volume which I had taken up was the "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning, but I had called it a favorite of Usher's more in sad jest than in earnest, for, in truth, there is little in its unorthodox and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual idealism of my friend. It was, however, the only book immediately at hand.

I had arrived at that well known portion of the story where Ethelred, the hero of the Trist, having sought in vain for peaceable admission into the dwelling of the hermit, proceeds to make good an entrance by force. Here, it will be remembered, the words of the narrative run thus:

"And Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart and who was now mighty withal on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to parley with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and malicious turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright and with blows made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand, and now, pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked and ripped and tore all asunder that the

noise of the dry and hollow sounding wood alarmed and reverberated throughout the forest."

At the termination of this sentence I started, and for a moment paused, for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me) that from some very remote portion of the mansion there came indistinctly to my ears what might have been in its exact similarity of character, the echo of a stifled and dull one certainly of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described. I continued the story:

"But the good champion Ethelred, now entering within the door, was sore enraged and amazed to perceive no signal of the malicious hermit; but, in the stead thereof, a dragon of a scaly and prodigious demeanor, and of a fiery tongue, which sat 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 enwritten:

Who entereth herein a conqueror hath he;  
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."

Here again I paused abruptly, and now with a feeling of wild amazement, for there could be no doubt whatever that in this instance I did actually hear, although from what direction it proceeded I found it impossible to say, a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted and most unusual screaming or grating sound—the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon's unnatural shriek.

Oppressed, as I certainly was, upon the occurrence of this second and most extraordinary coincidence by a thousand conflicting sensations, in which wonder and extreme terror were predominant, I still retained sufficient presence of mind to avoid exciting by any observation the sensitive nervousness of my companion. I was by no means certain that he had noticed the sounds in question, although assuredly a strange alteration had during the last few minutes taken place in his demeanor. From a position fronting my own he had gradually brought around his chair so as to sit with his face to the door of the chamber, and thus I could but partially perceive his features, although I saw that his lips trembled, as if he were murmuring inaudibly. His head had dropped upon his breast, yet I knew that he was not asleep from the wide and rigid opening of the eye as I caught a glance of it in profile. The motion of his body, too, was at variance with this idea, for he rocked from side to side with a gentle yet constant and uniform sway. I resumed 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."

No sooner had these syllables passed my lips than, as if a shield of brass had indeed at the moment fallen heavily upon a floor of silver, I became aware of a distinct, hollow, metallic and clangorous yet apparently muffled reverberation. Completely unnerved, I leaped to my feet, but the measured

rocking movement of Usher was undisturbed. I rushed to the chair in which he sat. His eyes were bent fixedly before him and throughout his whole countenance there reigned a stony rigidity. But as I placed my hand upon his shoulder there came a strong shudder over his whole person, a sickly smile quivered about his lips, and I saw that he spoke a low, hurried and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence. Bending closely over him, I at length drank in the hideous import of his words.

"Not hear it? Yes, I hear it and have heard it. Long, long, long, many minutes, many hours, many days have I heard it, yet I dared not—oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am—I dared not—gazed not speak. We have put her living in the tomb! Said I not that my senses were acute? I now tell you that I heard her first feeble movement in the hollow coffin, I heard them—many, many days ago—yet I dared not—I dared not speak! And now, tonight, Ethelred—ha, ha!—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! Oh, whither shall I fly? Will she not be here anon? Is she not hurrying to upbraid me for my haste? Have I not heard her footstep on the stair? Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? Madman!"—here he sprang furiously to his feet and shrieked out his syllables as if in the effort he were giving up his soul—"Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!"

As if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell, the huge antique panels to which the speaker pointed threw slowly back upon the instant their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust. But, then, without those doors there did stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the Lady Madeline of Usher. There was blood upon her white robes and the evidence of some bitter struggle upon every portion of her emaciated frame. For a moment she remained trembling and reeling to and fro upon the threshold; then, with a low, moaning cry, fell heavily inward upon the person of her brother and, in her violent and now final death agonies, bore him to the floor a corpse and a victim to the terrors he had anticipated.

From that chamber and from that mansion I fled aghast. The storm was still abroad in all its wrath as I found myself crossing the old causeway. Suddenly there shot along the path a wild light, and I turned to see whence a gleam so unusual could have issued, for the vast house and its shadows were alone behind me. The radiance was that of the full, setting and blood red moon, which now shone vividly through that once barely discernible fissure of which I have before spoken as extending from the roof of the building in a zigzag direction to the base. While I gazed this fissure rapidly widened, there came a fierce breath of the whirlwind, the entire orb of the satellite burst at once upon my sight, my brain reeled as I saw the mighty walls rushing asunder, there was a long, tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters, and the deep and dank tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the "House of Usher."

The end.

### Consoling Thought.

Country Vicar (to widow whose best pig has died)—Well, you know, Mrs. Higgs, these little troubles are sent us by Providence for our good.

Mrs. Higgs—Oh, yes, sir. But what a comfort it is to know that there's one above as won't let Providence go too far!—Toronto Globe.