MOURNER FIVE:

”Through all, I- wrote. Through joy and through sorrow, I-wrote. Through hunger and through thirst, I-wrote. Through good report and through ill report- I wrote. Through sunshine and through moonshine, I-wrote. What I wrote is unnecessary to say. It is unknowable. Invisible things are the only realities.”

Edgar Allan Poe

*Music. MOURNER FOUR and SIX enter.*

MOURNER FOUR:

The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal -- the redness and the horror of blood.

MOURNER SIX:

There were sharp pains.

MOURNER FOUR:

And dizziness.

MOURNER SIX:

And then profuse bleeding.

MOURNER FOUR:

The whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

*PRINCE PROSPERO enters. HE wears a carnival/commedia style mask.*

MOURNER FIVE:

But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious. When his dominions were half depopulated, he summoned to his presence a thousand hale and light-hearted friends and with these retired to the deep seclusion of one of his fortified abbeys.

*PROSPERO gestures. THE COMPANY, as his GUESTS, bursts onstage. Rich and decadent, they examine their new surroundings.*

PROSPERO:

My friends! A strong and lofty wall girdled us in. The wall has gates of iron and they are now welded shut. We are amply provisioned. The external world can take care of itself!

MOURNER SIX:

In the meantime it was folly to grieve, or to think. The prince had provided all the appliances of pleasure.

PROSPERO:

See! There are buffoons! Ballet-dancers! Musicians! Beauty! Wine! All these and security are within.

MOURNER FIVE:

Without was the "Red Death.

MOURNER FOUR:

Toward the close of the fifth or sixth month of his seclusion, and while the pestilence raged most furiously abroad, the Prince Prospero entertained his thousand friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence.

*THE COMPANY puts on masks---or perhaps SERVANTS bring them on. The masquerade begins. As it continues it becomes more drunken, more sensual, more out of control. PROSPERO enjoys this immensely.*

MOURNER FIVE:

It was a voluptuous scene, that masquerade: a magnificent revel.

PROSPERO:

My tastes are peculiar. I have a fine eye for colors and effects---my conceptions glowed with barbaric luster.

But first let me tell of the rooms in which the masque is held. There are seven -- an imperial suite. My love of the bizarre had placed in the middle of each room, a tall and narrow Gothic window.

Each the color of the room it stood in---blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet, Such rooms! Every carpet, every article, every decoration, composed one singular color, a reflection of the windows----but the last chamber---ah the last chamber…

The seventh apartment was closely shrouded in black velvet and in this chamber only, the color of the windows failed to correspond with the decorations. The panes here were a deep blood color. In the black chamber the effect of the fire-light was ghastly in the extreme, few of my guests were bold enough to set foot within the room at all.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood against the western wall, a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when the minute-hand made the circuit of the face, and the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock hands …

*The sound of a tolling bell.*

MOURNER FIVE:

He had directed, in great part, the moveable embellishments of the seven chambers, upon occasion of this great fete; and it was his own guiding taste which had given character to the masqueraders. There was much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust.

*The masquerade continues--the decadence grows. PROSPERO drunkenly moves about: dancing, flirting, laughing.*

PROSPERO:

To and fro in my seven chambers there stalks, a multitude of dreams!

MOURNER FOUR:

And these dreams writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps.

PROSPERO;

And there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet.

MOURNER SIX:

And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock.

*Another gong. The dancing and movement freeze---a suspended moment. The dance resumes.*

PROSPERO:

The music swells and the revel whirls on and on and on…

*Twelve low chimes---each lower and more distorted than the next. A FIGURE, dressed as a bloody corpse, enters. It is the RED DEATH. The face is disfigured, skeletal: a red ruin. It is draped in blood red cloth****.***

MOURNER FIVE:

There arose at length from the whole company a buzz, or murmur, expressive of shock and surprise -- then, finally, of terror, of horror, and of disgust.

PROSPERO

Who dares?

*The FIGURE makes no sound and slowly begins to glide forward. The REVELERS back away in horror.*

PROSPERO:

Who dares insult us with this blasphemous mockery? Seize him and unmask him -- that we may know whom we have to hang at sunrise!

*TWO REVELERS step forward. THE FIGURE soundlessly stops them with a gesture. PROSPERO moves to seize the visitor but stops short, caught by some nameless terror. The FIGURE wags its finger at him.*

*PROSPERO, in rage and shame, pulls a dagger and approaches the FIGURE.*

PROSPERO:

Show yourself! Who are you? Who are you?!?

*He raises the dagger to strike. The FIGURE turns and gazes into PROSPERO’S eyes. PROSPERO starts, grasps at his throat, and dies in agony. His mask falls, revealing a bloody mask underneath. He collapses. During the last narration the FIGURE slowly glides towards the forward edge of the playing area as the REVELERS collapse behind him.*

MOURNER FIVE:

And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revelers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out. And the flames of the tripods expired.

*Darkness onstage except for a spot on the RED DEATH. IT faces the audience and in an a magnified voice says*:

RED DEATH:

And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all.