lusus: to trick, mock, play
naturae: nature, birth, character

lusus naturae: a person or animal that is markedly unusual or deformed. Freak, monstrosity, monster.
FIVE STORY SHIFTS

FIRST: *What Could Be Done?*

Endless family discussions

Was a lovely baby. What happened?

- Judgment for a wrong doing
- Curse
- Measles
- God
- Disease: Porphyria.

“She’s a lusus naturae: a freak of nature. It’s nobody’s fault.”

“She’s a human being.”

“Either way, no one will marry me if they find out.”

LN stays shut up in a darkened room. Couldn’t stand sunlight, would roam the house in the night. Smelled of dried-up blood.

SECOND: *It Was Decided That I Should Die.*

Priest was bribed to say a mass.

“Special girl…sufferings would purify soul…innocent all my life…no man would pollute me…go straight to Heaven.”

On display for two days in deep coffin, very dark room, white dress and lots of white veiling.

Walked around at night. Everyone mourned as if really dead.

Filled coffin with damp straw and buried it in the cemetery.
THIRD: Now That I was Dead, I was Freer.

Shut up in room, reading Romantic poets.

Mother came and went quickly with food, and to take away the chamber pot. Affections were waning.

At night, run of the house, yard, and forest. Free from others seeing or fearing.

No future – only the present – which changed with the moon.

“If it weren’t for the fits, and the hours of pain, and the twittering of the voices I couldn’t understand, I might have said I was happy.”
FOURTH: I Began to Explore the Limits of My Power.

“The cat became elderly.”

“Who will take care of you when I’m gone... There was only one answer to that: it would have to be me.”

Frightened children in the woods, on purpose.

Stranger made offer to buy farm. Mother moved in with sister’s family. LN stayed behind.

New people moved in, haunted them. They left. Had the farm to herself.

No reflection in the mirror. Saw something else she didn’t recognize. Didn’t look in mirror anymore.
FIFTH:  But Now Things Are Coming to an End

Noticed two lovers in the woods.

Interpreted their “furtiveness”, twining, stops and starts, mewing noises, little screams, and spasms as being like herself – a shapeshifter of sorts.

Crept closer to see them “change.” Wanted to “share their fits.”

One evening the young man fell asleep. Tried to kiss him but it came out as a bite.

He awoke, told the villagers, they dug up her coffin.

“I am a lusus naturae! Take me to the city! I should be studied!”

Forgiving nature: She is ready for them to come. She has put on her white burial dress and veil.

“Perhaps in Heaven I’ll look like an angel. Or perhaps the angels will look like me. What a surprise that will be, for everyone else! It’s something to look forward to.”
Think About:

How does this article from the *The Kingston News*, July 15 1859, affect your reading of “Lusus Naturae?” Discuss two things. Consider:

- Description of the “lusus naturae” character
- Treatment of the character
- Actions/reactions of townspeople
- Narrator P.O.V.
- Setting or era
- What’s not being reported in his story?
- Who, in a modern retrospect, do you believe this person might be?
Think About:

There is no validation available as to which newspapers published these “curiosities.” But, can you think of other “curiosities,” freaks of nature, or hard to believe events of nature that have been reported on in the past year? Consider:

- Animals
- Weather
- Current news
  - Local
  - National
  - International

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**CURiosities of the News.**

[Clipped from Many Newspapers.]

A hog recently killed in Perry, Ga., had three complete sets of lungs.

Two Manitoba catfish have been caught, each with a child’s hand in its stomach.

A Tennessee girl is said to have been carried off into the mountains by a large brown bear.

A Newark museum manager advertises a four-armed man. This must be the one that was forewarned.

An Englishman has invented an apparatus through which, he declares, he can see the soul leave the body.

A 40-year-old peacock struts proudly on the farm of Adam Bohn in Penn township, Berks county, Penn.

A fine pussy-cat in a Chester, Penn., family jumped for a rat, caught its neck-ribbon on a nail and strangled to death.

An artesian well near Albert Lea, Minn., which spouts both oil and water, often changes the programme and “sends out a stream of small minnows which are wholly unlike any known species of fish found in that vicinity.”

There is now a character known as “Jack the Dude-kicker,” who inhabits St. Louis. He has assaulted a dozen fancifully dressed young men during the past week.
Ques. #8 According to the story, what kind of behavior makes for lasting human worth or for human waste?

- Being loved makes for lasting human worth. If you are loved by people then you experience self worth – human worth.
- Accepting yourself and who you really are is a behavior which makes for lasting human worth. Hiding, is not a very good behavior for worth, but makes for lasting human waste. Leaving everything you love behind can make you feel like garbage and worthless.
- Selflessness makes for lasting human worth. The protagonist “gives up” her life by faking her death for her sister. She also told her mother to leave her, even thought it would be easier to stay with her mother. By doing this, the protagonist ponders if she’ll look like an angel in heaven.

- Although she was “dead,” she constantly made herself seen by others. For example peering through the woman’s window, scaring the new home owners, and kissing the guy in the woods. At the end of the story she knew what was coming and she didn’t stop it because she wanted to die with the townspeople aware of the fact that she exists.