

## CHARACTERS

MADELINE 1	25-35 year old woman
FRIEND	35-40 year old man
RODERICK	25-35 year old man
MADELINE 2	woman; MADELINE 1's alternative self. However, she need not be too similar to her, not even the same race or age—but should have the same long, loose hair.

## SETTING

The House of Usher.

*The lights come up to a large open room with a window so large along the back wall that it is lost in the upper stage. Stage right in the back is an old steamer trunk. Stage left forward, a chaise lounge with an elaborate embroidered pillow.*

*MADELINE 1, dressed in casual clothes, enter stage left. There is a bell on a stand stage right. She goes to the bell and rings it with a small hammer. MADELINE 1 goes to the large trunk and pulls out an old, filthy dress, white, smeared with dirt. She pulls it over her head. She puts her hair up. As she is getting ready, she occasionally stops to go ring the bell.*

**MADELINE 1:** (to audience) The House of Usher. A name that stands for a people and a place.

Brother and sister. The only remaining of the line. Roderick, the brother, has written to a friend. The narrator is this friend. He is not a central actor. His separation from the events creates suspense. Roderick and his sister, they die, so it would be inconvenient to have either of them carry the narration.

The friend approaches. His horse can be heard passing through the woods. He passes the pool, a torpid tarn of fouled water. He sees the house, imposing, falling apart. Finally, he enters.

*MADELINE 1 rings the bell and sits on the couch.*

*FRIEND enters stage left. He wears a ruffled shirt and carries a handkerchief to his nose. He inspects the house, noticing the general decay and dirt, which offends him. It is obvious he expected something better in this case, and generally does.*

**MADELINE 1:** It is a dark, dull and soundless day. The Friend has come from afar.

**FRIEND:** All the dark and soundless day I have been passing alone through this wilderness and now in Roderick's crumbling home, there is no one to meet me.

**MADELINE 1:** Gloomy shadows cover the land.

*MADELINE 1 rises from couch to wander the room.*

**FRIEND:** These shadows do not improve my mood, the vacant windows and dead trees all round. I feel as I did when on laudanum—clouded, gloomy, desolate. The structure of this house must be solid, else how could my friend Roderick live here, but... A strong wind might blow it down. And the fungi growing everywhere... That pool of rank water should be drained.

**MADELINE 1:** The friend questions why he has come, but he knows it is because of Roderick. This friend has happy memories of school, learning Latin and history under hard teachers. Roderick was obsessive and dark minded, but he played music, painted, and his brooding nature. Attracted all sorts.

**FRIEND:** Roderick lives within. A lifelong friend, since school days. How we goaded one another in those days. He was always so reserved. But a great painter and musician. Loved by the local girls. His brooding face; his silken locks. It was a benefit to know him. Roderick had the refinement of mind so rare these days.

**MADELINE 1:** (takes a letter from her pocket) The letter Roderick sent was depressing, but, with no job responsibilities, this Friend accepted. Out of fascination or real compassion? There are some things I can't read. While Roderick is private, his friend is also close.

*MADELINE 1 hands letter to FRIEND.*

**FRIEND:** He wrote about his condition. I considered. But the tone of his letter. So worldly, yet spiritual, too. Roderick has a way with language. I decided. (opens letter and reads, summarizing) He writes of his illness, a mental disorder. A feeling of oppression. His desire to have my company once again. I ordered my affairs as best I could in the short time and, leaving my business with my secretary, rushed off to this singular part of the country.

*MADELINE 1 pulls materials from the trunk as this scene proceeds. A rug, picture easel and canvas (which she covers with a cloth,) boxes of books, musical instruments, etc.*

**MADELINE 1:** Roderick's studio was a large loft filled with black wood. The lamps give off a red light.

**FRIEND:** The room was large and lofty. The windows, long and pointed, were crisscrossed with leaden lattices and made the light crimson and weak. Dark draperies hung on the walls and all around lay antique chairs. Books and musical instruments lay strewn about as well.

**MADELINE 1:** The walls were covered with tapestries and old rugs, books, instruments on the floor. A scattered mess, not the order the friend remembered. And over everything a stern and deep gloom

**FRIEND:** The effect was one of a stern and deep gloom.

**MADELINE 1:** Then Roderick appeared.

**FRIEND:** I settled myself upon my surroundings, when my friend Usher came to greet me with vivacious warmth.

*RODERICK enters stage right. He is dressed in stylish clothing, shades of black and gray. His hair is wild, but stylishly so, and he has several days beard. He wears wire-rimmed glasses, which he removes when entering.*

**RODERICK:** Good tidings. *(raises a hand in greeting)* Good to see a familiar face.

**MADELINE 1:** Behold the Usher family tree. Blunted and twisted. Nothing much of goodness there.

*MADELINE 1 walks over to ring bell. RODERICK gives her a stern look and she puts the hammer down.*

**FRIEND:** The stem of the Usher race, time-honored as it was, had put forth no enduring branch. The entire family lay in direct descent. This had so identified the name Usher with the house that the two became one. The House of Usher included both the family and the family mansion.

**MADELINE 1:** They marry their...cousins...

*RODERICK looks at her again.*

**MADELINE 1:** ...or someone. The right people. Several famous, but minor, works can be attributed to the name. But, the Ushers had stopped producing and have become patrons.

**FRIEND:** This ancient family has been noted for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself through long ages, in exalted art, and manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent, and yet unobtrusive charity, as well as passionate devotion to music.

*MADELINE 1 leaves the bell and finds a guitar to give to RODERICK. He takes it and sits on the couch to play.*

**FRIEND:** I remember the times we spent at school. I would come in from studies and find him absorbed in reading, or contemplation or, most often, music. What are you playing Roderick? I would ask him.

**RODERICK:** An old song. One from home.

**FRIEND:** Our conversation would turn to the past. I would sit near the window and see the other boys at play, unconcerned with the future or the oppressions of the world to come. I would turn to Roderick, see him strumming his guitar, and sigh.

**RODERICK:** How melancholy you are.

**FRIEND:** He would ask me what I was thinking. My thoughts would be dissembled. About home and the future, I would say. I asked him what he played. If it was a song of his own creation.

**RODERICK:** (*stops playing and grasps guitar strongly*) Yes, written with some others at home. (*more gently*) Do you like it?

**FRIEND:** I asked him to teach me the composition.

**RODERICK:** Come sit.

*FRIEND sits. Roderick hands Friend the guitar.*

**RODERICK:** Hold it here and here.

**FRIEND:** He was always a patient teacher. Glad to share his knowledge.

**RODERICK:** I've written it out.

*Roderick takes a piece of paper from under a cushion. Friend begins to play, poorly. Roderick looks at the paper with Friend and places an arm around him to show him fingering.*

**FRIEND:** I was a poor student, but Roderick was patient. His gloom would leave him. I would see a look of rapture come over him.

**RODERICK:** No, B sharp.

*Roderick looks at Friend. They stop playing.*

**RODERICK:** Do you ever see yourself in someone else's face?

**FRIEND:** He would philosophize about all sorts of matters. Open up to me. And I to him.

**RODERICK:** You know the Greeks taught that we were split in two. Do you think that the other half looks like us? Or is it like the differences between our right hand and our left? (*suddenly embarrassed*) I mean they look alike at a distance, but on closer examination...

**FRIEND:** (*suddenly, in the moment*) Yes, yes probably.

*Roderick stands, goes to look out the window.*

**RODERICK:** We should go join them, yes?

*Roderick steps over and ruffles Friend's hair.*

**RODERICK:** All this music has made me melancholy.

**FRIEND:** I took him by the arm to sit where we might converse away from the ears of the servants if not the prying of the house itself. Roderick, I said to him, what of your letter. It has vexed me, I explained.

**RODERICK:** I had a desire to see...an old friend. Sometimes the familiar things of the past. Comfort us.

*Madeline 1 whispers in Roderick's ear.*

**RODERICK:** The sickness I wrote about, so...impulsively. A family trait I suppose. Just nervousness; something that will pass.

**FRIEND:** Such an explanation he gave me did not seem sufficient. I pressed him, what was the nature of the disease? Had he seen physicians? Had he taken pains to alleviate the symptoms?

*Roderick works to continue nervously, pushing Madeline 1 away.*

**RODERICK:** I suffer from too much sense. Food is unendurable. I only eat oatmeal or plain bread. I only wear natural fabrics; my skin chafes. Sweet, natural smells, flowers or perfume, sicken me. The light hurts my eyes. The slightest sound causes throbbing in my head.