

THE MINDS OF DOLLS

*A Play*

by Artemis Truax

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Cast of Characters (by order of appearance)

Geraldine Jewsbury - *Early 30s*, An English novelist and one of Charlotte's lovers.  
Jealous, easy to anger, sure of herself.

Charlotte Cushman - *Late 20s-Early 30s*, Famous American actress on the rise.  
Confident, ambitious, center of her universe.

Eliza Cook - *Late 20s*, English author and poet, one of Charlotte's longer-term girlfriends. Well-meaning, thoughtful, takes people at their word.

Notes:

[Text in brackets] is said to the audience.

Charlotte must not be played by a thin actor.

Preferably, Eliza should be played by a masculine/butch actress.

While every character in this show is female, gender-conscious casting that also involves men and non-binary people is allowed. However, if doing cross-gender casting, it is vital that it not be treated as a joke. There should be no "man dressed as woman and talking in a high-pitched voice" jokes.

*1840ish. A well-furnished room. Geraldine enters and pours some tea. Offstage, we hear a voice vaguely, unsure exactly what it's saying. It becomes clear when Geraldine joins in.*

**Geraldine**

For never was a story of more woe  
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo

*Geraldine bows then laughs.*

[Her Romeo, my ass.]

*As we hear applause offstage, Geraldine takes a bottle of whiskey and pours it into her tea. Charlotte enters the stage and plops down on a couch.*

**Charlotte**

That audience was abhorrent.

**Geraldine**

[Charlotte Cushman, everybody. The most famous actress you've never heard of.]

**Charlotte**

Someone laughed during my banishment scene!

**Geraldine**

[Fortunately, very talented. Unfortunately, American.]

**Charlotte**

But Sarah looked good tonight.

**Geraldine**

[Also a massive dyke.]

**Charlotte**

Come here, Geraldine. Ugh my head aches, I am desperate for a quiet night in.

**Geraldine**

Haven't you been having many nights in with Sarah?

**Charlotte**

That's anything but quiet.

**Geraldine**

Alright, I think I'm gonna head out.

**Charlotte**

Not for that reason—we're practicing lines! She's debuting as Ophelia next week.

**Geraldine**

Great! I know a river where she can really get into character!

**Charlotte**

No! Uh-uh. Quiet night in. That means no jealous asides from you. Besides, Sarah is only 18, you have no reason to be worried about her.

**Geraldine**

[In a few years, when Charlotte is 36, she will have an affair with someone half her age named Emma. Not to be confused with the age-appropriate woman Charlotte was already dating, also named Emma. When Emma gets mad at Charlotte for dating Emma, Charlotte marries Emma off to her nephew slash adopted son in order to keep seeing both Emma and Emma. But I don't know this at the time, so I say —]

Of course, Charlotte. My jealousies are my own fault.

*Enter Eliza. She walks in with an undeniable confidence. She wears masculine attire.*

[Speaking of jealousies.]

**Eliza**

Guess who got George Sand's new poetry collection?

**Geraldine**

No! How? It's not released yet.

**Eliza**

I'm friends with the publisher.

**Geraldine**

— And that also explains how the hell anyone will publish what you write.

**Charlotte**

Geraldine! Ignore her, Eliza.

*Eliza and Charlotte kiss. Time pauses.*

**Geraldine**

[Have you ever met someone who was so talented and confident and kind and perfect? And you just fucking hate them?]

*Time resumes.*

**Eliza**

You were perfect, Charlotte.

**Geraldine**

[For me, that is Eliza.]

**Charlotte**

You give me too much credit.

**Geraldine**

[And tonight...]

**Eliza**

Oh, Geraldine —

**Geraldine**

[I break her and Charlotte up.]

**Eliza**

My friend sends her immense compliments to your novel. She said it was absolutely marvelous.

**Geraldine**

You haven't read it yet? Too intelligent for you?

**Eliza**

I am hoping to read it soon, it's just been so hard to get my hands on!

**Charlotte**

Have you read any of Eliza's work?

**Geraldine**

Yes! You sent me that poem of Eliza's to critique, remember?

**Eliza**

What?

**Charlotte**

Not critique, per say —

**Geraldine**

You said critique.

**Charlotte**

I did not, I told you

**Charlotte**

that I wanted you to  
look it over and to  
share your thoughts.

*Beat.*

Exactly.

*Beat.*

**Geraldine**

I remember you specifically  
saying you wanted me to  
share my thoughts.

Exactly.

**Eliza**

Thank you for the clarification. Geraldine, I would love to hear your thoughts.

**Geraldine**

And I would love to share them.

*Takes a long gulp from her tea.*

I think, while your poetry is very pretty, it lacks depth. You need grit, edge, tension. Your poems are empty of conflict. You need more drama, specifically in your personal life. If you and Charlotte fought more often, I think your work would soar.

**Eliza**

You want us to fight?

**Geraldine**

Get dirty.

**Charlotte**

*[Breaking this up.]* Do you two want to hear the funniest thing?

**Eliza**

Yes, love.

**Charlotte**

Edwin Forrest is back in America performing Macbeth and asked if I would step in for Lady Macbeth.

**Geraldine**

Ha! The nerve of men.

**Eliza**

After all the awful things he has said about you?

**Geraldine**

Eliza, you do not even know the half of it.

**Eliza**

And the thought that you would even *consider* going back to America for one second. Does he not know you have commitments here?

**Geraldine**

Oh, but she is considering going back...

**Eliza**

What?

**Charlotte**

Geraldine...confidence.

**Geraldine**

She didn't tell you? Charlotte got word of a tour in America and asked me if I would be willing to join her.

**Charlotte**

Geraldine...

**Eliza**

Charlotte?

**Charlotte**

Eliza...

**Eliza**

Is she messing with me?

**Charlotte**

It was a romantic thought that I was not actually considering, just / spur of the moment.

**Geraldine**

What do you mean you weren't / actually considering?

**Eliza**

Oh, just a romantic thought? Is that all?

**Charlotte**

Eliza...

**Eliza**

Running off with Geraldine and leaving me behind is romantic?

**Charlotte**

That's not what I meant –

**Eliza**

You said you would stay in England until at least the end of next year.

**Charlotte**

I can't help missing my home country.

**Eliza**

Yes, but you can help telling me and Geraldine two entirely different things just because you think they are what we want to hear.

**Charlotte**

I –

**Eliza**

I don't want to hear it. Not if your words don't mean anything.

*Eliza exits. Beat.*

**Geraldine**

Wow, what a lovely night you and Eliza have made.

**Charlotte**

Oh, fuck you.

**Geraldine**

Excuse me?

**Charlotte**

You just can't let me be happy, can you?

**Geraldine**

Let you be happy? All I want is for us to be happy. But you want to be happy with Eliza and Sarah and any woman who gives you an ink of praise.

**Charlotte**

Oh, please.

**Geraldine**

Tell me I'm wrong.

**Charlotte**

You're wrong.

**Geraldine**

Damn, you really are a great actor.

**Charlotte**

Can you leave Eliza alone? She has done nothing to you.

**Geraldine**

No...no, don't do that. I guarantee you that she hates me just as much as I hate her, I am just more honest about it. That must be why you like her more.

**Charlotte**

I don't –

**Geraldine**

No, because she is calm and rational and chooses her words wisely, but you can't control me which is why I

**Geraldine**

will always be second to her.  
Because I will beat and scratch like a  
wildcat while she purrs into your ear  
like the house cat she is.

**Charlotte**

I have no desire to control you,  
I want you to be happy but you  
make it impossible.

**Charlotte**

You are the reason you are unhappy. Don't blame me for your own miserable life.

**Geraldine**

My life is you! Charlotte, I have seen countless women be drawn in and used by men, and I thought with you it would be different. But you are just a dyke who wishes to love like a man but be loved like a woman.

*Beat. Charlotte processes this.*

**Charlotte**

Geraldine, you are speaking out of anger right now. I think you need to go home.

**Geraldine**

No, I want to stay. Get rid of someone else, make room for me.

**Charlotte**

What?

**Geraldine**

Do you know what it's like to watch you perform? Like watching an eclipse. You are so obsessed with getting the audience to like you that you don't let anyone shine. You don't want a good show, you just want to be the center. And that's what it's like to love you.

I want to be beside you. I want to be your equal.

**Charlotte**

You are.

**Geraldine**

Eliza.

Me.

Sarah.

And whoever Matilda Hayes is.

That is your hierarchy.

**Charlotte**

Wha-what? Matilda is no one. She's a pen pal.

**Geraldine**

Right now, sure. But in fifteen years you two will have had a 10 year long relationship at the end of which she will sue you for draining her of everything. And you won't even care. Because that is who you are.

**Charlotte**

What are you talking about?

**Geraldine**

Last year, you were an idol. A star. A shining example of the purity of art and theatre. When everyone around us is saying, "Actresses are sluts who will give themselves away for five goddamn pennies!" You were proof that they were wrong.

If they only knew what I know.

**Charlotte**

But you don't know. You are a great writer, but you have written me wrong.  
I love you. Truly, I do.

**Geraldine**

I never—

**Charlotte**

But I *also* love Eliza, a love which I have never hidden from you, so your resentment towards her only makes you look pathetic. I do not love like a man, I love like myself. And I am goddamn complicated. I have known others who could not handle that. If you hate the people I love so much then you really should leave. I have had to leave plenty of people behind to get where I am, it won't be that difficult with you.

*Beat.*

*Geraldine goes to slap Charlotte. Charlotte grabs her hand.*

*Beat.*

*Charlotte tenderly brings Geraldine's hand down and kisses it.*

I don't want to fight.

**Geraldine**

Screw you.

*Eliza enters holding a letter.*

**Eliza**

Charlotte, this letter came for you. Sallie said it was urgent.

**Charlotte**

Thank you, Eliza.

*She reads. Eliza and Geraldine sit in uncomfortable silence.*

**Geraldine**

Carrier pigeon much?

**Eliza**

I thought I was a house cat.

*Silence.*

**Charlotte**

Um...I need to talk to my sister.

**Eliza**

What is it?

**Charlotte**

Rosalie... *[Eliza looks scared for a moment.]* She passed. I have to go back to America.

**Eliza**

You'll go for her but you won't stay for me?

**Charlotte**

Eliza, her family was my family. And Rosalie, I mean...I need to go.

*Charlotte exits. Eliza almost goes after her, but stays.*

**Geraldine**

Who's Rosalie?

**Eliza**

The one that got away.

**Geraldine**

Another artist?

**Eliza**

What else?

**Geraldine**

She sure has a type, doesn't she?

**Eliza**

Yeppppp.

*Geraldine nods. She begins to walk away.*

You know that story that Charlotte loves to tell the papers? About how when she was younger she wouldn't play with dolls like a normal girl and would instead cut their heads open so she could see their thoughts?

**Geraldine**

Of course.

**Eliza**

At times like this I wonder...maybe that wasn't the reason. Maybe she just liked the idea of hurting them.

*Beat. Geraldine almost says something, but stops herself.*

Regardless, all I know is that when it comes to Charlotte, the only choice women like us have is to love her, and hope, sometimes beyond hope, that there will be moments where she gives us something similar.

**Geraldine**

Hmm. *[Turns away. This next line is evidently hard for her to say.]* I...do not hate your poetry...sometimes I rather enjoy it.

**Eliza**

Thank you, Geraldine. I hope you mean it.

**Geraldine**

I do. *[Next week I will tell her I never fucking said that.]*

*Charlotte enters.*

**Charlotte**

Eliza, come home with me.

**Eliza**

Of course.

*Charlotte exits.*

I'm sorry.

**Geraldine**

Don't be. I don't think I want to be a doll anymore.

*This sinks in for Eliza. She understands.*

*She is tempted to agree, but instead she exits towards Charlotte.*

*Geraldine watches. She breathes heavily...shakily. She exits.*

END OF PLAY