

## Childish Hearts by Alice Webster

SETTING: A forest on the outskirts of a small rural New England town in the late 1890s.

LIZZIE: 19 years old, female, lesbian. Deeply stubborn and often sardonic, but always genuine when expressing her emotions. Unwilling to confine herself based on the rules of society. Prioritizes fantasy over rationality.

ANNE: 19 years old, female, queer. Recently engaged to her best friend and lover Lizzie's brother. It is up to the actress to decide whether she has genuine feelings for him or not. Maybe she doesn't know. Willing to live within the confines of society. Prioritizes rationality over fantasy.

*A forest. LIZZIE is sitting on a log picking at the grass and wildflowers around her feet. She wears a long plaid skirt and a matching waistcoat over a white blouse.*

*ANNE enters. She is wearing a plain but dignified 1890s morning dress. Her hair is put up in the Gibson Girl style. She looks at Anne, who refuses to return her gaze, for a moment before speaking.*

ANNE

I knew I would find you here.

LIZZIE

*(Still looking down and picking at the grass)* Maybe I wanted to be found. We have to have it out sooner or later.

*Pause*

Coming here used to calm me when I was upset, but it isn't working anymore. The beauty of nature and all that.

*Pause*

Maybe I've just never been this upset before.

ANNE

Lizzie, I /

LIZZIE

*(Sharply turning her head and meeting Anne's gaze)* You don't love him.

ANNE

Lizzie, please, it doesn't have to be like this.

LIZZIE

*(Standing)* Why not? Why shouldn't it be like this? Why shouldn't I be like this? I have been completely and utterly betrayed by both my dearest friend and my own brother! I think I have a right to be angry.

ANNE

You do. Of course you do.

*Pause. Anne turns away.*

But you don't have to be childish.

LIZZIE

I'm being childish?

ANNE

You know you are.

LIZZIE

I know that I am not the one marrying someone she doesn't love because she can't think for herself! That is childish!

ANNE

*(Whipping back to face her)* You have no idea who I love!

LIZZIE

No, I suppose I don't! You said you loved me, but clearly that was just another childish whim! Or was it a lie? Lying is an awfully childish thing to do, don't you think, Anne?

ANNE

Of course it wasn't a lie! It's just... *(she sits on the log)* can't you see this is different?

LIZZIE

*(Sarcastic)* Different? Oh, I hadn't realized it was different, that changes everything /

ANNE

*(Standing and beginning to walk away)* If you won't listen to me, I'll just leave you / alone

LIZZIE

*(Grabbing her hand)* / Wait!

*They stand like this for a moment. The feeling of their hands touching radiates through them.*

I'll listen. *(Anne looks at her expectantly)* I'm... sorry.

*Anne leads Lizzie back to the log. They sit, hands still entwined.*

ANNE

The love that you and I share is... it's not *(she searches for the right word)* sustainable.

LIZZIE

*(Tensing)* Not sustainable?

ANNE

Maybe that's not the best way to describe it, it's not - I don't mean that I couldn't love you forever. I could. I will.

LIZZIE

I'm failing to see how that isn't sustainable.

ANNE

It's not about the feeling, it's about the (*searching again*) practicality.

LIZZIE

You think love ought to be practical?

ANNE

I think life ought to be practical. It has to be.

LIZZIE

So you're marrying my brother because it's practical?

ANNE

You make it sound so /

LIZZIE

Cold-hearted? Cruel? Calculating?

ANNE

He's kind to me. He'll provide for me.

LIZZIE

You don't love him.

ANNE

He wants me.

LIZZIE

(*Touching Anne's cheek with her free hand*) I want you!

ANNE

And if I could marry you I would, but /

LIZZIE

You can! We can buy rings and live far out in the country and everyone would think we were strange but it wouldn't matter! Other women have done it, I know they have /

ANNE

/ *(Removing Lizzie's hand from her cheek)* Rich women! Women who can afford to live on their own and have everyone whisper about them; we are not those women!

LIZZIE

I can make money! I haven't sold a story yet, but I will, I'll write trash if I have to, I don't care /

ANNE

I want children, Lizzie!

*(Lizzie's face falls. Anne closes her eyes.)*

I want to be a mother.

*Anne opens her eyes and looks apprehensively at Lizzie, who is both crestfallen and confused.*

LIZZIE

More than you want love?

ANNE

It's not about what I want more, it's about what is possible!

LIZZIE

Where is this coming from, all this talk about practicality and motherhood? In all the years you've been my closest friend, you never told me /

ANNE

/ Because I knew it would upset you. I wanted to be together without the future hanging over us. *(Pause)* I thought you would realize sooner that it couldn't last.

*Pause. Lizzie takes her hand out of Anne's and looks down at her feet.*

LIZZIE

Do you remember the first time we came here together?

ANNE

Of course I do.

LIZZIE

We said we would stay here for the rest of our lives if we could. *(She picks a dandelion near her feet)* We made a promise on a dandelion that we would never forget each other.

ANNE

I intend to keep that promise.

*Pause*

LIZZIE

Did you know then, that our time together would end? That you would be the one to end it?

ANNE

It isn't ending! *(She gently takes Lizzie's chin and turns her face towards her own, then rests her hand on her cheek)* We will still be friends, we'll be sisters /

LIZZIE

*(Putting her hand on top of Anne's)* I don't want to be your sister!

*Lizzie moves in closer to Anne, their faces are now mere inches apart. Lizzie's eyes plead. Anne struggles to hold herself back. She fails, kissing Lizzie as though it is the last thing she'll ever do. Lizzie kisses her back, mirroring her passion and desperation.*

ANNE

*(Pulling back just enough to speak)* I love you.

LIZZIE

Don't marry him.

ANNE

You know I love you.

LIZZIE

Run away with me.

ANNE

I will love you all my life.

*Anne kisses her again, more softly this time. Lizzie begins to reciprocate, but then pulls away and stands.*

LIZZIE

You can't do this to me. I can't let you do this to me. You can't tell me you love me, and kiss me, and make me feel like I have a chance at being yours when you know you don't intend to give me one!

*Anne's eyes begin to water. She does not look at Lizzie.*

You are engaged. I was a fool to think you would change your mind.

*Anne closes her eyes.*

My mother wants to have me set up as a governess for a friend of hers in Boston. I told her the other day I wasn't interested, but she hasn't sent word to her friend yet. I think I'll tell her I've had a change of heart. (With venom) I've gotten rather used to dealing with foolish children.

*Lizzie walks offstage. Anne remains, eyes closed, lips quivering. Her head falls into her hands.*

*Lights down.*

*End of play.*