

Stage Fright

by

Lynn Howes

**(after an idea by
Stefan Lubomirski de Vaux)**

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Cast

Peter

A somewhat shabby playwright who had some early success in his career but has struggled in recent years. The highlight of his career to date was a west-end run of one of his plays which starred Charles – this was a test of their friendship as Charles took advantage of Peter during this production using his fame to force executive decisions that meant Peter had to make almost constant rewrites. They managed to reconcile their differences but only after Peter suffered a near mental breakdown and became an alcoholic. They have been close friends ever since. Peter has a string of short-term, disastrous relationships behind him but remains a hopeless romantic. He is always edgy and his overt sensitivity masks a latent and potentially uncontrollable temper – for which he has sought counselling and these manages to control.

Charles

Charles is a successful actor in his early 50's who shot to fame in the 1980's when he starred in a TV detective series. He has been a friend of Peter's since appearing in his west-end success. Unlike Peter, Charles still works regularly, appearing in cameo roles on TV and doing voice-overs for documentaries and advertisements etc – he also receives royalties on repeats of his TV show. This means he is relatively wealthy (although not as well known as he once was and he feels the loss of status) – he has taken to supporting Peter – his 'starving artist' friend – paying for everything each time they meet. He does this partly out of natural generosity and partly due to the guilt he carries from when he took advantage of Peter in the past. They get together regularly for coffee and share experiences of being single men in London. Charles is single – having been married twice – he has been divorced for several years. He rarely pursues romantic relationships and considers himself streetwise.

Geraldine

An actress who is not easy to age but could be anywhere between 25 and 40. She has a mysterious past and although she first appears to be vulnerable, her manipulative nature slowly becomes evident. She shows a different face to everyone she meets in order to achieve the best she can out of any given situation – often playing much dumber than she actually is. She is highly ambitious and ruthless – but she is also (much to Peter's annoyance) very talented.

Set

The play takes place over the course of a theatre production – some several months possibly. The settings are; a café in central London, a rehearsal room, a dressing room or green room and the stage of a west-end theatre.

The play within the play is set first in Russia and then Argentina.

Please play all dialogue at a good pace.

“Stage Fright”
was first performed
on 2nd February 2010 at
The Canal Café Theatre,
Delamere Terrace,
Little Venice,
London,
W2 6ND

A Sonja Rein Production
with the following cast:

Charles - Sion Tudor Owen
Peter - Alex Barclay
Geraldine - Abi Titmuss

Directed by Emma Taylor

Act One**Scene One**

(A café in Soho. Peter is sitting at a café table making notes in a book and glancing about. Charles arrives – he is late – he has evidently been to the counter of the café as he brings with him his own coffee – and an espresso for Peter.)

Charles Sorry.

Peter *(Annoyed but appeased by the espresso.)* Used to it. I want to tell you –

Charles Ok?

Peter Yes. You?

Charles I am very good. I'm lovely. / In fact I met a –

Peter / I've met this amazing girl.

Charles I see.

Peter Sorry, / you were saying?

Charles / It's Ok. When you say 'girl' –

Peter – Woman. Obviously. Young woman.

Charles Yes. It's the young part that worries me.

Peter She's not a child.

Charles Good.

Peter No, I mean – Oh come on – she's an adult. She's in her twenties.

Charles Just?

Peter Alright – she's 23. *(Charles groans.)* No – oh come on.

Charles *(Laughing)* At least you'll have some company. *(Peter's mood has changed.)* You don't expect me to encourage you? Please prove me wrong. But it's the same old story. She's going to break your fragile middle-aged heart and / then you'll wallow in grief for a week or two – until you meet another one. / Why do you torture yourself? Actually – it's me who gets tortured.

- Peter / I am not middle aged! What do you mean? / You! You're middle aged!
- Charles - Fifty is the new thirty.
- Peter Who told you that? That's a classic. Anyway, she's not like the others.
Charles No – she's younger. / Can you hear yourself? 'Not like the others...' dear oh dear...
- Peter / Fine! Let's talk about you shall we? For a change...
- Charles What's that supposed to mean?
- Peter Let's talk about you instead – and how happy you are in your perfect relationship – but – Oh yes! You're divorced. Oh sorry – twice wasn't it? Twice divorced? Yes. And somehow you think you can lecture me.
- Charles *(Pause.)* Actually, Peter – I met an interesting woman last night. A grown up woman. And very – 'cool' – and interested in me. I was about to tell you / before you launched into...
- Peter / Did you really just say 'cool'?
- Charles Yes.
- Peter *(Pause.)* And interested in you?
- Charles Yes!
- Peter Really?
- Charles Yes – Do you mind! It's not that unlikely.
- Peter Alright, sorry. This is new. I'm not used to hearing you express so much interest in women.
- Charles I'm too busy listening to your tales of woe.
- Peter – You'd like her, / she really is different.
- Charles / Let's just say the jury's out until she pays for something. Or until the two of you last more than a month. Whichever comes first. Did you get your key back from the last one?
- Peter No.
- Charles Christ, here we go again! Get the bloody key back!
- Peter No – / I will.
- Charles / Or change the bloody locks!

Peter You're right. I know.

Charles Ok?

Peter When I get a bit of cash, I will.

Charles You never have any cash! And you're not insured / I suppose.

Peter / I will get insured!

Charles You're not are you! / You didn't do it did you?

Peter / Charles I've got no money! / Do you understand? I haven't got any money.

Charles / How is it that you never have any money?

Peter Not everyone has your luck.

Charles You had bad contracts! You never read the / contracts properly.

Peter / Please don't go there...

Charles *(Loaded pause.)* How much do you need?

Peter I'm not borrowing from you!

Charles Then let me give it to you.

Peter No!

Charles I swear – you'll end up in the gutter. I'll walk past a pile of dirty old clothes in a doorway in Soho – and it'll be you. Why do you let people take advantage of you?

Peter I don't! And I don't want your money. I want my own. I want to earn it. I will! I just need to get a decent job – a proper writing job – and I'll get sorted. Insurance, locks / – everything.

Charles / Don't spend any money on this new girl.

Peter She's broke too.

Charles Well of course she is. / They always are.

Peter / I'm writing a bit at the moment.

Charles *(Suddenly interested.)* Oh yes?

- Peter *(Pause.)* You've depressed me now...
- Charles Alright. Sorry. You're writing something?
- Peter A sort of dramatic essay.
- Charles *(Less interested.)* Oh?
- Peter About the bus stops on Oxford Street. / They have a life of their own.
- Charles *(Disappointed.)* Oh man... Busses now. It's tragic.
- Peter *(Getting up.)* I'm going!
- Charles Sit down.
- Peter What's the point?
- Charles I have a proposition. *(Charles gets up and brings Peter back to the table)*
Honestly! Come on – I've had a great idea. That's why I wanted to see you. Sit down.
- Peter *(Sitting down.)* What is it?
- Charles Write me a play.
- Peter What?
- Charles Yes! Eh? Write me a play! Not for me. For Geraldine.
- Peter Who's Geraldine?
- Charles The woman I met last night. That's her name – Geraldine. Actress friend of Steven's. Mysterious. She's sort of timeless. Studied at RADA with some big names. Just hasn't had the breaks.
- Peter Maybe not very good?
- Charles *(Ignoring Peter.)* It's a long story – she got involved with this idiot violent guy who kept her locked in their flat – literally – a real horror story. I know she's talented. She radiates it. I want to help her. And God knows you need the work – Write her a play! Two hander – for me and her.
- Peter For real?
- Charles I haven't done any theatre in years. And it'd sell – people would and come and see it off the back of my telly stuff. People still know who I am.
(Fighting a slight doubt.) Of course they would. She gets a break. You get a job. And I get her! She'll be so grateful. *(Realising how this sounds.)* – Although I'd never abuse her trust like her ex – I didn't mean that – you know – she'll fall for me while we're working on your brilliant new play.

Peter Oh, I don't know Charles. I mean... Work together? After last time...

Charles I've thought about that – I was full of myself in those days. Thought I knew it all.

Peter You actually drove me to drink.

Charles Do we need to/ drag that up?

Peter *(Almost laughing.)* / You know that.

Charles Yes. I was there.

Peter *(Very serious.)* I was in a black hole.

Charles Yes.

Peter I couldn't go through it again.

Charles The past is another country.

Peter *(Unimpressed.)* Quite.

Charles Those days are gone. We can forget about that now eh? I'll behave myself. I've mellowed. I'm humble.

Peter *(Almost choking.)* Humble?

Charles There is nothing more important than the play.

Peter Really?

Charles Humility, Peter. I have learned. I mean it.

Peter It took me years to forgive you.

Charles - But you did!

Peter Those rewrites....

Charles That was the old Charles. The new Charles has been very good to you.

Peter I know. I owe you.

Charles Well, if you put it like that.

Peter You're serious?

Charles I am perfectly serious. Big time mind – west end.

- Peter West end?
- Charles Get it written.
- Peter And you'll make it happen?
- Charles I'll take it to Roger – he's been looking for a play for me – or so he says. He'll never get around to it – he's the laziest bloody agent in England.
- Peter At least you've got an agent...
- Charles He's more into producing now – taken his eye off the agency side a bit.
- Peter Oh?
- Charles *(Brushing this off.)* Carol – you know – his assistant – she mostly handles the agency these days.
- Peter Carol? Your old flame? She hates you. And she's Roger's partner? No wonder the work's dried up.
- Charles Don't be silly – she's a professional. She's been assisting Roger for years. She's always been perfectly charming.
- Peter *(Laughing.)* It's all coming back to me now – she wanted you dead!
- Charles Not these days. She's a respected agent.
- Peter *(Smirking.)* I see.
- Charles There's no reason why she'd stop sending me work! She's put me up for things recently. *(Peter is stifling a giggle.)* Look – I'm making you an offer here! Write a play! Here's a chance for you to do what you do best.
- Peter Making your own work, eh?
- Charles There's nothing wrong with that. *(Peter is smirking.)* I'll take the offer back if you carry on. There are other people I could ask.
- (Charles crosses his arms in a sulk.)*
- Peter Like who? Ok, sorry. But it is quite funny.
- Charles *(Angry.)* It isn't! *(Serious.)* You know Peter – I actually need to do some acting. Recently I've just been 'that bloke who does the voice on that advert'.
- Peter 'Savour the flavour.'

Charles *(Unimpressed.)* I want to get back to it. It's been years since I was on stage. I'm afraid I won't be able to do it. But I have to. I mean, I need to. I don't want to lose it. I've left it too long as it is.

Peter *(Sympathetic.)* How long has it been? Since you were on stage?

Charles Nearly fifteen years.

Peter Wow.

(Charles goes to get a plate of sandwiches – handed to him from offstage.)

Charles Roger's hopeless. And, OK, Carol is a bit prickly, but this way we'll hand it to them on a plate – they'll be delighted. Roger owes me one. Plus I'm offering to fund the whole project. I got a whopping repeat fee from Germany last month – perfect timing. They love me out there.

Peter From your detective thing? That must be twenty years old!

Charles *(Now really irritated.)* Look Peter, you cut it out Ok?

Peter *(Pause.)* When we worked together before...

Charles Roger can draw up an agreement – if you're worried. It won't be like last time. Let him have impartial power. He said something like that when I had this idea actually –

Peter You already spoke to him? What did he say?

Charles I sounded him out. And, Geraldine's very keen. I told her all about you.

Peter Oh?

Charles About how brilliant you are.

Peter You said that?

Charles Of course.

Peter I'm not sure...

Charles Let Geraldine be our inspiration! You're going to love her. Someone to pull us back in line if one of us has a tantrum.

Peter I don't have tantrums.

- Charles She'll keep us grounded. We're wiser these days. We won't fight. You want to don't you? I know you do. On me. A salary I mean. Let's do this! What do you say? Thousand pound advance? That should get you started.
- Peter Well, I do have an idea about gangster kidnapping in Moscow.
- Charles Christ... Ok, your call.
- Pete You mean that? I get to be part of it all? No outsiders.
- Charles We can do that.
- Peter I want to direct it –
- Charles *(Pause.)* Really?
- Peter *(Suddenly angry.)* There – that's exactly what I'm talking about!
- Charles What?
- Peter You're questioning me already!
- Charles No!
- Peter You're trying to undermine me already!
- Charles No!
- Peter I can see it happening all over again. I'm a great director!
- Charles I know that.
- Peter You tell Roger I'm directing it!
- Charles Ok. Good – I appreciate your passion.
- Peter That's what it is!
- Charles That's a good thing.
- Peter Yes. I'm passionate. I want to direct it.
- Charles I am a sponge – waiting to soak up your directorial juices!
- Peter Steady.
- Charles Sounds like you want to do this. You can direct – of course – why not?
- Peter Ok.

Charles *(Pause.)* Roger just might have had someone in mind that's all.

Peter You tell Roger – I want to direct it!

Charles Good. I will.

Peter And no trouble from you either – you'd have to try whatever I ask –

Charles I would! So you're in?

Peter *(Pause.)* If you try to force me to rewrite any of it – it's over – understand?

Charles I do.

Peter Let me make the artistic decisions.

Charles As long as I make all the financial ones. It's collaboration – just the two of us – from / the outset.

Peter / That's all I want.

Charles So have we got a deal?

(Charles offers Peter the sandwich – he takes it.)

Peter *(Pause.)* I suppose so.

(Peter eats ravenously.)

Charles I'm calling Roger.

(Charles takes his phone out of his pocket.)

Scene Two

(A rehearsal room. Geraldine and Peter are waiting for Charles so they can start working on Peter's new play. Charles is late. They have been waiting for an hour and have worked on some of the lines – scripts open in their hands. They are awkward with each other. Peter is intrigued by her. Geraldine is smiling and seems a little shy.)

Peter You have a natural ear for how I intended it to sound.

Geraldine Thanks.

Peter I was wondering, Geraldine, / whether –

Geraldine / Actually it's Aldine.

Peter Ald-

Geraldine 'All-Dean' – instead of Geraldine – I keep meaning / to say.

Peter / Aldine?

Geraldine Yes.

Peter Ok.

(Pause.)

Geraldine It's not as obvious as 'Geri' – you know. Aldine. I think it sounds sort of classical. Like a heroine – in a poem – or something.

Peter It suits you.

Geraldine Thanks.

(Awkward pause as they look around the room. Geraldine plays with her hair, scuffs the floor with her heels etc – she catches Peter looking at her – he is embarrassed.)

Peter I like it.

Geraldine What?

Peter *(In a French accent.)* 'Aldine'.

Geraldine Oh, right.

Peter *(By way of explanation.)* French sounding...

Geraldine Yes. To be honest – I sort of wanted to reinvent myself. After... He used to call me Geri – you know – Marcus – my ex. Did Charlie tell you anything about / my...

Peter / What? – Oh! Yes.

Geraldine Really? What did he say?

Peter Nothing really...

(Another awkward pause.)

Peter *(Trying to break the ice.)* Never 'Gerald'?

Geraldine Gerald?

Peter Your name?

Geraldine *(Smiling to humour him.)* No. *(Pause.)* It makes me feel a bit queasy now.

Peter Sorry?

Geraldine 'Geri'. You weren't to know.

(They hold eye contact for an uncomfortably long time – Peter is confused. Suddenly, Charles enters in a flurry.)

Charles God, sorry! I was on time until I got to Clapham, then it all went wrong – but – you've met! Great! *(To Peter.)* Hello! *(To Geraldine.)* Hello darling.

(Charles and Geraldine kiss.)

Peter Anyway – great! Let's start!

Charles Certainly!

Peter Now, the opening scene / is set in –

Geraldine / Is fantastic!

Peter Oh, right. Thanks.

Geraldine Charlie has to be so horrible!

Charles I know! Excellent!

Geraldine It's so funny!

Peter It isn't supposed to be funny.

Geraldine No – the scene isn't funny – it's terrifying. I mean – poor you Pete –

Peter Peter.

Geraldine Sitting there helpless, and Charlie beating you up like that – it turns my blood cold. Brilliant scene.

Peter Oh, right.

Geraldine It's the idea of you being like that when you're such an old softie.

Charles Less of the 'old' please.

Peter Let's get / to it shall we...

Geraldine / I don't mean you're old. I don't think of you as old – you know that. Fifty's the new thirty.

Charles Hear that Peter?

Peter Yes, I heard that – shall we? –

Geraldine Yes! You crack the whip, Pete. Absolutely.

Peter Right –

Geraldine Drive us hard! Let's get on with it! *(Suddenly emotional.)* Here's me chattering on and on – you must be utterly sick of me already.

Peter No!

Geraldine This is not like me – I mean it's not me to get like this. I hate it myself – when someone sucks the energy out of the room like this. I hate it when actors interrupt the flow.

Charles What flow?

Geraldine Especially as we've just met!

Charles The creative flow?

Geraldine I'm so embarrassed.

Peter Not to worry. Maybe we –

Geraldine It's just that – to be honest – this scene really messes with my head. You know? It reminds me of Marcus. *(Tears well up.)* Of – of when...

Peter Oh, right...

Geraldine I'm fine though – really!

(She sobs quietly. The two men don't know what to do and stand still in silence glancing at each other for help.)

Peter Right...

Geraldine This is crazy. It's taken me by surprise. You know what I think it is? I think it's just that I'm at a tough stage in my recovery – and I'll get through this. It's like therapy for me – this play...

(Another tortuous pause while she continues sobbing.)

Peter Oh. *(Pause.)* Right.

(Charles and Peter continue to exchange a worried looks. Charles silently reprimanding Peter for upsetting Geraldine – Peter silently trying to defend himself. Charles goes to hold her but is too awkward to touch her.)

Peter Maybe if we just – you know – make a start and –

Charles Take your time.

Peter Of course, when you're ready –

Charles If you need a break...

(Peter sighs as she grabs her bag and searches for her cigarettes and mobile phone.)

Geraldine Oh, could we? Just for a bit?

Charles Of course.

Geraldine Do you mind Pete?

Peter Peter. *(Pause. He gives in.)* No, that's fine.

Geraldine You are both so lovely.

(Geraldine exits. Perhaps we can see her through a window – smoking a cigarette and texting on her mobile phone.)

Charles Quite a woman isn't she? She's had so much to deal with.

Peter Yes.

Charles She's an inspiration. And she thinks your play is...

Peter Yeah?

Charles You know – very good.

Peter Oh, right.

Charles *(Pause)* You don't like her do you? I knew it!

Peter No! I don't dislike her – that's not it – as such – it's just... It's her voice.

Charles Voice?

Peter It's got this odd quality to it – I can't explain.

Charles Suits the play doesn't it – that quality.

Peter She talks in that kind of...

Charles What?

Peter Sort of – counselling – sort of way.

- Charles No doubt the result of years of abuse. She told me / last night, about the time she was staying at a women's shelter...
- Peter / Yes – I'm just not sure I trust her.
- Charles Really? I'm shocked. Why?
- Peter This ex of hers...
- Charles What a piece of work – he actually hospitalised her once – she told me.
- Peter Yes – How do you know?
- Charles What?
- Peter What did she tell you – how / do you know that?
- Charles / You don't believe her?
- Peter I don't like the way she's converted you.
- Charles What do you mean?
- Peter Well...
- Charles You don't believe her! That's how they get away with it Peter!
- Peter Right...
- Charles They're charming to the world – behind closed doors – different story. People never believe it of his type – it's an act! I did an episode about it once on my show in '88. *(Peter groans.)* Ger – Aldine – explained it to me. But she's recovering. This play is doing her a world of good. She told me. She's improving every day. In fact – she's amazing.
- Peter *(Pause. Friendly again.)* You've got it bad.
- Charles I think I have. *(They both laugh – the friendship intact once again.)* I think you're right. *(Pause.)* Have you considered the possibility that you might be jealous?
- Peter *(Peter's smile disappears.)* Jealous?
- Charles Of me and G – Aldine?
- Peter I'm not.
- Charles You know – with your latest / not working out.

Peter / If you even begin / to tell me –

Charles / As if I need to.

Peter I know what this is about.

Charles What?

Peter She still won't sleep with you will she...

Charles Look, the woman is recovering. Ok? She's not ready. I can wait.

Peter Right.

Charles And she's going to be excellent in this play of yours.

Peter I know. Actually, she's very good. We went through some of the script before you got here.

Charles Oh, yes? You didn't wait for me?

Peter Charles – you were an hour late!

(Charles sees Geraldine at the door.)

Charles Here she comes my inspiration.

(Geraldine enters – refreshed.)

Geraldine Thanks, I needed that. *(Pause.)* Is something wrong?

Charles I was just saying how well you're doing. With your recovery.

Geraldine What exactly did you tell Peter about my –

Charles That you were nervous about getting back on stage – you're doing great!

Peter Yes. That's what he said.

Geraldine Charlie! You're so sweet! And such a talented man too.

Charles Stop it.

Geraldine He is isn't he?!

Peter Who? Charlie boy here? Oh, yes.

Charles Well don't sound surprised!

(Charles gives Peter a warning glance.)

Geraldine Silly man.

Peter Let's get on with it shall we?

Charles *(Gesturing to an empty chair.)* After you.

Peter Yes. I'm in the chair. Aldine over there...

(They prepare to work on the scene.)