

## **The Women by Clare Boothe Luce**

### **Character Breakdown**

#### **41w (doubling)**

#### **\*\*The Role of Little Mary has been pre-cast\*\***

**Mary Haines- Mid - late 30s**, Mrs. Stephen Haines, is a glowing, contented wife and mother from a well-off family, who lives in comfort and style in New York City. Mary Haines is a gracious, kindly hostess, deeply devoted to her husband and two children, and is a helpful, patient friend -- a perfect image of the traditional "good woman". She has dignity, ease, and elegance, feeling at home in the smart circle of her socialite friends, but she is also reasonably down to earth. She has a good sense of humor, and can laugh at herself, although a touch of pride can make her guarded and self-conscious. Reasonably confident and self-assured, in moments of emotional distress she can be persuaded and influenced by others. Mary is a warm and helpful friend, who tolerates with loving amusement the various quirks and cruelties of her lady chums -- at least until the effect on her own life becomes too negative, at which point she learns to keep such friends at more of a distance.

**Sylvia Fowler- Mid - late 30s**, (Mrs. Howard Fowler) is a wealthy socialite, a society matron from the smart set, who lives in comfort and style in New York City. Sylvia's forceful personality, inflated sense of her own importance, vicious fondness for scandal and gossip, and chilly, bossy, catty demeanor hides a basic discontentment and insecurity. Sylvia is witty, and can be bright and sparkling upon occasion, but her lack of self-awareness and tendency to overshare often make her look the fool. She is elegant and fashionable. She declares herself devoted to her female friends, but in reality, her jealous temperament and love of dishing the dirt led her to devalue and undermine said friendships until, by the end of the play, she is left with very few.

**Crystal Allen- Mid - late 20s**, begins the play as a salesgirl behind the perfume counter at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City. While she is a glamorous and seductive woman, her lower-class background gives her a hard manner and a bit of a rough edge. She is a gold-digger and social climber, looking for a ticket out of retail, and willing to flirt and manipulate her way into someone else's bed to get it. She is described as "terribly pretty and clever", as "having those eyes that run up and down a man like a searchlight", and as a "blond floozy", (the hair color presumably unimportant, and the line easily changed.)

**Edith Potter- Early - mid 30**, (Mrs. Phelps Potter) is a well-off society matron, living in New York City. Trapped in a tedious marriage and constantly in the middle of one pregnancy or another, her main enjoyments are eating, relaxing, and dishing the dirt with her friends. Edith has expensive, but not fashionable tastes, and unlike her stylish friend Sylvia Fowler, she is known to be a little sloppy. Edith may gossip in the background, but her passive ways do guarantee that she never has a direct falling out with any of her friends.

**Peggy Day- Early - mid 20s**, (Mrs. John Day) is a young, pretty, sweet, and anxious woman. She has a soft, impressionable temperament, and is described as someone whose character “has not, and will never quite, jell.” She is often quite passive, a follower, and can be easily led by her friends with stronger characters. She is generally positive and optimistic, hoping to see the good in everyone. Sentimental and domestic, Peggy makes a good housewife, caring for her husband and hoping for children.

**Nancy Blake-30 - 40**, is a sharp, intelligent, adventurous woman: a published author and world traveler. She is a bit cynical and always ready with a wisecrack, but she has a dignity and moral center to her and despises the vicious gossip with which her fellow women tear each other down. Noted in the stage directions as “worldly, yet virginal,” Nancy is single and independent, describing herself as “what Nature abhors, I’m -- a virgin, a frozen asset.” She spends much of her literary power writing books which criticize the modern woman for being assertive -- but also backstabbing, materialistic, and lacking in maternal feeling, qualities which Nancy observes among her acquaintances in the smart set. Nancy is constantly annoyed by and at odds with Sylvia Fowler, an overbearing, catty acquaintance, and the two trade insults with enjoyment. Nancy champions her friend Mary Haines for being content to be “a woman,” a loving wife and mother.

**Little Mary- 11** is the daughter of Stephen and Mary Haines. She is a sturdy, healthy, and outspoken girl, with a strong sense of herself. Just on the brink of puberty, Little Mary is emotional and anxious, angry that her little brother can get away with teasing her about her body and scared that she will turn into a boring “lady” who will get all “lovey-dovey and silly.” Little Mary loves and trusts her mother very much. She is insistent and curious, always asking questions, and trying to reconcile the complicated adult world with her straightforward child’s logic. **(THIS ROLE HAS BEEN CAST)**

**Mrs. Morehead- 50s - 60s**, (Mary Haines’ Mother) is a comfortable, well-off widow, living in New York City. Described in the stage directions as a “bourgeois aristocrat,” she has the dignity and bearing of a Duchess, though she is only a plain Mrs. With a great deal of life experience, she is calm and pragmatic, practically minded, with a low tolerance for fuss or gossip.

**Countess Flora de Lage- 50s**, is a wealthy, glamorous, and generous socialite who frequently throws grand parties and finds herself featured prominently in the society pages. Kind and friendly, she is also grandiose, vain, and frequently ridiculous. As she ages, not very gracefully, her gold-digging husbands (four total) remain young and handsome, and the Countess is easily seduced by whatever new beauty treatment will keep her looking youthful and fresh. The Countess is relentlessly cheerful and optimistic, however, and willingly jumps back into the marital harness with her latest beau, putting her trust in ‘l’amour, l’amour!’

**Miriam Aarons- Late 20s - early 30s**, is a Broadway glamour girl and a successful singer and dancer, whose charm and hard work have enhanced both her stage career and her love life. Miriam is brisk, breezy, fun, and friendly. Bright and sociable with the women she encounters, and tolerant of good-hearted fools, she does not suffer hypocrites, and gets into some little trouble when she speaks her mind. Tough and practical, Miriam looks out for herself and her friends, and is not afraid to get her hands dirty to get ahead.

**Jane- Early 20s - early 30s.** Jane is employed as housemaid by the Haines family, and is a helpful, loyal servant to her mistress, Mary Haines. She is lively and expressive, not afraid to give her opinions unasked, or subtly scold Mary's friends for any number of regrettable behaviors. **(Doubles as The Girl in Distress)**

**The Girl In Distress-** The Girl in Distress is attending a swanky party at the sophisticated nightclub, the Casino Roof, when she suffers a mortifying accident with the strap of her gown. She seeks refuge in the ladies powder room, in search of a safety pin. The Girl in Distress is embarrassed, but not too embarrassed to talk about it. She is horrified, talkative, and emotional.

**First Hairdresser-** is employed at Michael's, a high-end spa and salon in New York City. She is professional, practiced, and poised, with a gift for upselling and the ability to flatter and ingratiate herself with her older, insecure, socialite customers. **(Doubles as First Salesgirl)**

**First Salesgirl-** works at a high-end women's dressmakers' in New York City, where she is kept busy picking up after indecisive and messy customers. She has some choice words to say about women who blow through a clothing store like a hurricane, declare themselves dissatisfied, and leave without a purchase.

**Second Hairdresser-** works at Michael's, a high-end New York City spa and salon. A brisk and clever professional, who has a great deal of patience with the antics of her society customers, and a talent for upselling and fawning over those ladies who are older and insecure about their appearance. **(Doubles as Second Salesgirl)**

**Second Salesgirl-** is employed at a high-end women's dress shop in New York City, where she works hard to keep things neat in the wake of messy, inconsiderate customers. She joins her friend the First Salesgirl in complaining about the spoiled, picky women who are their customers, but asserts that men are just as destructive and indecisive when they are trying on hats.

**Pedicurist-** is a hard-working employee at Michael's, a high-end spa and salon in New York City. She patiently paints the toes of the fidgety Countess de Lage and helps her to walk around without smearing the enamel. Like her salon coworkers, the Pedicurist is excellent at flattering the customers, making sure that older and plainer ladies feel like they are young and beautiful. **(Doubles as Model 1 and Cigarette Girl)**

**First Model (Miss Myrtle)**- Likely new to modeling. Likely gets corrected a lot on posture.

**The Cigarette Girl**- The Cigarette Girl works at the Casino Roof, a swanky nightclub in New York City. She is a weary professional,

**Olga- Early 20s - late 30s**, is a manicurist at Michael's, a high-end spa and salon in New York City. With a hasty string of customer service jobs behind her, Olga is not the best or hardest worker. She is very friendly and talkative, and an eager and able gossip. Olga has a lot of fast-paced, comic dialogue, and a knack for flattering her rich, pompous, aging clients and abusing them behind their backs. This role requires an actor with good comic timing. **(Doubles as The Debutante and The Fitter)**

**The Debutante**- The Debutante is a young woman, attending a swanky party at the sophisticated Casino Roof in New York City. She is prevented from having any fun by her overbearing mother, who is constantly criticizing her behavior.

**The Fitter**- The Fitter works in a high-end women's dress shop in New York City, taking measurements for alterations after customers have made their purchase. The Fitter is a hard-working, detail-oriented person.

**Euphie- Early - late 20s**, is employed as a maid at Michael's, a high-end spa and salon in New York City. She is kept busy cleaning up after messy customers and chasing after careless women who wander around with mud-masks on their face. Euphie is hard-working, polite, a little exasperated, and knows how to flatter and soothe those customers who are worried about their appearances. **(Doubles as Maggie, Nurse, and Sadie)**

**Maggie- Late 40s - mid 60s**, is a cook in the well-off household of Stephen and Mary Haines. She is a wise, knowing woman, with confidence and some cynicism about romantic relationships and marriage. Maggie has many wisecracks and clever observations to make about the battle of the sexes and the ways in which men and women hurt and misunderstand each other.

**Nurse**- The Nurse is in charge in the maternity ward where Edith (Mrs. Phelps Potter) is resting after the birth of her child. Her professionalism and patience are tried by Edith's obnoxious ways, and she is increasingly annoyed as Edith smokes while nursing, gossips loudly, and complains about her delivery experience. She is clearly a strong, practical woman, with an experience of life's dark side.

**Sadie**- Sadie is the wise, knowing attendant stationed in the ladies' powder room at the swanky nightclub, Casino Roof, in New York City. She is a hard worker, and very helpful, providing safety pins in the case of garment mishaps, or gin and bromides for emotional distress.

**Miss Fordyce- 30s - 50s**, is employed by the Haines family as a governess to their two young children, Mary and Stevie. Miss Fordyce is a brisk, stern, and cool woman. A firm disciplinarian and traditionalist, she believes that this is a man's world. **(Doubles as Exercise Instructress)**

**Exercise Instructress- Early 20s - mid 30s.** is employed in the exercise room at the Elizabeth Arden salon in New York City, paid to whip the spoiled society matrons of the smart set into peak physical shape. She has a strong personality, a brisk, firm, and martial manner of teaching, and a great deal of self-discipline.

**Head Saleswoman (Miss Shapiro)-** Head Saleswoman at a high end dress shop in New York City. She is an organized, confident manager, who commands her sales floor with an eagle and an iron fist. She scolds misbehaving models and offers the greatest customer service to her preferred clients. **(Doubles as First Society Woman and Miss Watts)**

**First Society Woman-** The First Society Woman is a wealthy, spoiled New York City matron, attending a swanky party at the Casino Roof. She is a very supportive friend, interested in her chum the Second Society Woman's dietary triumphs and vacation woes.

**Miss Watts- Mid 20s - late 30s** works as a secretary for Mr. Stephen Haines, a broker with offices in New York City. She is brisk, efficient, and businesslike, with a chilly and heartless manner.

**Second Saleswoman-** The Second Saleswoman is employed at a high-end dress shop in New York City. She is brisk, businesslike, and fairly tactful. **(Doubles as Miss Trimmerback and Second Society Woman)**

**Miss Trimmerback- Early 20s - early 30s.** is a notary, employed at the broker's office of Mr. Stephen Haines in New York City.

**Second Society Woman-** The Second Society Woman is a rich, spoiled, self-centered socialite, attending a swanky party at the Casino Roof, a sophisticated New York nightclub. She should be incredibly smug and obnoxious.

**Corset Model-** The Second Model is a confident, shapely woman, who wanders the floor at a high-end dressmaker's shop in New York City, selling the latest in shapewear:

**Princess Tamara-** a royal from Russia (Russian Accent a plus), this elegant young lady now uses her title to move about in the best social circles of New York City, while her reduced circumstances require her to model at a high-end dressmaker's shop. She is fashionable, beautiful, and bold, with lots of dignity and class, but she is not above a cutting remark or jab when she believes it is deserved. **(Doubles as The Dowager)**

**The Dowager-** is chaperoning her young, debutante daughter, at a party on the sophisticated Casino Roof. She is a stuffy, controlling mother, overly concerned with propriety, who is horrified to see her daughter drinking champagne and flirting with boys.

**Lucy- 40s - 50s**, runs a hotel in Reno, Nevada, an establishment which is frequented for long periods of time by women waiting for an easy Reno divorce. She is gruff, pragmatic, and plainspoken, with a bit of good humor thrown in. Lucy does sing a verse or two of a folk song, but the role does not require an actor with a melodious voice. **(DOUBLES AS COOK)**

**Helene-** is a maid employed by Mr. Stephen Haines to wait on his second wife, Crystal, a woman who enjoys the luxuries that her advantageous marriage has granted her. Helene is chic, dignified, and responsible, and tries politely hold Crystal to the standards of appropriate behavior, without success. **(DOUBLES AS MRS WAGSTAFF)**

**First Cutie-** The First Cutie is on the town, at a swanky rooftop party at the Casino Roof in New York City. She is fashionable, pretty, and out for fun. She is supportive of her friend, the Second Cutie, and listens actively to her stories of relationship woes. **(DOUBLES AS MUD MASK)**

**Second Cutie-** The Second Cutie is a pretty, glamorous girl, out on the town with her best chum and her gentleman friend. In the powder room at the swanky club Casino Roof, the Second Cutie complains copiously about said gentleman friend, and his insistence on spending holidays with his wife and children.

**\*\*Those characters that aren't doubles, may be asked to fill in for other scenes.**