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# Bette & Joan

Anton Burge

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



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*BETTE AND JOAN* was first produced by Ann Pinnington in association with Andy Jordan at the Arts Theatre, London, on 6th May 2011. The performance was directed by Bill Alexander and designed by Ruari Murchison. The cast was as follows:

**BETTE DAVIS** ..... Greta Scacchi  
**JOAN CRAWFORD** ..... Anita Dobson

## CHARACTERS

**BETTE DAVIS** – Hollywood actress, 54. A star who has nothing to prove. Brisk, no nonsense, to the point of abruptness, caustic, brittle, difficult, vulnerable and funny. At the time of filming, a low point in her life and career. Has worked steadily through the '50s, though often with unrewarding results. Angry at the state of the business and her position within it. A professional to her fingertips. Four times married, recently divorced, mother of three (two adopted). All that matters now is the work.

**JOAN CRAWFORD** – Hollywood star, admits to 54, though is actually 58; as an actress has much to prove. Glamorous, neurotic, moody, vulnerable, generous and alcoholic. Desperate for approval. Comfortable playing the star, though there is always an uncertainty about this, stemming from a childhood that lacked education and love, from which she struggled, reinventing herself, to survive in the toughest of businesses. Four times married, recently widowed, mother of four (all adopted). Throughout her life, in spite of adversity, the image of Joan Crawford, star, continues to shine.

## SCENE

The action of the play takes place in Hollywood during 1962.

## A NOTE ON COSTUMES

**BETTE:** Day clothes should be blocks of colour: black was her most common choice, simple, tailored, unaffected, often cotton or linen. A love of jewellery all antique, in particular charm bracelets. Also worn: broaches or broach pins, rings and a watch and pearls. Hair at the time of filming the famous outgrown page boy bob of 'All About Eve'.

Robe and dressing room attire, look to 'All About Eve' dressing room scene for inspiration.

**JOAN:** Immaculate, serviceable and matching. In pastel shades and often patterned in contrast to Bette's. Accessories all made in the same fabrics, including a hat, shoes covered with a film of plastic. Jewellery: a coordinating set of stones that would link with her outfit.

Robes: feminine and flowing, like gowns.

Hair can be the same as worn for Blanche.

**JANE:** Baby Jane Hudson gown, with pale blue sash. Look to the appropriate scene in the film.

**BLANCHE:** Has two distinct gowns in the film, one in red/rust and the other in blue: both deep, rich colours.

**GENERAL NOTE:** Colours should remain slightly muted to give the impression of grainy colourisation, as if of a black and white film that has been coloured. Some elements of the set could remain more black, white and grey.

## MUSIC

Louis Prima: 'Sing, Sing, Sing' (Instrumental Version)



## ANTON BURGE

Actor and writer Anton Burge has written eight plays for women, all focusing on the lives of celebrated women of the 19th and 20th centuries, including *Whatever Happened to the Cotton Dress Girl?*, *G & I* (both New End Theatre, Hampstead), *Storm in a Flower Vase*, (Arts Theatre) *Bette & Joan* (Arts Theatre, UK tour and a Broadway production planned for next year), and the forthcoming *Lady Mosley's Suite* and *Gung Ho Gertie!* He is also the author of a forthcoming book

*Portraying Elizabeth*, a study of actresses' interpretations of Elizabeth I, from Sarah Bernhardt to the present day.

## THANKS

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*for Ann Pinnington*



## ACT ONE

*(8:45 a.m. The Producers Studio, Melrose Avenue, Hollywood. Voices off: Technical, Wigs, Wardrobe staff etc: 'Good morning Miss Crawford'/Monty has left your lashes for you to choose, Miss Crawford/'How are you today Miss Crawford?'/^Set up will be ready for Blanche's bedroom at ten'.)*

*(Lights up on a modest dressing room/trailer. A wheelchair for the character of Blanche, off centre. Dressing table, the mirror cut away, and chair centre stage, close to the adjoining wall of the other dressing room. All upholstered items covered in a layer of plastic. Also present: clothes rail, drinks cabinet and telephone.)*

*(All is spotless and clinical, the clothes on the rail wrapped in cellophane. Luxury is expressed by miscellaneous items such as a large amount of flowers, clothes and feminine accessories: perfume bottles, make-up etc. Pepsi Cola bottles are abundant. A fridge full of Pepsi bottles at the rear of the room. There are also piles of fan mail and photographs to be signed and scripts to read. JOAN often refers to, and touches for assurance, a diary schedule.)*

*(The overall visual effect is that of a monochrome, as in a black and white movie, which has been colourised, giving a period and slightly muted effect.)*

*(Across the other half of the stage a matching dressing room/trailer will be revealed, in reverse. A solitary gardenia plant is the only indication of opulence. A mirror image of the other dressing room, minus the wheelchair, an armchair in its place. Also a wig block upon which sits the Baby Jane Hudson wig. On the dressing table just the essentials and a thermos jug of*

*coffee, photographs of BETTE's family and dogs, cigarette boxes, cigarette containers (she had a particular fondness for china animal cigarette pots, often in the shape of chickens and cockerels), and ash trays are everywhere. Both stars have open, marked, worn scripts on the set at all times.)*

*(The main mirrors, each attached to the dividing wall, are in fact suggested and is full length downstage, so that when BETTE and JOAN come to look at their own reflections together, they are in fact looking at each other.)*

*(Both rooms have director chairs, with their names embossed on the back, facing the audience as the curtain rises.)*

*(Lights up JOAN CRAWFORD's dressing room. JOAN, lying on the floor, knees raised, immaculately turned out in shorts and exercise blouse, her hair pristine covered by a lace net, practises deep breathing. Her eyes are concealed by an eye mask. Her heeled 'Pump Me' slippers remain on even when exercising. Each ensemble she wears matches.)*

*(After a moment the telephone rings. She rises, removes the eye mask and composes herself, checks her perfect make-up, including rubber tyre lips, heavy eyebrows etc, dabs her brow with a chiffon handkerchief, and answers the telephone. When she speaks it is with careful, modulated tones. Like many alcoholics she perspires. Her movements are always poised, somewhat athletic, as if she is constantly on camera. She consults her watch.)*

**JOAN.** Good morning, Patricia (*pronounced Patreecia*) and isn't it a beautiful morning... Thank you for my call, you were right on time... Yes, dear; yes I know the scene... Now would you mind telling them that I refuse to rehearse with anything but an empty plate. When the camera is ready to shoot the scene, and only then, they may bring the rodent in – I almost said animal – they look so big, but I believe it is a rodent,

the rat? Would I be correct?... Bless you... No I'll be ready. Take one... Yes, that is what I said, take one and that will be the take Bob will print...

No, not at all...and while we are on the subject the temperature in my room isn't correct, it is far too hot... And make sure the set is the same... Oh, and remind Bob, no close-ups after four-thirty... Yes, dear, curfew... That will be all.

*(She replaces the receiver. She then rises and puts on a long robe, accentuating her shoulders. In so doing she undoes her shorts and steps out of them, under the robe, leaving them on the floor.)*

Wonderful to do these types of scenes, wonderful to be in front of the camera again, marvellous to feel the warmth of the lights. It's what I was born to do. The only thing I've ever truly known. It's my life and I'm so glad to be a part of this magical business. To show my fans I had the balls to return.

*(She settles in the wheelchair.)*

We did the dead canary scene yesterday. I had rehearsed with an empty plate, I always insist on that, and when the camera was ready I said 'You may bring on the platter'. But there was some kind of technical hitch; even so I kept my focus, kept the emotion (I don't think one should rehearse too much) and was very firm and said: 'Take the bird away'. Whatever had to be fixed was fixed, and when we came to shoot, take one, there it was, in the can!

Wonderful to be a perfectionist and that's what Joan Crawford is. She's a tough dame. She's got balls.

So exciting. I was telling Louella Parsons only yesterday – she's writing one of her beautiful articles about me – I said, 'Louella, I've always felt this way about making pictures. I want to bring the audience, my lovely fans, so close, that I have them in the palm of my hand. And when you go to a movie theatre, and find that

you have done that, with a couple of scenes, well, as an artist, that's very rewarding. Very.'

I did rehearse a great deal with the wheelchair though, and my arms are as firm as a bat for it... I feel Blanche Hudson, movie star, the marvellous part I'm creating, and Joan Crawford, movie star, deserve it. I said to our director, Bob Aldrich, when we first discussed the role:

*(JOAN rises and opens her robe wide, revealing her underwear – her blouse can be velcro-fastened to make the reveal one take with the robe.)*

Take a look, Mr. Aldrich, take a good look. This is what you've got to work with. This is Joan Crawford and she's one hell of a star! *(A beat. JOAN finally closes her robe)* I do that with all my directors. It's one hell of an ice breaker.

*(Sitting at her dressing table she picks up a big bundle of knitting.)*

I'm loving playing Blanche Hudson, and Bette Davis, my co-star, well...well she's a very interesting personality, very.

The press, Hedda and Louella included, are trying to kick up the dust between us, so Bette gave a press release the other day: 'Getting along just fine, sorry, no feud!' So original.

Though I must admit I would prefer it if she refrained from telling the reporters that Joan Crawford is a very accomplished motion picture star, but *she*, Bette, is an actress!

*(The sound of heels coming swiftly along the corridor. Voices off: 'Good morning Miss Davis', 'Page 72 Miss Davis', 'Hi Bette', 'The staircase scene, Bette, careful on the stairs'. BETTE remains silent before exclaiming: 'Ha!' to a request. JOAN rises from the dressing table and goes to the door.)*

**JOAN.** *(at the doorway, to BETTE)* Good morning, Bette, dear. And how are you today?

**BETTE.** *(ignores her. Entering)* Oh shit. Good manners.

**JOAN.** *(to herself)* Yes, sir! Getting along fine, sorry, no feud!

*(JOAN slams the door and goes back to her knitting. Cross-fade to BETTE's dressing room. BETTE slams her door behind her)*

**BETTE.** They don't have to damn well tell me about playing scenes on stairs. Spent half my life goin' up 'em, the other comin' down. Christ!

They think just because I've been in the business two hundred years, and have something of a reputation, I'm gonna fall on my ass, break my back again and file an insurance claim!

*(The telephone rings.)*

Jesus! It's the kids of today who do that, *not* the professionals. *(Into the receiver)* Yep. Sure, I know, they just told me.

*(She replaces the receiver, cutting the other voice off. Begins to get ready for the day's shooting. She doesn't waste a second, is rarely still, a mass of energy. In time she will smoke and drink a cup of coffee from the thermos jug on her dressing table.)*

Don't they remember I was at Warner Bros. Studios, this very studio, for eighteen years, till those sons of bitches decided Battling Bette was too expensive a commodity? Not that I evah got what the male stars got. Oh boy, no! But then why would I? I'm a female!

*(The telephone rings again, interrupting her preparations.)*

Gonna rip that sucker out the wall one of these days! *(Into the receiver)* Well?... Has it turned up then? Just let me know when it does. Said it damn well should have been here by now.

*(She bangs the receiver back onto the telephone. Continues to get ready)*

But when it comes to staircases don't tell me to be careful!

Christ, if I'd been careful, wouldn't have had the career I've had. *Jezebel* (pronounced 'Jezeble'), *Dark Victory*, *Little Foxes*, they all had sets dominated by staircases, *All About Eve's* 'bumpy night!' on a staircase. Why, in *The Letter*, the picture opened on stairs, and was frankly, god damn it, *the* greatest opening sequence *evah* played on film, no question about it!

*(She rises, mid preparation, caught up in the memory, and in time acts out the scene, reliving her former triumph. The lighting changes, closing in about her to give the effect of the 1940 melodrama. The sound of a projector running.)*

The credits roll. The Malay moon shines down on the sleeping rubber plantation of Robert Crosbie. The rubber drips, the servant boys drowse... All is silent. Quiet as the grave.

Suddenly a shot rings out, a bird flies out of the jungle, then another shot and another and Mrs. Crosbie – me – follows a stumbling man from the bungalow, down the veranda steps, emptying a barrel-load of bullets into him.

We hear the click of the last report, the dust begins to settle and the moon emerges from behind a cloud. Close up on me as I stare at it; widen eyes as if guided by it. *Genius!*

*(The light reverts to the set once again and colour washes over her. She returns to the dressing table.)*

The (often pronounced 'thee') greatest opening of any picture, before or since, no question about it. And they tell me to be careful! Huh!

*(Lights up on JOAN as BETTE removes her clothes, down to her petticoat, and puts on a plain white robe and slippers; the look reminiscent of Margo Channing in 'All About Eve'. Both sit at their dressing tables. JOAN adds finishing touches to her make-up and also lotion to her skin. In time she will also apply scent from an atomiser. BETTE, pinning up her hair, removes her day make-up with cold cream, before applying the full Jane hag mask.)*

**JOAN.** Always the same, every day, nine a.m. on the dot. Never 'Hello' or 'Good morning' to anyone. So rude.

Whereas I love a warm welcome whenever I enter a studio, even here in a part of Warner Bros. that I never came to before, where the 'B' pictures were churned out, even here. For Joan Crawford, every morning on any film set is a homecoming.

She's always been very difficult. I've always believed, though golly I would never say, it was due to a disorganised sex life. I can't think why more people haven't picked up on it. You've only to look at her to see that.

**BETTE.** *(looking at her figure before closing her robe)* Sex is usually such a bad bet; at least that has always been my experience.

Ha! Said that to her the other day. *(Nodding towards JOAN's dressing room)*

**JOAN.** She said, 'Sex is such a bad bet'.

**BETTE.** In a moment of weakness. To which she replied:

**JOAN.** I said, 'Gambling can be so bad for the figure, Bette dear!'

**BETTE.** I could have punched her in the fucking face!

**JOAN.** I knew she was a handful: a loose cannon. When I was first introduced to her I was just about to marry my second husband, the stage actor Franchot Tone. They were making a picture together – *Dangerous*, I think it was called – some turgid little pot boiler, that didn't really get any recognition...

**BETTE.** Won my first Oscar for a little picture called *Dangerous*.

**JOAN.** ...and Bette, a perfectionist even back then it seems, was always wanting to rehearse in the evenings; all eyes and talent!

**BETTE.** *Dangerous* wasn't a great script, but I knew I could make it into something. Franchot Tone was swell – screwed everything that moved, but a great actor nonetheless.

**JOAN.** I did eventually become *Mrs Franchot Tone*, though their squalid little affair left a bitter memory, from which our marriage never truly recovered. In time we both knew when it was over...and it was over.

*(A short beat. Then more brightly)*

Of course I insisted on remaining friends. I do that with all my ex-husbands. When they leave I change the locks and the toilet seats, but they'll always have a place in my heart.

**BETTE.** That bitch wouldn't let him out of her sight! Always hanging around the set, slowing things down with picnic baskets, afternoon tea and her fucking knitting. I remember thinking at the time: 'If I'm as desperate as her when I reach that age, I'll, I'll...shoot myself!'

**JOAN.** For some reason Bette likes to presume that I am older than she is. Check my birth certificate dear... *(Under her breath)* if you can lay your hands on one!

**BETTE.** Even when we'd wrapped she wouldn't let up. I even remember her taking a swipe at me for my choice of outfit the night I won my Oscar for *Dangerous*.

**JOAN.** Oscar night, 1936, Bette wore...well, I think it could only be described as...well, well...a bath robe. She was young back then – hard to believe, I know – with so much to learn about the industry. Labouring over her image as a working actress – we're all that, dear – but she has to remember that glamour is part of the business as well.

**BETTE.** I was even cornered in the ladies' room by a reporter, furious about it! She told me to start dressing and behaving like a star!

**JOAN.** Of course it was very different when I won my Oscar a few years later...

**BETTE.** Maybe I should have behaved like that clothes horse next door, feigned illness and received my award in bed. Not the first Oscar to hit her sheets I'm sure! Only to rise from the grave when she heard the announcement on the radio and the pop of a flashbulb outside!

**JOAN.** Even when close to death, one should always resemble a star.

**BETTE.** There was nothing wrong with her and nothing wrong with the outfit I wore in '36. I felt it was very fitting for a working actress.

*Sylvia*, that was the bitch reporter's name, informed her readers that she didn't like the parts I was fighting so hard to play: the girls with guts, the wicked ladies, the bitches, the tragic heroines: the *real* women, never seen on screen before.

**JOAN.** Winning the Oscar for *Mildred Pierce* meant so much to me. Not only was I accepted by my fans, but by my peers and the press as well. One journalist, *Sylvia*, used to write a beautiful column called 'Advice to the Stars!' She would always say 'Of course, Joan, you're the one star in Hollywood I never have to give advice to!'

**BETTE.** (*at the wig block, smoking*) wonder what *Sylvia* would make of Baby Jane?

A lot of people in the know begged me not to take this part, but I've got an inkling... Miss Crawford has too... something good's gonna come of this picture.

**JOAN.** This picture will put Joan Crawford right back on top!

(*A beat. Joan settles into the wheelchair*) Though I must admit I've never made anything quite like this before! Our director Bob Aldrich loves such evil subjects, vile,

horrendous things; so dark. An aging, psychotic child star terrorises her beautiful and glamorous movie star sister in a creepy gothic mansion full of shadows and secrets. This isn't really my type of brand, it's much more Bette's line.

**BETTE.** I'll give the critics a field day, I do know that! Directors in the past have often said to me: 'Now Bette, are you sure you want to go before the camera looking like that?' But my fans love it. They love to see me go out on a limb, and after all it's only looking as the character would look – isn't that what acting is all about?

**JOAN.** I mean I could never do that to myself, what Bette is doing, just plying on the greasepaint for effect, or do it to my public for that matter! Of course she's always been happy to make herself a grotesque...though a little bird did tell me she sat in the screening room last night and wept till her mascara ran.

**BETTE.** *Hell*, what am I supposed to do, work every fifteen years like Claudette Colbert?

Thank God I love it as I do, Christ, you've got to love it, love, *love* making pictures. At least that hasn't altered.

*(Cross-fade to JOAN picking up the telephone receiver)*

**JOAN.** Hello, who is this please?... Ah, hello there... *(More briskly)* Tell Mamacita be ready in 45 minutes to go on the set...bless you.

*(Replaces the receiver, rises and continues exercising)*

Mamacita, my maid. She's been with me for years. Never says very much, but then I don't want confidences. I want someone who, when I say, 'Have the coral suit with the long skirt, pressed and ready for me', boy, is she ready!

She's a very gifted packer, for travelling, Pepsi Cola functions, or filming on location. She realizes Joan Crawford has to damn well look her best for her fans, and she makes damn sure that I do.

Those wonderful, charming fans. Without them Joan Crawford wouldn't exist and I'd be back in the dirt of Kansas City. Some fans call me up—

**BETTE.** (*applying the chalky pancake make-up at her dressing table*) Much as I love making pictures, I certainly wouldn't give my fans my telephone number like somebody I could mention.

**JOAN.** Really, some fans call me—

**BETTE.** She actually gives her fans her telephone number! Jesus!

**JOAN.** And I *love* that. One called only yesterday, just to hear my voice, and to ask what I was wearing. (*Moved*) Such a beautiful, enchanting gesture...

When they stop on the sidewalk and say, 'Why look, there's Joan Crawford!' I reply, 'Why yes it is!', blow them a kiss and ask, 'And how are you today?' I owe that to them, *and* to always look my best. I never leave the house unless I look like Joan Crawford.

**BETTE.** She once said to me, 'I never leave the house unless I look like Joan Crawford!' (*Chuckles*)

**JOAN.** I made the mistake of saying that to Bette recently. I was trying to be civil, golly how I try, but since we've started shooting...well, let's just say someone's manners have been allowed to slide.

(*BETTE rises from the dressing table before studying her script, centre.*)

**BETTE.** Well, who the fuck does she expect to leave the house as then!

**JOAN.** She's so coarse. My motto has always been, 'If you want to see the girl next door, go next door!' And who wants that?

(*Exercising*) Every morning I say to myself, 'Treasure yourself. Thank you, God, for making me a flier and not pedestrian. Thank you for this lovely day; now what can I contribute to it?'

I believe that is wonderful advice. For me that means remaining vital, gorgeous and sexy. Oh, sex is very important, it keeps a woman looking young as well. I'm very proactive when it comes to sex. Learn from your lovers and move on!

As my stardom grew I learnt from the best: Spencer Tracy, Jeff Chandler, Rock Hudson, yes even Rock. Ah.  
(*A beat as she reminisces*)

Jackie Cooper, Cesar Romero, Greg Bautzer. Ah.  
(*A beat as she reminiscences*)

Douglas Fairbanks Junior, Vincent Sherman, Douglas Fairbanks Senior (just kidding!) and Yul Bryner: boy, what a king!

(*Coming to her senses, returning to her seat*) But for me the *real* King, oh my, *the* King: Gable. Gable every time. He was everything you would think him to be and more. Man at his most primeval, virile. The instincts of a wild beast. He had balls. It was a volcanic attraction we had for each other, a fire that only death could quench. He told our boss at MGM, Louis B. Mayer, that he wanted to divorce his wife and marry me. Papa Mayer, as we all called him, said, 'Marry that tramp Crawford? The daughter of a washer woman!' Gable had balls. But we never married, though no one but him would have stood up to Mr. Mayer like that.

(*Sincerely*) We loved each other right up until the end, through all our subsequent marriages: twenty-eight years, twenty-eight years of love. He taught me so much. He even understood my need to clean, knew that I had to have order and everything spotless. Like me he travelled with cleaning materials. He'd had an upbringing that he too wanted to wash away. I understood that. He had discipline. We both believed in it. Discipline in all you do.

**BETTE.** (*in dim relief*) The key to a female's success in this town is to simply be better! I can pick a decent script, never a decent man!

(**JOAN** picks up the receiver again, a handkerchief dabbing her brow.)

**JOAN.** Oh my. (*Into the receiver*) Patricia, Patricia, the temperature in my room hasn't been fixed, what seems to be the problem? ... It has? It can't have, dear... And the set, what temperature is that at now?... It should be at the level stated in my contract, always... And if it isn't, Patricia, you'll never work in Hollywood again... Thank you, dear, bless you. Love and eternal thanks.

(*She replaces the receiver and takes a slug of Pepsi. Lights fade up full on BETTE, make-up almost complete, hair still tied back, as she rises with her script and cigarette and exits her dressing room. Over the next segment of dialogue JOAN becomes angry and distressed, unravelling somewhat. This new JOAN, at odds with the sophisticated star we met initially, dons gloves and begins to clean her dressing room.*)

Such a pity standards have been allowed to slip in Hollywood. This would never have happened at MGM. Hollywood is fast becoming such a depressing place. I'm grateful, the most grateful human being in the world for what it has given me. It's given me my education, the power to adopt four beautiful children, to raise them, educate them. Hollywood has given me everything I ever owned; I will never be ungrateful to it for that. But now, oh my, you may *have it*. Where are the beautiful people, the moguls, the fathers to take care of us and guide us...the glamour, the *stars*—

(*A brief knock at the door. BETTE walks briskly in smoking a cigarette.*)

Come in... Oh hello, Bette. How can I...

**BETTE.** The running order has been changed.

**JOAN.** (*alert*) What do you mean?

**BETTE.** So we need to rehearse the lift—

**JOAN.** (*holding up her hand to silence BETTE*) It can't have been changed. I would have been told. Won't you sit down? (*She gestures towards the wheelchair.*)

**BETTE.** (*ignoring the offer*) Well it has, so we have to go over the lift again before Jane and Blanche head for the beach.

**JOAN.** But I don't understand. Bob was blocking for the rodent under the tureen scene last night, to shoot this morning. I've been preparing—

**BETTE.** Well, we talked last night, he and I, and it just made more sense to shoot it this way round and do the rat tomorrow.

(**JOAN** *tenses.*)

They're nearly ready for us out there.

**JOAN.** But I haven't prepared.

**BETTE.** (*ignoring her, waving her hand in the direction of JOAN's face*) And you'll have to calm all that make-up down.

**JOAN.** (*picking up the telephone receiver*) Well, that's rich, I must say...

**BETTE.** Who are you calling? I want to rehearse the lift before we shoot it! We don't have time—

**JOAN.** Why, Bob of course. I need to speak to him, to run through my thoughts, my emotions and—

**BETTE.** You don't have anything to say in the scene!

**JOAN.** (*trying to be civil but politely snapping, the receiver still in her grasp*) I understand what you want, but I'm not really happy about this, Bette, dear. Whether I have a line or not makes no difference. This isn't the first time schedules have been altered after one of your late night chats with *our* director.

**BETTE.** (*ploughing on*) Now when I lift you, remember what I said and move with me, don't become a lump of lead, or I'll *nevah* shift ya!

**JOAN.** I should have been informed!

**BETTE.** (*enjoying the situation*) OK, no need to get hysterical.

**JOAN.** It's no wonder I can never get hold of Bob in the evening!

And yes I do know about your condition. We've been through this, *several times*: because you broke your back a few years ago you—

**BETTE.** – I gotta be careful, so you need to help me on this one.

**JOAN.** But that still doesn't alter the fact that—

**BETTE.** Oh shit! I forgot to say good morning, didn't I?  
*Good morning.*

**JOAN.** (*a tight, momentary smile*) Good morning, Bette.

Now I really am going to have to speak to Bob.

**BETTE.** He's on the set, wrapped in a sweater; it's a goddamn igloo out there. Call him if you must, if you think it will make a difference.

**JOAN.** Of course it will make a difference! It's both of our names up there above the title, you know. I think you forget that sometimes.

**BETTE.** And for Chrissake don't play the scene like you're Little Bo Peep!

(**JOAN** then notices **BETTE**'s cigarette has almost burned down. Their eyes meet momentarily.)

(*After an embarrassing silence*) I suppose you don't happen to have an ash tray?

(**JOAN** shakes her head looking at the offending article)

A saucer?

(**JOAN** looks at **BETTE** incredulously)

Well... (**BETTE** looks at the floor as a possible solution for stubbing out the cigarette) Shit! I'll be back in a moment.

(**BETTE** exits and enters her dressing room fuming. She stubs out the cigarette and immediately lights another to calm herself, pacing the floor as **JOAN**, infuriated that the order of her day has been upset, picks up the telephone receiver. Lights change, to imitate black and white, the sound of a projector runs and the atmosphere,

*lighting, music etc. take on a heightened filmic moment, as from 'Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?')*

**JOAN.** Patricia, Patricia?... Yes it is important. I need your help. Is Mr. Aldrich there? I need to talk to him!... But I have to talk to him; you'll have to put him on, immediately... *(She waits nervously, anticipating BETTE's return.)* Bob!

**BETTE.** *(beginning to hear JOAN's raised voice)* Son of a bitch!

**JOAN.** Bob! Bob!... But I need to speak to him!, I need him here!... Yes, the way she is behaving... I need him here! Tell him immediately!

*(In the meantime BETTE has stubbed out her cigarette and exited her dressing room. Hearing part of the conversation outside JOAN's door she opens the door momentarily, unbeknownst to JOAN, and then lets it swing shut again.)*

*(Working herself up)* She's unbalanced... Yes! Yes, she is!... Thank you. Get him to come to Miss Crawford's dressing room as soon as you find him.

*(BETTE re-enters her dressing room and picks up the telephone receiver aggressively.)*

**BETTE.** Bob Aldrich, and make it snappy... *(Calmly)* Bob, yes I know. I'm here with Joan... Well, you don't have to bother rushing along here now; we've sorted the problem out... Yes it is all taken care of... yea, so we'll see you on the set... yes, yes she's fine. See you in a while. *(She replaces the receiver, menacingly, using her 'Baby Jane' voice)* Goodbye director!

*(Laughing outrageously as Baby Jane she exits. The lighting, music etc. reverts back. During this time, JOAN, with the help of Pepsi and the knowledge that Bob will be along soon, has composed herself. BETTE knocks and enters.)*

**JOAN.** Ah, there you are, Bette. I've been in touch with Bob and he agrees we need to make these decisions together.

**BETTE.** Oh really? I agree; I'm sure it is for the best.

**JOAN.** (*exerting some control*) Now, when we shoot the tablet business, Jane will just hand the bottle to Blanche won't she? You won't actually...

**BETTE.** Touch the pill?

(**JOAN** *nods* and **BETTE** *rolls her eyes.*)

I promise.

**JOAN.** I've had Mamacita sterilise the mouth tape, if you could be careful not to... (*She gestures towards her made-up lips. BETTE remains silent.*) You understand?

**BETTE.** Yeah.

**JOAN.** (*glancing at her watch*) So...

**BETTE.** Expecting someone?

(*A beat*)

**JOAN.** (*innocently*) No. (*Playing for time*) So what do you think of my Mr. Aldrich?

**BETTE.** Well, he's no Willie Wyler that's for sure.

**JOAN.** This is a marvellous opportunity for both of us. I hope you realise that, Bette.

**BETTE.** (*muttering*) A gig's a fucking gig.

**JOAN.** And Bob is a very celebrated director, very celebrated indeed.

**BETTE.** I'd hardly call *Sodom and Gomorrah* a celebrated picture!

**JOAN.** (*ignoring BETTE*) Of course, Bob and I have collaborated before.

**BETTE.** Oh, I'm sorry, were you in that?

**JOAN.** (*not amused. Looking at her watch*) Really.

**BETTE.** I think we can trust him to know what he's doing. I always think it's better to let directors get on with it, no question about it...

**JOAN.** If only *that* were true.

**BETTE.** Well, we both know what we've gotten ourselves into; it's hardly a remake of *Little Women*.

Now, Blanche is in bed tied up...

**JOAN.** (*a beat and another glance at her watch*) Oh, very well.

(**JOAN** rises and seats herself in the wheelchair with her hands raised above her head as if tied up.)

Like so?

(**BETTE** acts out untying **JOAN**'s hands and proceeds to drag her, hands clasped under **JOAN**'s bust, across the floor to the door. The process comprises a false start. **BETTE** does the untying motion again, identically, and they finish the action. **JOAN** picks herself up off the floor. **BETTE** casually gives her a hand to help; it is refused)

**BETTE.** Just don't become a lump a' lead, that's all.

**JOAN.** Thank you, dear, I have no intention.

**BETTE.** Well, don't forget.

**JOAN.** And don't drop me!

**BETTE.** (*heading for the door*) Oh brother.

**JOAN.** (*a beat, savouring this moment. She swallows some Pepsi*)

Oh, before you go, Bette dear, will you be viewing the rushes tonight? I thought we could maybe sit together.

**BETTE.** I nevah go to the rushes, you know that. Every goddamn take I make is worth printing!

**JOAN.** Oh? I'd heard you went the other night?

**BETTE.** (*pausing at the door, sniffing danger*) What?

**JOAN.** It's incredible, I would have thought – (*Gesturing at **BETTE**'s unkempt appearance*) I mean this being such a departure from your normal beautiful self: letting yourself go like this, I would have thought you'd have wanted to see what was happening. I know I would. (*On reflection, gaily laughing*) Not that I could ever do what you're do—

**BETTE.** (*at the door. Tightly*) Oh, I just remembered. I think Bob wants to shoot the *kicking* sequence later – did he tell you? Or perhaps there wasn't time to see you this morning?

**JOAN.** (*reverting to her former mood, working herself up*) Well, I would have thought that was obvious. No, of course he hasn't told me. (*Dabbing her forehead*) I had hoped... (*Beginning to realise he has let her down*) He should understand all these changes upset me. I know we are limited for time—

**BETTE.** – You're damn right there!

**JOAN.** – but I can't really believe he would do this; we have a history, he and I. I believed in him, still believe in him, but he needs to make changes with gentleness, with kindness.

**BETTE.** (*ignoring her, going for the kill*) Also there is a cut on page eighty-nine.

**JOAN.** *A cut?* (*She hurriedly flicks through her script*)

**BETTE.** Yea, I hope you don't mind. It holds me up.

**JOAN.** (*sipping Pepsi nervously*) I'll have to look at it... it, it just gets me so jumpy, filming at this, this...

**BETTE.** Pace.

**JOAN.** Thank you, Bette, yes, pace.

**BETTE.** As I said, we both know what we've gotten into. Not so different from when we started out, making pictures in a few weeks, now is it?

**JOAN.** No, I suppose not...

**BETTE.** Or television for that matter.

**JOAN.** Oh, don't say that word. You know how I feel about the enemy.

**BETTE.** (*looking into the mirror at JOAN's reflection*) Going out live, no rehearsal, fear of forgetting your lines! Well television is here to stay, let me tell you, so you better get used to it!

**JOAN.** Oh, Bette, no!

**BETTE.** But we don't have to completely surrender to it! There are still parts out there, and these are two of them!

**JOAN.** Well, I know. I was very aware of that fact when I discovered this property and brought it to you. (*With edge*) Remember?

**BETTE.** Look, you want this as much as I do, so I suggest we get on with it and make it work. Or do you want to do *What's my Line?* and *I Love Lucy* for the rest of your life?

**JOAN.** (*calming herself with more Pepsi before going towards BETTE with an outstretched hand, trying to find a glimmer of friendship between them*) Bless you for being so kind. I know we haven't always—

**BETTE.** I wasn't.

(*BETTE exits, slamming the door behind her. JOAN, agitated, perspiring again. Cross-fade to BETTE's dressing room. In time BETTE will complete her preparation.*)

**BETTE.** (*with satisfaction*) Ha! That showed her! As if I'm gonna sit back and let Aldrich and her call the shots; no way! (*Proudly*) I've always been a meddler, always wanted the finished product to be the best it could be, protected my work as I protected my family. Even with the odds stacked against me: bad directors, weak leading men, trite scripts!

(*Revering in the memory*)

I've had more people tell me I've *exhausted* them over the years, than any other thing! *Exhausting! Just too much!* My inherited vitality, from my mother Ruthie, hasn't gotten any mellower as time's gone on. She looked to the future and so do I! Something Joan of Crawford should try, instead of harking back to the old days!

Anyway, enough about her. We've got another ten days shooting together which I'm not *wild* about, but, well, that's that. I need the money and I will say this, it's a damn good script. It's gonna take guts, but then I've never been afraid of taking risks. No guts, no glory.

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