

Acting Edition

POTUS

Or, Behind Every Great Dumbass Are Seven Women Trying to Keep Him Alive

by Selina Fillinger

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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POTUS premiered on Broadway at the Shubert Theatre on April 27, 2022. The production was directed by Susan Stroman, with scenic design by Beowulf Boritt, costume design by Linda Cho, lighting design by Sonoyo Nishikawa, and sound design by Jessica Paz. The production stage manager was Johnny Milani. The cast was as follows:

HARRIET	 Julie White
JEAN	 Suzy Nakamura
STEPHANIE	 Rachel Dratch
DUSTY	 Julianne Hough
BERNADETTE	 Lea DeLaria
CHRIS	 Lilli Cooper
MARGARET	 Vanessa Williams
STANDBYS	 Gisela Chípe, Anita Abdinezhad, Jennifer Fouché, Lisa Helmi Johanson

POTUS was originally produced on Broadway by:

Seaview, 51 Entertainment, Glass Half Full, Level Forward

Salman Al-Rashid, Runyonland Productions,
Sony Music Masterworks, One Community

Jay Alix and Una Jackman, Jonathan Demar, Imagine Equal Entertainment,
Lucas Katler, David J. Lynch, Leonid Makaron,
Mark Gordon Pictures, Liz Slager, Ted Snowdon,
Natalie Gorman/Tish Brennan Throop

and the Shubert Organization (Mark Shackel, Executive Producer)

CHARACTERS

In order of their emotional proximity to POTUS (closest to furthest).

HARRIET – His chief of staff.

JEAN – His press secretary.

STEPHANIE – His secretary.

DUSTY – His dalliance.

BERNADETTE – His sister.

CHRIS – A journalist.

MARGARET – His wife. The First Lady.

SETTING

The White House.

Perhaps not the current administration, exactly – but broad strokes of past presidents, combined with stress dreams of future ones.

And, if we're being honest, an amalgamation of them all...

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Note on Text:

An indented and lone semicolon (;) indicates a charged moment of silence. A forward slash (/) indicates where the following line overlaps. Lack of punctuation at the end of a line indicates an interrupted thought.

Note on Set:

Simple, flexible, representative: a few chairs, desks, doors, some ornamental objects, arranged in various configurations to create the sense of endless offices and hallways. Allowing for multiple scenes to occur simultaneously in different parts of the White House.

Rules of the World:

The seven women are the only people onstage, but they frequently address colleagues, press, etc. that we can't see. Those lines should be delivered out, to us. We should have the sense that TVs are everywhere and the news always running – but we only hear soundbites as indicated, when a character clicks into what's being said. We should never see POTUS in his entirety, a leg or two at most.

Note on Casting:

American power structures are rooted in, and shaped by, white supremacy. Racism permeates our institutions, compounding gender and class inequity everywhere, but especially in electoral politics. This play is a critique of complicity in white patriarchy; thus, the following requirements speak to those dynamics and must be followed. International productions should analyze and reflect in their casting a similar understanding of marginalized communities' struggle for voice within their governing bodies.

In America: Bernadette is white. Margaret is Black. Chris is Black. Jean, Harriet, Dusty, and Stephanie can be played by actors of any ethnicity; but be aware that lines and relationships will land differently depending on the racial breakdown of the cast. Some of the insults will be more cringe, some less, depending on the privilege each character possesses. These are interesting dynamics to explore, but they should be interrogated consciously, with care for each community.

At least three of the characters must be women of color. Actors can be cis or trans. Age is flexible. Beauty is subjective. So long as they're fast, fierce, and fucking hilarious.

Note on Music:

When picking the BitchBeats song, think aggressive classic rock or punk rock: Joan Jett, Bikini Kill, Pussy Riot, etc... Please note: A license to produce *POTUS* does not include a performance license for any third-party or copyrighted music.

*For any woman who's ever found herself the secondary character
in a male farce.*

ACT I

1.1

(HARRIET *vs.* JEAN.)

HARRIET. Cunt.

;

JEAN. What?

HARRIET. Cunt.

JEAN. No.

HARRIET. It's not a question.

JEAN. No.

HARRIET. It's not a yes or no question.

JEAN. Publicly?

HARRIET. Yes.

JEAN. No.

HARRIET. Please stop saying no.

JEAN. How public? Who exactly was there?

HARRIET. *Washington Post*.

JEAN. Well

HARRIET. *Huffington Post*.

JEAN. They're hardly

HARRIET. CNN.

JEAN. Okay

HARRIET. *New York Times*, BBC, and three Chinese diplomats.

JEAN. The ones who speak English?

HARRIET. They all speak English.

JEAN. I think there was one last year who struggled with idioms, you know, like, slang, so it might have gone over / his head

HARRIET. Everyone heard it, everyone got it, two people *gasped*

JEAN. No.

HARRIET. *These are not questions, Jean, stop saying no.*

JEAN. He said the words, "My wife's a cunt?"

;

HARRIET. He said, "Please excuse my wife's absence. She's having a cunty morning."

;

JEAN. Well that's not so bad

HARRIET. Wow

JEAN. It's not! We can contain that. We all have cunty mornings sometimes. My son has them every week. You're clearly having one today

HARRIET. She was in the room.

JEAN. What?

HARRIET. Margaret wasn't absent, she was in the room. She entered late but she had been there for ten minutes when he

JEAN. Called her absent.

HARRIET. And a cunt.

JEAN. Cunt-y.

HARRIET. If this is you workshopping your response to the press right now

JEAN. I'm just processing, I'm trying to – Why didn't he see her?

HARRIET. She was sitting.

JEAN. And therefore invisible?

HARRIET. He was standing, so the diplomats felt like it would be rude to sit, so they were all standing, they were all standing in front of her, blocking his view and she was sitting.

JEAN. He stood for the entirety of the meeting?

HARRIET. He can't sit right now because of / the thing on his

JEAN. The thing on his – right.

I thought they were removing it.

HARRIET. Well they couldn't remove it last week because of the / shit with Israel

JEAN. Shit with Israel

HARRIET. And there was talk of doing it today but he got booked up: nine a.m. briefing, ten a.m. China, non-proliferation discussions in an hour

JEAN. Okay, but then

HARRIET. Two p.m. Leslie Hopper endorsement

JEAN. Okay, but afterwards

HARRIET. Three p.m. handshakes with the Jacobson twins

JEAN. Can't we reschedule them?

HARRIET. The two veterans who were blinded and maimed while saving their units in Iraq? I'm gonna say no

JEAN. I'm just spit-balling

HARRIET. Three p.m. handshake, five p.m. briefing, six p.m. pedicure

JEAN. Push the pedicure!

HARRIET. Have you *seen* his feet?

JEAN. Okay, blink, Harry, you're not blinking

HARRIET. Pedi, tux, then eight p.m. gala honoring FML!

;

JEAN. What?

HARRIET. FML! FML! The Female Models of Leadership Council.

JEAN. Okay, I think you need to include the Council part in the acronym because – do you know what that means?

HARRIET. I just told you

JEAN. No, but literally

HARRIET. Literally, I've bullied 200 feminists into attending tonight's gala and written thirty-seven drafts of POTUS's speech so that our female base doesn't literally shrink smaller than a nutsack in the snow! It's final hour, we're headed into reelection: FML!

JEAN. But if someone texts you FML it means

HARRIET. The point is he's booked, Jean! He's fucking booked, so they had to reschedule the procedure which is why Margaret entered the meeting late, she was talking to Dr. Rifson and she entered the meeting late and POTUS didn't see her – bing, bang, boom: "cunty."

JEAN. So Margaret agrees with Dr. Rifson that the abscess on his anus should be removed – and that makes her a cunt?

HARRIET. He's pissed she's insisting on surgery. His friend, Jerry, from college said that he had the same thing and that it just went away without surgery.

JEAN. What the fuck does Jerry know?

HARRIET. He said he should rub tea tree oil on it

JEAN. How does a person even get an anal abscess?

HARRIET. Jerry told him it can happen sometimes from ass play.

;

Ass play.

When it's rough.

Ass play

JEAN. I know / what ass play is

HARRIET. When it's rough ass play.

JEAN. *Stop saying ass play.*

;

Is that particular activity a plausible cause for *this* anal abscess?

HARRIET. How would I know?

JEAN. You're his right-hand.

HARRIET. Not for *that* activity.

JEAN. You're his chief of staff.

HARRIET. Exactly. You want to know about stuff like that, ask the First Lady.

JEAN. Right, like Margaret would ever go anywhere / near his

HARRIET. She would know if he was engaging in that kind of thing with anyone else

JEAN. Why would she know that?

HARRIET. Because it's HIM and it's HER and it's their weird marriage with all their weird "arrangements"!

JEAN. Well she and I don't have an "arrangement," so I can't just go up to the First Lady and ask if her husband is getting into rough ass play with some other

HARRIET. I'm just saying if you want to know

JEAN. WANT to know? I don't WANT to know. In the last three years, I've had to bail on seven first dates and my sister's mastectomy just to spin shit I don't WANT TO KNOW.

And right now I'm trying to figure out if my biggest problem today will be explaining why the President of the United States used the word "cunty" to describe his wife to three diplomats – OR if there is still something MORE awful involving ASS PLAY that I need to know about!

IS there, Harriet? Is this day about to become an oozing pustule on the anus of my week?

Or is everything *fine*?

1.2

(**MARGARET** vs. **STEPHANIE**. **STEPHANIE** has flung herself in front of the closed door, blocking **MARGARET**'s path. **MARGARET**, seething, wears an impeccable suit and Crocs.)

STEPHANIE. No!

MARGARET. I'm gonna punt that man's abscessed ass across the South Lawn and if you don't get out of my way I will shred you like the sad cardigan you are.

STEPHANIE. Ma'am, he really is busy

MARGARET. With what.

STEPHANIE. You know that I can't

MARGARET. If he's in there rubbing tea tree oil on his

STEPHANIE. He is not, Ma'am. Anymore. But he is in the middle of

MARGARET. I checked his schedule and I know he has a break right now.

STEPHANIE. Something came up.

MARGARET. Did it?

STEPHANIE. Yes, Ma'am.

MARGARET. Margaret.

STEPHANIE. Pardon?

MARGARET. Margaret or Margie. Do not address me as Ma'am. I sent a memo this morning.

STEPHANIE. Yes, Ma'am – Margaret – Margie – Why are we calling you by your name now?

MARGARET. To show how earthy I am.

STEPHANIE. Okay

MARGARET. (*Bitterly.*) Because apparently these days it's not enough to be wildly accomplished and deeply effective

STEPHANIE. Ohh is this about the

MARGARET. I've launched free lunch programs in 6,000 public schools but all the tweens can meme about are the stilettos I wore to one homeless shelter

STEPHANIE. Is that why you're wearing

MARGARET. (*Scathingly.*) What do *you* think, Stephanie? You think this was *my* idea? You think when I gave my speech as Valedictorian I said, "One day I will walk the halls of the White House in shoes that can double as flotation devices"? No! But there are children to feed, funds to raise, and *Time Magazine* is interviewing me today for their Women of Excellence series so I will not allow anything to distract from my work – (*Going for the door again.*) – *least of all*

STEPHANIE. Ma'am – Margaret – Margie – I am the Presidential Secretary and nobody enters that door without my say-so!

(She hits a wide stance, arms above her head in a V, hands clenched into fists.)

MARGARET. What's happening?

STEPHANIE. Harriet gave me a book about women taking up space in the workplace and I've read it twice!

MARGARET. Are you having a stroke?

STEPHANIE. I'm power-stancing, I am decreasing my cortisol levels and increasing my testosterone, thus increasing my confidence!

(HARRIET opens the door, hitting STEPHANIE hard in the back and knocking her over.)

OW!

HARRIET. Jesus. Stephanie, what the hell are you doing?
(*To MARGARET.*) What's on your feet?

MARGARET. Does *anyone* read my memos?

STEPHANIE. (*Frantically, to HARRIET.*) She wanted to see the president and I said no! My spine was in alignment and I used declarative sentences!

HARRIET. (*Soothing.*) That's great – Have you been listening to that playlist I recommended?

STEPHANIE. BitchBeats, yes Ma'am, very empowering, I listen to it every morning while I eat my overnight oats.

HARRIET. Why don't you go practice your power stances in the bathroom.

(**STEPHANIE** *scurries to the door, then turns back to say something.*)

MARGARET. That trash fire *must* be extinguished.

HARRIET. She's still in the room, Margaret – Yes, Stephanie?

STEPHANIE. (*A whisper.*) The merch for the Female Models of Leadership Council arrived.

HARRIET. Thank you.

(**STEPHANIE** *flees.*)

MARGARET. She's like a menopausal toddler.

HARRIET. Stephanie has a photographic memory and speaks five languages. To what do I owe the pleasure, Margaret?

MARGARET. I actually need a chat with POTUS, so if you'll just / excuse me

HARRIET. (*Blocking the door.*) He didn't mean it. He's in a lot of pain and it's clouding his judgment.

MARGARET. Your loyalty to my husband is admirable, and I hope you continue to feel fulfilled by your choice to trade youth and beauty for a life of service to him.

HARRIET. (*Darkly.*) Thank you

MARGARET. But if you do not let me speak to POTUS right now, I refuse to attend the Female Models of Leadership dinner this evening.

HARRIET. We both know that would hit your ratings harder than his.

MARGARET. Dammit, Harriet, you cannot prevent me from having a marital discussion with my husband!

HARRIET. I absolutely can, on any day during his term in office, but especially today, when he has a nuclear non-proliferation meeting in half an hour, a gubernatorial candidate endorsement in two, and an oozing pustule on his anus. I finally got him calmed down from your argument this morning

MARGARET. What argument? / It wasn't an argument

HARRIET. When you told him to stop behaving like his father, grow a pair, and have the procedure without anesthesia.

MARGARET. I had two natural births and one root canal with no drugs, he can certainly

HARRIET. He's not in his right mind and he's making terrible decisions

MARGARET. What else is new

HARRIET. (*Low.*) He wants to pardon Bernadette

MARGARET. He wants to PARDON / BERNADETTE?

HARRIET. Lower your voice! He had a phone call with her yesterday and you know how manipulative she can be, especially when he's feeling vulnerable

MARGARET. We've talked about this! You can't pardon someone just because she's your baby sister!

HARRIET. I know.

MARGARET. Our ratings would plummet! We would be crucified! She's wanted in three countries, Harry

HARRIET. *I know.*

MARGARET. Not to mention all the holidays we'd have to start spending with her if she were to get out – You know, Bernadette bought my daughter a dildo for her sixteenth birthday? And stole my ruby earrings, probably wears them as nipple piercings now

HARRIET. I KNOW I FUCKING KNOW, which is why we're not going to let him go through with it, but if you don't back off and let me handle this

JEAN. I'm sorry, did someone say something about Bernadette?

(JEAN stands in the doorway.)

HARRIET. Nope / don't think so, nobody said that

MARGARET. Of course not, nothing to worry about.

JEAN. Okay 'cause I'm going into the press room right now and if there's something I need to know

HARRIET.

You don't need to know
anything, Jean.

MARGARET.

Nothing to know.
Everything's fine.

(Pumping herself up, heading to the press room:)

JEAN. *(Cracking her neck.)* Okay let's go, fuck me

HARRIET.

(With weak cheer.) Go
get 'em! Woohh

MARGARET.

(With weak cheer.) You
got this! Knock 'em dead

JEAN. *(Exiting irritably.)* Oh shut up

1.3

(CHRIS vs. JEAN. CHRIS sits at Jean's desk, hooked up to a breast pump.)

CHRIS. Hi!

JEAN. Leave.

CHRIS. (*Cheerfully.*) And a cunty morning to you! What a time to be alive, isn't it?

JEAN. God, that thing is loud. You can't pump in my office.

CHRIS. Where else am I gonna do it in this hellish place?

JEAN. Not my problem. Put 'em away. How did you get back here before me?

CHRIS. I know a shortcut from the press room. I thought you handled it very well in there.

JEAN. You have food on your collar.

CHRIS. The twins just discovered projectile vomiting.

JEAN. I have an extra shirt you can borrow.

CHRIS. As much as I love your Steve Jobs aesthetic

JEAN. (*Loftily.*) Turtlenecks are universally flattering.

CHRIS. I'll stick with the vomit. How would you say your morning's going, on a spectrum of cocky to cunty?

JEAN. Do you have something for me, or are you just craving companionship since Greg left you?

CHRIS. Bahrain.

JEAN. What about it.

CHRIS. It's a country

JEAN. I know.

CHRIS. Involved in the nuclear non-proliferation discussions

JEAN. I'm aware.

CHRIS. Occurring in fifteen minutes

JEAN. *Get there.*

CHRIS. Bahrain is pissy about cunty.

JEAN. How do you know?

CHRIS. I've got a buddy at HuffPo who covers the area. The prime minister's unsettled by the fact that the president would be so blatantly disrespectful to someone so close to him.

JEAN. I don't think a government as cozy with Saudi Arabia as *Bahrain's* can really pass judgment on ours.

CHRIS. I don't think a government as cozy with Saudi Arabia as ours can really pass judgment on *Bahrain*.

JEAN. We're in bed with their oil, not their gender politics.

CHRIS. (*Enjoying herself.*) Is that your official comment?

JEAN. No.

CHRIS. Was it an *emphasized* cunty? Or more of a casual, throw-away / cunty?

JEAN. *What do you want, Chris?*

CHRIS. A comment.

JEAN. You got my comment in the press room.

CHRIS. I want a better one.

JEAN. I thought you said I handled it well.

CHRIS. (*Enjoying herself.*) Yeah, so handle it poorly for me and I'll make it anonymous.

JEAN. Very cute.

CHRIS. Speaking of fucking adorable, can you please tell Luke to stop sharing his snacks with Kenny? We're trying to get him out of the habit of sharing food at school because of his canola allergy.

JEAN. I'm not going to tell my kid to be less generous because your kid has trouble saying no. I'm raising a feminist.

CHRIS. Yeah, foisting his agenda onto someone who is too polite to refuse sounds super feminist.

JEAN. *Sharing* is not *foisting*, *grapes* are not an *agenda*, and you're *not supposed to be here*

CHRIS. I'm a White House reporter.

JEAN. Doing a fluff piece on the First Lady's excellence for *Time*. Sounds like someone's being phased out. Who are they replacing you with? Young Harvey? Younger Nate? That giggly boy from *Vulture*?

CHRIS. Listen

JEAN. No, *you* listen: You are a newly divorced mother of three with vomit on your neck and tit juice on your shirt. These guys can out-tweet you, out-text you, chug a Red Bull and work three days straight. Is it fair? No. Am I sympathetic? Sure. But don't think that means I'm going to let you stir shit up just to save your job.

CHRIS. Honey, I don't need to stir shit up: we got a president throwing his feces at the wall.

JEAN. There isn't a story in Washington smutty enough to get you back in the game, Chris.

CHRIS. That a challenge?

JEAN. That's a warning.

CHRIS. First Lady still going to the gala tonight?

JEAN. Why wouldn't she?

CHRIS. Might be feeling a bit cuntty.

JEAN. Don't use that language in my office, please

CHRIS. *Give it up, Jean*

JEAN. *Get off my dick, Chris.*

CHRIS. Is that your comment?

JEAN. Yes.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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