

BETTE AND KATE JOIN THE LINE!

A Play in One Act

by

Chuck Blasius and Robert Kahan

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SYNOPSIS

BETTE AND KATE JOIN THE LINE! finds Katherine Hepburn and Bette Davis in their 80s still taking Uta's acting classes, still struggling to make it in the cruel theatre world, ever-jealous of each other's flirtations with success, but never ceasing to be loving and supportive friends.

BETTE AND KATE JOIN THE LINE! was first presented by Incoact (In The Company of Actors) at the LaMama Galleria on December 2, 1995. It was directed by John Alban Coughlan with the following cast:

KATE ..... Chuck Blasius  
BETTE ..... Robert Kahan

CAST OF CHARACTERS

KATE, an actress in her eighties  
BETTE, an actress in her eighties

TIME

The mid-1990s, in a parallel universe

PLACE

Various locations around Manhattan

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Equity Audition Center  
Scene 2: An Audition Hall  
Scene 3: ABC Television Studios  
Scene 4: An Answering Service  
Scene 5: Stage Deli  
Scene 6: A Piano Bar  
Scene 7: Star Burger Coffee Shop  
Scene 8: Eugene O'Neill Theatre  
Scene 9: Bette's Apartment in the West 40s

Scene 1

(EQUITY AUDITION CENTER. In the dark, we hear KATE)

KATE

Hoke?

(A pause)

Hoke?

(A pause. Lights come up on BETTE and KATE, seated. BETTE looks askance at KATE. KATE looks front)

Hoke?

(A pause)

You're my best friend. No. Really. You are. You are.

BETTE

Christ! You're not going to do it like that, are you?

KATE

What the hell are you talking about?

BETTE

Like that. "You are. You are." You're saying it like he's the postman! These two people, they've been together for fifty years, for chrissake! She's losing her mind! Put some pathos into it. (Demonstrates:) You're my best friend. You are. You are.

KATE

Good God, she's a proud woman. Proud! She's been a schoolteacher. Never had anyone taking care of her. She's made her own way in the world. She isn't some simpering ninny. A cry-baby!

BETTE

Well, we'll see. All I know is that my performance as Daisy at the West Willingham Mountain Playhouse, summer of '91, no, '89, won the Straw Hat Summer Circus Award for Best Actress.

KATE

I was offered that production. I turned it down for a film. (To someone offstage:) Excuse me! Excuse me!  
(SHE points to the wall. Reads)  
No vocalizing!

BETTE

A film?

KATE

A featured role. Good, good script. Two weeks' work.

BETTE

This film. Did it have a name? Better yet, did your role have a name? Other than "Old Woman #4", I mean.

(SHE laughs)

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KATE

I played "Aunt Martha", the wise yet troubled confidante to the leading actress.

BETTE

What studio?

KATE

It was an independent film. All of the most daring, original work is being done independently these days. A brilliant, up-and-coming director. I'll be working on his next film just as soon as the financing comes through.

BETTE

And what was the title of this gem, this box office bonanza?

KATE

"Burnt Toast." Brilliant.

BETTE

Direct to video! It never even got a theatrical release!

KATE

It won the Audience Choice Award at the Daytona Beach International Film Festival.

BETTE

I rented it! You had one line!

KATE

My role was reduced to please the marketing executives.

BETTE

And the line was "I wet myself!"

KATE

My role will be completely restored in the director's cut, which will be released... shortly.

(A long pause)

BETTE

So? What number are you?

KATE

I was number five. Already been in there. Did my monologue, they told me to stick around, must be interested.

BETTE

Shit. I got here at eight-thirty and all I could get was one thirty-nine.

KATE

You've got to do better. Up with the birds, like me. I was up at three, had a refreshing swim, a bowl of wheat germ, got dressed, a brisk walk to the Equity Building and I was on the line at four-thirty. Got to grab the bull by the horns. The early bird catches the worm! A rolling stone gathers no moss!

BETTE

Go fuck yourself.

KATE

If you had gotten up early and been here on time to sign in, you would have been...

BETTE

Still waiting, just like you! Have you read for anything else lately?

KATE

Of course. I've had two auditions this week alone.

BETTE

What were they?

KATE

I read for the part of the Grandmother in LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD that TheatreWorks-You-To-The-Bone is producing. Think they make you assistant stage manager as well as act, good training. Auditioned for a film being produced by an NYU student. It's an updating of the old Spencer Tracy/Constance Bennett classic. It tells the story of a porn star who brings his black male lover home to meet his liberal parents, called "Guess Who Came At Dinner." No pay, but they promise lots of exposure. Good exposure. Lots of good exposure.

BETTE

Good luck.

KATE

And you?

BETTE

Well, I just got back from three weeks at Theatre Under the Sea, where I created the role of Baby Jane Hudson in the musical version of that old Warner Brothers chestnut, called "What The Hell Happened To You?" I played the role created by what's-her-name...

KATE

Miriam Hopkins.

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BETTE

Whatever. I was a little concerned that I would have trouble with some of the dancing because of my stroke, but it went splendidly. And the critics said Miss Hopkins couldn't hold a candle to my performance as Baby Jane, which was "full of fire and music!" I'll show you the clippings. Since then, I've been involved with a play that has had many, many readings all over the city. For christ's sake, put the damn show up on its feet already! Rent a theatre, get costumes, publicity, and, ah, well... the list goes on and on. They don't produce the way they used to.

KATE

Still just an eligible performer?

BETTE

There's a wealth of non-Equity work out there for women over... for middle-aged, mature women.

KATE

Middle aged? If you intend on living to a hundred and fifty-two, I suppose.

BETTE

Why should I limit myself by getting a useless Equity Card? My dear friend, Estelle Getty, didn't get her card until she was sixty-something!

KATE

It just smacks of unprofessionalism. I'm more interested in being taken seriously as an actress than in playing the Molly Picon role in a non-Equity dinner theatre production of COME BLOW YOUR HORN.

BETTE

I am interested in being taken seriously, which is why I would never consider wearing slacks to an audition. In my day, a woman improperly dressed would never make it past the casting office reception desk!

KATE

I get jobs with talent, not legs.

BETTE

Certainly not with those legs!

KATE

I can say with pride that I've never had to part my legs to get a part!

BETTE

Just what are you insinuating? A producer invited me to Hollywood many, many years ago. Picture called BAD SISTER. And I was to play the good sister. Can you imagine? I don't even remember who wound up playing it.

KATE

Miriam Hopkins. Made her a star.



BETTE

Anyway, this producer, he promised me a huge career in pictures. All for one simple "favor." Well, I gave him his walking papers. No. No. My career, my love, my life has always been the theatre. You can never call yourself an actress if you're not on the stage.

KATE

You should never call yourself an actress, that's for damn sure!

BETTE

Shall we talk Hollywood? You sure you want to go there?

KATE

I don't know what you're talking about.

BETTE

Shall we talk A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT? Does that ring any bells?

KATE

It was to be my debut! Jack Barrymore was consistently drunk on the set. Unprofessional. Vulgar. Constantly forgetting lines, camera blocking. He was making me look bad. Of course I had to say something to Selznick. I didn't want them to have a flop on their hands.

BETTE

In fact, he was making you look SO bad, they fired your sorry ass and sent you packing with a one-way ticket on the next freight train east.

KATE

That wasn't the only opportunity I was offered, you know.

BETTE

You didn't even get the chance to be box office poison! You were too busy proving yourself as sound stage poison!

KATE

As an actor, one must be concerned with the full picture, not just yourself. You're just one small part of the whole, and the whole is made up of individual details...

BETTE

Speaking of holes, shut up. The monitor is trying to say something. Lunch break? How dare they! Get the Equity Rep on the phone.

KATE

Doesn't matter to me; brought my lunch.

(SHE eats)

A quick bite and then we're gonna go, go, go! There's a go-see for the Feen-A-Mint Industrial at Nola.

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BETTE

Oh, no, I'm going to Twenty-One for lunch, like I used to go with my girlfriends. With hats on. Hold me a place.

KATE

I most certainly will not. If you're not there when they start, they'll know you're not the professional actress you say you are. You've got to put up with hardships in the theatre...

BETTE

Here I go. Good luck, Kate, I hope you get the part. When I think "laxative," you're the first thing that comes to mind.

KATE

I'll be there. I'll be waiting. Maybe a quick jog around Times Square, get those endorphins going.

(SHE stands)

Ooooooh, God. If only I weren't getting so old.

BETTE

Butcha are, Kate. Ya are.

(THEY exit. KATE immediately re-enters, briskly)

SEQUE

Scene 2

(AN AUDITION HALL)

KATE

Hi. I'm Katharine, but please, call me Kate. Everyone does. I've brought you a homemade date nut bread. I hope you like it!

(SHE hands out a wrapped package)

Now, I've learned the combination, but I'd prefer to do my song first. I'm more the "singer who can move well" type. Now, I've brought my up-tempo pop, as you requested, although I'm not really sure what that is. I'd also be happy to read from the script, if you like. Well, let's get this over with.

(SHE hands a very long piece of music to the offstage accompanist. A pause. SHE smiles at the audition panel. SHE nods to the accompanist. Silence)

That's it.

(Silence)

No, you don't understand. When I shake my head, that means I want you to begin playing. Keep your eyes on me, and when you see my head shake, that means I'm ready. Got that? Now, the song I'm going to be doing...

(Music begins)

What the hell are you doing? Stop. Stop. I didn't shake my head. I beg your pardon, I did not. Oh. Well. No. When I shake my head like this:

(SHE nods her head up and down)

That's when I want you to play. (Out front:) I'm so terribly sorry. A misunderstanding.

(HE begins to play. SHE glares at him. The music stops. Slowly, deliberately, SHE nods her head up and down as the music starts. SHE opens her mouth to sing)

No, no, that's too slow. It should be... what's the word at the top of the music? "Sprightly." That wasn't "sprightly", my dear. A little bit more sprightly, please.

(A pause)

Oh. Sorry.

(SHE nods her head. HE plays)

Oh, God, no, that's way too fast. I can't get through it at that speed without needing oxygen. If you can find a happy medium between those two, we're in business.

(SHE nods. HE plays. SHE sings)

SEE THEM OUT ON THE STREET AT NIGHT  
WALKIN'  
PICKING UP ALL KINDS OF STRANGERS  
IF THE PRICE IS RIGHT  
YOU CAN'T SCORE  
IF YOUR POCKET'S TIGHT  
DO YOU WANT A GOOD TIME?

KATE (CONTINUED)

YOU ASK YOURSELF  
WHO THEY ARE  
LIKE EVERYBODY ELSE  
THEY WANNA BE A STAR

BAD GIRL, YOU SAD GIRL  
YOU'RE SUCH A DIRTY BAD GIRL  
BEEP BEEP, UH-HUH

YOU BAD GIRL, YOU SAD GIRL  
YOU'RE SUCH A DIRTY BAD GIRL  
BEEP BEEP, UH-HUH...

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

(ABC TELEVISION STUDIOS. Lights up as BETTE enters, holding a script)

BETTE

How do you do, Mr. Director? So nice to meet you. Let me say that I have the utmost of respect for directors. Even those who direct soap operas. But I must say that this soap, ONE LIFE TO LIVE, is my favorite and I am delighted to be part of this ensemble and to be collecting a paycheck. And you will see that I will follow your direction down to the last letter.

(A pause)

No I won't put out my cigarette. So don't ask me again. Excuse me?

(A pause)

Of course I know my lines. All four of them! Do you know how many postcards I had to send to that damn casting assistant just to be an extra on this show? And now, after two years, they finally let me utter a few words.

(A pause)

Now let's set the scene. I am Nurse Hartwell at Cedars-Mt. Sinai Hillcrest Landview... Something Hospital. A little boy has had a car accident, and his mother comes rushing in from a neighborhood bar where she has been boozing and stripping. She runs over to me at the nurse's desk. Give me a moment.

(SHE performs her vocal exercises, puts out her cigarette)

Let's get started.

(SHE "acts")

"Your son, Christopher, is in surgery." Then the mother says something. Then I say "I have no idea." Then she says something else. Then I say "He's getting the best of care." Then she's got a long speech. Then I say "Go home now and get some rest". Then the mother exits and I then I think the camera should zoom in on my face, I really do, where I will be crying and, without words, express anguish, sadness, upsetness, on and on...

(A pause)

What? On TV less is more? Not true! TV, film, stage, does not matter. They all say to change your style of acting for the different mediums, no, no, no, no, no, no.

(A pause)

And since we've stopped anyway, my costume is such an ordinary color for a nurse, it's white! I think Nurse Hartwell would wear pink or yellow, or if it must be white perhaps a shade of white, eggshell at least! Also, my lighting. I must be lit from behind and my best camera angle is on my left. Also, don't you think Erika Slezak who's playing the mother, is much too old for the part? What? I'm being difficult Well, you may change this extra any time you like! Starting with today's rehearsal! I'm not just a body with a voice! Someone get me a martini, very dry!

(A pause)

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BETTE (CONTINUED)  
Where are you going? Come back here! We've got to  
rehearse!

(BLACKOUT. A telephone rings)

SEQUE

Scene 4

(AN ANSWERING SERVICE.. BETTE re-enters, moves to the table, picks up the ringing phone)

BETTE

Bells Never Stop Ring...Bells Are Ringing, may I help you? Yes, Ms. Sternhagen is still with the service. Yes, you may leave a message. Just a moment.

(fumbles putting down cigarette and picking up pen, etc) BETTE (cont'd)

What is it?

(SHE writes on pad)

"New Neil Simon play- you got the lead- way to go Frannie-call me" And the number?

(A pause)

Even if she has it I must take it.

(Jots down number)

Thank you for doing me such a favor!

(Hangs up phone)

Shit! That woman never stops working, while I'm stuck in this office every day from 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM. I will never see what anyone sees in her, same performance every time, GOOD DOCTOR, HEIRESS, EQUUUUUS, on and on. Hmmmm... Almost lunchtime.

(SHE picks up the phone, dials a number)

Hello? It's Bette at Bells Are... whatever. I'd like an order delivered. I'd like an egg salad sandwich.

(Shouting:) AN EGG SALAD SANDWICH! Hmmmm... (Thinking:) Whole wheat, rye, white or pita... Pita, I guess.

(Shouting:) PITA! PITA!

(SHE slams down the phone)

Well, better take advantage while the phones are slow and check Backstage.

(SHE takes out a copy of Backstage)

Let's see.

(SHE thumbs through the paper and reads out loud)

"Julie Wilson wins MAC award", who cares for Christ's sake!

(SHE turns pages. Reads out loud)

"Celebrity look-a-likes wanted for new revue. If you can do Cher or Miriam Hopkins, come on down" Can you imagine!

(SHE turns pages. Reads out loud)

What's this? "Signature Theatre holding auditions for their season of plays. This year we devote our season to plays by Ntozake Shange". Well if their casting non-traditionally, which they should be, I could play that lady in red or purple!

(SHE continues to read)

"Auditions are Saturday, December 2 from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM"

(Looks at calendar)

That's today for Christ's sake! Maybe I could down there on my lunch hour. Wait! If I put my two fifteen minutes breaks together and that half a personal day I never took, why that's five free hours!

(Phone rings)

BETTE (CONTINUED)

Bells Are...Tolling, may I help you? Oh, it's you Kate. No I can talk, it's rather slow right now.  
(Phone rings)

Hold on.

(SHE picks up other line)

Bells Are Chiming, please hold.

(SHE goes back to Kate's line)

Where are you? Signature Theatre! I thought you had to do the breakfast shift at the restaurant.

(A pause)

Are there a lot of people?

(A pause)

500! What number are you?

(A pause)

4! How did you manage that?

(A long pause)

Christ! Kate, if you use one more syllogism I'll spit up.

(Phone rings)

Hold on.

(Picks up other line)

Bells Aren't Ringing Right Now, please hold.

(Back to Kate's line)

Do you think I should drop my picture and resume off after work?

(A pause)

Yes Kate, I know, I know, nothing ventured, nothing gained. Thanks for the tip. Good luck!

(SHE hangs up phone)

Christ! Her and that damn deductive reasoning. God knows she would have given up the business years ago without it. Of course Dad would have still paid the bills. Everytime I think how I've been struggling with money all these years...I shouldn't get started over her.

(A pause)

Born with a silver spoon in her mouth! Totally unfair!

(Phone rings)

My Ears Are Ringing, may I help you? Oh, Miss Sternhagen, how are you? Messages? Yes, you got the new Neil Simon play. Oh, you're very welcome. Have a nice day!

(Slams down phone)

Christ! All I ever get is readings! Well, better start work on that monologue for scene class.

(SHE takes out a copy of A RAISIN IN THE SUN by Lorraine Hansberry)

I'm glad Ms. Hagen has decided to stretch me a bit. Now, she said I should create a history for this character, as well as her circumstances, I should know who my grandmother was...ah, to hell with all that! Know your lines and pray to God!

(SHE stands and "acts")



BETTE (CONTINUED)

"Ruth, child, we got a great big old check coming tomorrow. Some of it got to be put away for Beneatha and her schoolin' - and ain't nothing going to touch that part of it. Nothing. Been thinking that maybe we could meet the notes on a little old two-story somewhere... if we use part of the insurance for a down payment and everybody kind of pitch in. Always had a dream of buyin' me a house with a little garden in the back and didn't none of it happen."

(SHE puts play on desk)

Bette, you've still got it!

(SHE laughs and exits as the phone continues to ring)

SEQUE

Scene 5

(STAGE DELI. KATE enters with a telephone receiver)

KATE

Hello, Stage Deli. No, I'm sorry, we're not making deliveries today, the delivery boy called in sick. I'm sorry. What part of "no" didn't you understand? If you want the Joey Bishop Deluxe, you're just going to have to get up off your fat ass and come down and get it yourself.  
(SHE hangs up as BETTE enters)  
Oh, God, Bette, I'm sorry, I really don't have time to chat.

BETTE

Who wants to chat? I'm hungry, for chrissake.

KATE

Well, just sit anywhere. I'll have your table cleaned in a minute. I had words with the busboy yesterday. I didn't think he was doing his job quite up to snuff. Told him so. Crooked place settings, dirty water glasses, customers asking more than once for coffee refills. Today he calls in sick. Unprofessional, if you ask me. Everybody must learn to survive criticism, no matter how much it may sting. And does the manager take my side? Oh, no. Sits back there on his keyster watching me run around like a dervish. Well, I'm up to the challenge. I'm always doing more than my share of the work around here.

(BETTE lights a cigarette)

Oh, Bette, put that out. You can't smoke in restaurants anymore.

BETTE

Oh, for Christ's sake. If eating the food in here hasn't killed you, you should be able to survive a little smoke!

KATE

I can't argue with you now; Table Five's Miriam Hopkins is up.

(SHE exits. BETTE continues to smoke;  
puts it out when KATE re-enters)

KATE

Okay, shoot, let's have your order.

BETTE

You haven't even given me a menu!

KATE

Oh, for God's sake, you've been eating here every day for twelve years. Surely you must know the menu by now!

BETTE

Do you have any specials?

KATE

Yes, but believe me, you don't want any of them. I had words with the cook this morning because I noticed that his presentation of the food was falling far below standard. What I bring to the table is an expression of my ability as a waitress and this is reflected in my tip. When I tried to explain this to him, he became very surly and began speaking to me in a language I did not understand but with a tone of voice that was very unattractive. And since then he has been extraordinarily slow in getting my orders out. The presentation, however, has improved.

BETTE

I would like coffee. Very, very hot. With cream. Not milk, not 2%, not half and half. Cream. A bran muffin, absolutely no raisins, lightly toasted. Make sure it is fresh. Butter. On the side. Right.

KATE

One Karen Carpenter. Oh, by the way, Bette, you're going to have to be a little more discreet. The manager noticed that after you left yesterday there was no more toilet paper in the Ladies' Room.

(SHE exits)

BETTE

Well, what the hell is he doing in the Ladies' Room?

KATE

(Re-entering with coffee:) The mark of a good waitress. See? I can balance two coffee cups in one hand.

BETTE

Yes, you're marvelous. Let's hope the owner keeps his liability insurance up-to-date.

(KATE takes out a pepper mill)

KATE

Would you like fresh pepper?

BETTE

It's coffee!

KATE

Just doing my job! You know, if I didn't know better, I'd think the man at Table Seven was flirting with me!

BETTE

Flirting?

KATE

He keeps winking at me when I pass by.

BETTE

Perhaps he's epileptic.

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KATE

So when was the last time a man flirted with you, Princess?

BETTE

Why, before my stroke, I had quite a few suitors.

KATE

Suitors? When was the last time you got laid, is what I'm asking. Maria! Maria! There's a man up front who wants to pay his check and get the hell out of here. That cashier is really for the birds. I'll have to give her a talking-to. You know what your problem was? You were always getting involved with actors. There's nothing worse. It's all about "me, me, me" and never about you, you, you!

BETTE

Actors make very good lovers. No matter what they do, it's always a performance.

KATE

Big mistake.

BETTE

We live, breathe, eat and shit the theatre! How do you meet anyone else?

KATE

Jesus! Jesus! Bus Table Number Five, por favor! Mesa Cinquo! Cinquo! JESUS! Christ, I'd yell at him if I thought he'd understand what I was saying!

BETTE

And you! You've always been afraid of commitment. Always men who were never available. Until you decided to become a dyke.

KATE

How dare you! Just because I choose not to give my life over to a man, because I choose the solitary life of an artist. Why in the hell would I want any man to come into my life, stand in my way, make my decisions for me? No thank you. What do I need with any man, straight or gay?

BETTE

Well, to do something with your hair, for one thing. There's nothing wrong with being gay, dear. If you'd just be honest about it. I remember when I was just starting out, this chorus girl took quite a shine to me. Lucille LeSeur was her name. But I told her that as sweet as she was, we would never be more than just good friends. She never spoke to me again. She went to Hollywood, made a few pictures and disappeared.

KATE

Actually, I heard she married rich. Became the Hires Root Beer heiress.

BETTE

Wouldn't that be nice? Maybe I'll look for a sugar daddy.

KATE

You'd do better to set your sights on a sugar grandson. Face it, dear. The days of free-wheeling, uninhibited sex are over for us. For good.

BETTE

I can barely remember. My stroke not only took away my power of speech, but all my carnal memories as well. And they DON'T come back. Do you remember sex?

KATE

I realized the other day that I've outlived most of the men I've slept with. Isn't that terrifying?

BETTE

Sometimes still being alive is accomplishment enough.

KATE

Sex may be a distant memory for me, but it's like a lover who's passed away. It's always there, always a part of you.

BETTE

Maybe if you'd had more sex, you wouldn't be alive to talk about it.

KATE

But I'd have died with a smile on my face!

(THEY laugh)

BETTE

So, Kate, what do you want to do tonight?

KATE

I don't know, Bette. What do you want to do?

BETTE

Friday night. Any good movies open? Oh! Did you see the Broadway Column? Just what we need: another revival of THE GLASS MENAGERIE with Dody Goodman.

KATE

Terrible.

BETTE

Oh, she'll be awful.

(A pause)

I wonder if they've cast the understudies...

KATE

Oh, I totally forgot. I'm supposed to meet a friend tonight. Remember my British friend Rula from RADA? She's staying at the Ramada and she's doing a solo tribute to Yoko Ono. It's a cantata at Nada in Soho. Afterwards, we'll have lattes at Lola in Noho.

BETTE

Is the food good?

KATE

So-so. But good coffee and hot cocoa. Care to go?

BETTE

Where is it again?

(A pause)

KATE

Bleecker Street.

BETTE

Pass.

KATE

What's wrong?

BETTE

She doesn't like me. She wouldn't want me along.

KATE

She won't mind.

BETTE

She hates me!

KATE

Only because the last time she was in town you got drunk and called her a has-been.

BETTE

She should have been flattered. "Has-been" implies that you've actually done something. No, that's fine. I can find plenty to do by myself. I just find it strange that after spending every Friday night together for I don't know how many years, suddenly you make plans without even...

KATE

For God's sake, Bette, it's no big deal. Come along with us. The more the merrier! Two heads are better than one! Uh...

BETTE

Three's a crowd.

(SHE stands)

KATE

What the hell else have you got to do?

BETTE

Plenty. Why, I've got a scene in class this week, I should be working on my lines... and, um... I have to update my resume, I've been putting it off... and... Well, I haven't even looked at this week's Ross Reports... there are millions of things I could be doing!

KATE

We'll have to finish this later. The matinee ladies at Table 12 want to send back their garnish.

BETTE

It is finished. Now I'd just like my check, please.

KATE

Your check! Twelve years you've been coming here and you've yet to leave a dime on the table.

(SHE exits. BETTE reaches into her purse, pulls out a change purse, extracts a dime and slams it on the table. Grandly, SHE lights a cigarette and exits)

BLACKOUT

Scene 6

(A PIANO BAR. Lights fade and then BETTE re-enters, dragging a stool. SHE takes a bow. SHE exits. SHE returns for a second bow)

BETTE

What a wonderful audience you've been! I can't believe we're almost at the end of the evening. Why we started at 8:00 and already it's...

(SHE checks her watch)

11:45! What more can I say? Thank you ladies and gentleman, thanks to the staff here at Don't Tell Mama. I've been in this business for many, many years. I've done it all. Theatre, my greatest love; films; now cabaret, soap operas... I did get fired from one last week but this was not my fault. The director was untalented so I was forced to collide with him. I never have any problems with a director when he is talented, but the untalented ones I'm forced to because my name is listed in the credits and I could be ruined if I didn't...what?

(A pause. SHE looks out in the darkness)

Oh, go to the encore? Go to the encore? Yes, I will. I promise not to do too much more. Um, let me say that my life has been my career. My parents have long ago gone to their reward. I've never been married, never had the blessing of a child in my life. But I am truly blessed because I am a member of the family of the theatre. All of the actors I've worked with, become friends with, over these many many years, the writers, the designers, the directors... well, some of them... these people are my true family. My family of choice. So I think it's rather appropriate to end the evening with a medley of songs about family and children.

(SHE turns towards piano)

BETTE

Roger? Roger? Where's the damn piano player? It's not over yet!

(SHE looks out)

Roger? Well, I guess I'll just have to do it a cappella.

(SHE sits on stool and "sings"  
acappella)

CAREFUL THE THINGS YOU SAY  
CHILDREN WILL LISTEN.  
CAREFUL THE THINGS YOU DO  
CHILDREN WILL SEE AND LEARN

(SHE "da-da's" the segue way to the next  
song and will continue doing this for  
each new song)





Scene 7

(STAR BURGER COFFEE SHOP. Lights up on BETTE and KATE in a booth. BETTE reads Backstage)

BETTE

Here's something. The WPA is presenting a new musical written by Priscilla Presley as part of their Famous Widows Series. Prepare one ballad and one up-tempo rock number. What is a rock number?

KATE

A rock number, you know, rock. Rock and roll, for God's sake!

BETTE

Oh, like Elvis! Yes, I remember. I like that song, um... Kim Carnes sang it: "She's Got Miriam Hopkins' Eyes." Maybe something... Who's that singer I like? Miriam Midler. I could do one of hers. "BOOGIE WOOGIE BUGLE BOY!"

KATE

You're moving backwards, idiot. I'll find something for you. My coach is bound to have something.

BETTE

Coach! Hah!

KATE

What about it?

BETTE

If you haven't learned anything at this stage of the game, hang it up.

KATE

Always things to learn. If you're an artist, your work is never done. Keep taking classes. Keep learning. Otherwise, your talent stagnates. Dries up. Technique classes. Scene Study. Keep it fresh. Alive. Dance classes. Tap. Jazz. Modern.

BETTE

Oh, that I'd like to see.

KATE

Voice lessons. Coachings. Can't let the moss grow under your feet. Gotta keep your finger on the pulse. Keep a goin'. Keep a goin'. Begin each new day as if it's the first!

(KATE takes the paper, reads)

BETTE

Bullshit. Talent can't be taught. You're either born with genius, or you're not. And all of the classes, all the teachers in the world cannot turn a potato into a diamond. It's hopeless.

KATE

Here's something. Big Bob's Deep Dish Pizza Theatre is reviving BAREFOOT IN THE PARK. I could do that.

BETTE

And what role are you going up for?

KATE

The mother, of course. I'm a little too old for the Elizabeth Ashley...

BETTE

Of course? Who's playing the daughter, Sylvia Sidney?

KATE

She could have been a mother late in life.

BETTE

Why not? It could be the "Ripley's Believe it or Not! Production." The Guinness Book presents: BAREFOOT IN THE PARK!

KATE

(Pointing to paper:) Here's something for you. Cameron Mackintosh is planning a musical version of JURASSIC PARK.

BETTE

Let's face it. When a woman gets to be... of a certain age... good roles get harder and harder to find. I've heard Meryl Streep complain about the same thing.

KATE

You two girls must have a tough time, battling over the same scripts. I heard they were originally going to use you for THE RIVER WILD but it was going to be set in your bathroom. "Can she survive the shower without breaking a hip?"

BETTE

Today, actors have to create their own work. I'm working on a one-woman piece.

KATE

A play?

BETTE

Not exactly. I guess you'd call it performance art.

KATE

Brother. You know what I always say: Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach. Those who can't teach do performance art.

BETTE AND KATE JOIN THE LINE! 7-24

BETTE

Have you heard anything back from the DRIVING MISS DAISY audition?

KATE

Not a word. Rumor is they want a star.

BETTE

A star? Oh, I don't believe it. The director was very complimentary to me. I showed him the reviews of my last Daisy and he seemed quite impressed.

KATE

I hear they want someone with a television following.

BETTE

He said I would getting a call back. Most definitely. But rehearsals start in two weeks! They better hurry, I may not be available much longer.

KATE

I hear there's an offer out to Brett Somers Klugman and J.J. Walker.

BETTE

Of course, I'll have to find someone to sublet my apartment...

KATE

It's a two week gig!

BETTE

I'll need to ship my wardrobe trunks on ahead, my mail will have to be forwarded...

KATE

I'm sure the AARP Bulletin can wait.

BETTE

I suppose I could put up a note about the apartment on the Equity board...

KATE

No one is going to sublet that rat trap, Bette, face it.

BETTE

Well, not all of us were fortunate enough to inherit Daddy's townhouse when he kicked the bucket. Not all of us had a Daddy to pay our bills, send us through school, put a roof over our head and leave us a juicy trust fund!

KATE

That chip on your shoulders is very unattractive. I've always worked for a living, even when I still had the trust fund. Always. Work. Good for you. Builds character. I could hold my head high. Knew the value of a dollar. Scrimped and saved. Took the subway when I'd rather have taken a cab.

BETTE

You think it's easy finding a decent job when you've been the victim of a stroke?

KATE

Victim! That's your problem - always looking at yourself as a victim. It's a challenge. A reason to get out of bed. To go forward. "En avant," as the Parisians say!

BETTE

You know, sometimes I think if I had an axe, I'd just love to chop off that shaking head of yours and send it down the street like a bowling ball.

KATE

Negativity. Terrible. Got to start each day brand new! Always have something to look forward to.

BETTE

What the hell have you got to look forward to? You're eighty years old, for chrissake! No pension, no children to care for you. Only some big old house you can't afford to repair and a job that barely pays minimum wage! Y'arnt ever going to work as a professional actress! You're a failure!

KATE

Well, you'll have to excuse me, but this failure has a final callback for the role of Miss Lynch in the Broadway production of GREASE at 2:30 sharp.

(A long pause)

BETTE

What?

KATE

Just as I said. I had an audition two weeks ago. They called me back last week and on Monday they called, saying they'd narrowed the choice to three and would I please come in today at 2:30 to meet Mr. and Mrs. Weissler.

BETTE

I see. And you chose to wait until now to tell me?

KATE

Well, you know what they say. Bad luck to talk about a job till there's a signed contract! It's an understudy assignment, but I hear Marilyn Cooper is planning a vacation any day now, so if I'm good, I'm sure they'd prefer to just put me on rather than train somebody new!

BETTE

How nice for you. How nice for them. How nice for everyone!

KATE

We have been friends for over fifty years, Bette. You might pretend to summon up a little enthusiasm for me.

BETTE AND KATE JOIN THE LINE! 7-26

BETTE

I'm ecstatic. Why, you can do the hand-jive just standing still!

KATE

And seeing that I've know you for fifty years, I have no problem whatsoever telling you that I think you are the most ungenerous, covetous, envious, mean-spirited bitch I have ever known. So may I suggest that you get permanently lost, you pontificating old poop!

(BETTE opens her mouth to speak)

Save your breath to cool your porridge! And now I'm off to the Eugene O'Neill Theatre.

(SHE rises and exits)

BETTE

Go! Go to the Eugene O'Neill! Go to the moon, you selfish dreamer!

(SHE sits in silence)

That bitch left me with the check!

BLACKOUT

Scene 8

(THE STAGE OF THE EUGENE O'NEILL THEATRE. Lights up. KATE, enters, somewhat tentatively)

KATE

What a lovely theatre. I can only imagine what it would look like if it wasn't painted pink. Is it true, what I've heard, that Stockard Channing will be reprising her role as Rizzo next month? Oh, won't that be exciting? You know, I remember when this used to be the Coronet. I guess they changed the name to the O'Neill in the fifties sometime. I remember seeing the original production of ALL MY SONS here. ALL MY SONS. By Arthur Miller. Arthur Miller. Yes, Marilyn Monroe's husband. He was a playwright. Like O'Neill. Eugene O'Neill. Oh, God. The man after whom this theatre is named! Are Mr. and Mrs. Weissler here? Oh, I see. Is the director here? The musical director? Oh, I see. And you are? And when will your parents be back? Oh, I see. I understood that this would just be an interview...Well, then, yes, please, let's begin. I wasn't given a side. No problem! (SHE picks up a side offstage right) Oh, whenever you're ready, I'll take it off you.

(A pause. SHE reads as "Miss Lynch")

"Uh-huh!"

(A pause while the auditioner reads a very long cue line. As Miss Lynch:)

"Keen!"

(A pause)

"Now, Frenchy...!"

(A pause)

Excuse me? It may be a little difficult to get all of that with just four words, but I'll try. Certainly. From the top?

(SHE starts again, investing every line with her full being)

"Uh-huh!"

(A pause)

"Keen!!"

(A pause)

"Now, Frenchy!!!"

(A pause)

Excuse me? Friendly? It's my feeling that Miss Lynch has a somewhat adversarial relationship with her students... Okay.

"Now, Frenchy..."

(A pause. SHE listens. Another reading)

"Now, Frenchy..."

(A different reading:)

"Now, Frenchy..." Yes, please, please, let's go on. But I have no music with me. Where is the accompanist? Oh, I see. So you just want me to sing with no music? Well, then, I'll just start.

KATE (CONTINUED)

(Sings)

WE GO TOGETHER  
LIKE RAMA LAMA LAMA KA-DINGA DA DING-DONG  
REMEMBERED FOREVER  
AS SHOO BOP SHA WADDA WADDA ...  
What? Faster? Well, sure.  
WE GO TOGETHER  
LIKE RAMA LAMA LAMA KA-DINGA DA DING-DONG  
REMEMBERED FOREVER AS  
SHOO BOP SHOO WADDA WADDA  
YIPPITY BOOM-DE-BOOM  
CHANG CHANG CHANGITTY CHANG SHOO BOP  
THAT'S THE WAY IT SHOULD BE  
WHAAA-OOOH...  
What? Faster? I'll try.  
WE GO TOGETHER  
LIKE RAMA LAMA KA-DINGA...  
WE GO TOGETHER  
LIKE A -RAMA DAMA DINGA DONGA  
WE GO TOGETHER  
LIKE RAMA DAMA DAMA DAMA DAMA...

(SHE starts again, trying to keep up  
with his unheard clapping hands, which  
continue to speed up until SHE mumbling  
unitelligible gibberish)

KATE (CONTINUED)

Damn, damn, dammit! I can't do it. I just can't. Excuse me? Yes, I know what the song is about. Friendship? Act friendship? And how the hell do you do that? How dare you. How dare you tell me what friendship is supposed to be. Friendship can't be acted. You can act love. You can act hate. You can act anger. But friendship, friendship is much more complex. You think it's some kissy-face, Hallmark Card platitude. But sometimes true friendship looks like anger. Sometimes, it doesn't look like anything. It just is. I'm up here, offerimng you a lifetime of experience, throwing my pearls... and you, you can't see the forest... Remember that what goes around... Fuck you.

BLACKOUT



Scene 9

(BETTE'S APARTMENT. Lights slowly up on BETTE, sitting in the dark. KATE pounds on the door)

KATE

(Off:) Bette? Bette, I know you're in there. Bette?

BETTE

Christ.

KATE

Bette? Your phone's been turned off, in case you didn't know. I called your office; they said you hadn't been to work in a week! Where have you been? Open the damn door!

(BETTE opens the door)

BETTE

My knight in shining armor!

KATE

Where have you...? It's pitch black in here. What is that smell?

(SHE runs offstage)

(Off:) You old fool! Do you realize you left the gas on in here? These old stoves, you need a match to light them...

(SHE reenters)

...can't just turn the gas on and walk away. When was the last time you had your eyes checked? It's a good thing I came by when I did!

BETTE

Yes, you've been ever so helpful. What a shame you must leave.

KATE

You're not safe on your own, that's clear. It makes no sense, you staying here in this firetrap, paying such a ridiculously high amount of rent...

BETTE

It's rent controlled! Knock wood.

KATE

Can we get some light in here, or do you enjoy sitting in blackness like a vampire?

BETTE

Electricity's off.

KATE

Oh dear.

BETTE AND KATE JOIN THE LINE! 9-30

BETTE

It's odd how touchy they get when you're a few months behind with your bills...

KATE

Well, I like a challenge. Candles? Kerosene? A book of matches? Anything?

BETTE

I didn't get it.

KATE

Get what?

BETTE

The part. The job. Miss Daisy. I didn't get it.

KATE

Oh, that. I forgot all about it.

BETTE

Forgot about it? It's the reason I was getting up in the morning! All the other auditions, I was just going through the motions, I knew none of it would pan out. But Daisy was one part I knew I could still do. Should do. Have done! And brilliantly, I might add. I'll show you the clippings. I called them. Asked why I hadn't heard anything. When would I be getting my callback? Well, somebody's assistant kept me on hold for God knows how long, only to inform me that the callbacks had already been held! The role was cast!

KATE

Oh, you didn't want that anyway. Two weeks in stock, no per diem. Onward! The next project awaits!

BETTE

I asked them why. Why wasn't I called back? This nothing, this girl, said she checked the audition notes and they thought I read too old. Too old? By the time the play ends, Daisy is in her nineties, for God's sake! How can I possibly be too old?

KATE

Well, dear...

BETTE

Perhaps it's time for me to move on. Perhaps it's time for me to accept that maybe I wasn't meant to be an actress...

KATE

Nonsense.

BETTE

I mean, if it was meant to be, it would've happened by now. I asked my father to give me until the age of thirty to make my mark on the stage. To at least be able to support myself as an actress. If nothing happened by thirty, I told him, I'd find something else. Teach, go back to school, be a dental hygienist, whatever he saw fit. Well, that was... several years ago. And Dad died when I was twenty-eight, so I never had to keep my promise. I'm sure he's looking down at me from wherever, and saying Ha, ha, ha.

KATE

Don't be a fool. It's your calling. It's your muse, it's your life's blood. The opportunity you've been waiting for could happen tomorrow, don't you realize that? And you have to be ready. It's coming. Don't know where, don't know when. You may have missed an opportunity in the past, but you have no choice but to press on. Besides, dear, you've already proven time and again that you are totally incompetent at doing anything else. If it makes you feel any better, my "Grease" audition was a fiasco. So, tomorrow morning at nine o'clock, I'll be back slinging pancakes at Eurotrash.

BETTE

What happened?

KATE

I'd rather not dwell on it. I'm just telling myself that since Stockard Channing is joining the cast, I'm obviously way too young for the role. The part of Miss Lynch will have to be played by Norman Bates' mother.

BETTE

Are they still seeing people? The dancing might be a little rough, but I'm sure that...

KATE

Don't even think about it. I'll make us some coffee. That's what we need. A god strong cup of coffee. As Miriam Hopkins said, "Fasten your seat belts..."

BETTE & KATE

"...it's going to be a bumpy night!"

(THEY laugh as KATE exits. Re-enters)

There's nothing in your refrigerator except a bottle of champagne and some mustard packets from the Chinese restaurant!

BETTE

I travel light. There were some mayonnaise packets this morning, but I had those for lunch. A little Nine Lives Tuna flavor, some mayonnaise, put it on a Ritz cracker... Delicious!

KATE

This won't do. This won't do at all. What to do, what to do? You'll come live with me.

BETTE

I'd rather die!

KATE

Use your head, for God's sake. What do you plan to do? Give up? Give out? Give in? You have no heat or electricity. The apartment's cold and too big for you. And face it, a woman of your age should not be living in a fourth-floor walk-up. That was cute when you were twenty-three, but your body just can't take much more. If you'd stayed in shape, like I have, brisk walks, a good swim in icy water once a day, then maybe...

BETTE

Have you got a light?

KATE

You need me, admit it. Who was it who took such good care of you when you had your stroke?

BETTE

Took care of me? I couldn't move the entire left side of my body and you'd come in my hospital room with a goddamn Frisbee and say, "Bette, catch!"

KATE

You needed to work on your motor skills!

BETTE

You gave me a black eye, for chrissake!

KATE

You're going to pack the few things left in that closet, and you're coming to live with me and that's final!

BETTE

If you think I'm going to climb into bed with you, you've got another think coming, Missy.

KATE

Nonsense. You'll take my room on the first floor and I'll move upstairs to Dad's old room. Oh, we're going to have such fun, just you wait and see! I'll teach you how to garden, we'll be up each morning with the birds, taking long walk together in the pre-dawn air, nothing better for you, (Referring to BETTE's cigarette:) you'll quit that disgusting habit...

BETTE

Be sure to turn the gas back on on your way out, dear.

KATE

It'll be a new life for the both of us. Isn't it exciting? Oh, let's go to hell with ourselves and open that champagne you've got!

(SHE exits)

(Off:) Where are your champagne glasses?

BETTE

Oh, I sold those off months ago. Don't snicker. I ate off those glasses for a week! There are come cups in the... cup place.

(KATE re-enters with cups)

KATE

A little bit of a letdown, drinking champagne out of a coffee cup.

(SHE pops the bottle, pours)

BETTE

You can put more in it than that. I promise not to get sloppy and embarrass you in front of your Turtle Bay neighbors.

KATE

Here's to the future. To our new future. Together. It's a new beginning. Oh, for God's sake, it's warm!

BETTE

You've proven it's warmer in my refrigerator than it is in my apartment!

(SHE laughs)

KATE

Well, no matter. It's a symbol. It's the gesture that counts. We'll break the empty bottle on the fender of the taxi cab that will take us to our new life together. To you, Bette.

BETTE

Thank you.

(THEY drink. A pause. BETTE slowly puts her arm around KATE)

You're my best friend. You are. You are.

(KATE looks at her. A long pause)

KATE

Oh, for Christ's sake, you didn't get that part!

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY.