

THE BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET DAWSON
(long one-act drama)

SYNOPSIS

This is a two character play with an optional prologue that would add two more characters. Aging movie star Margaret Dawson (67) has agreed to allow her biography to be filmed and has requested a private meeting with the young starlet Jennifer (15) who has been cast to play her as a teenager. When they meet, Margaret is extremely condescending and disdainful of Jennifer despite Jennifer's attempts to mollify her. Margaret strongly suggests that Jennifer reconsider her desire to pursue an acting career leading Jennifer to wonder whether there is a method to Margaret's madness. And indeed there is.

CAST

1 Caucasian female (15)
1 Caucasian female (60s)
Optional: 1 Caucasian female (40s)
1 Actor any gender/age

SET

A Backstage Dressing Room.

PRODUCTIONS/READINGS

October, 2015 - Staged reading THE THEATER PROJECT
May, 2015 - Staged reading THE VILLAGERS THEATRE

**THE BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET DAWSON
DIALOGUE SAMPLE**

JENNIFER

(Reverently) I'm so sorry. I didn't realize you were here Miss Dawson.

MARGARET

(Disdainfully and with a flourish) To be or not to be, that is the question. Do you know where that comes from?

JENNIFER

Hamlet.

MARGARET

Yes Hamlet, written by a sexist pig who could very well have written about the daughter of a slain king rather than the son. All the great roles of Shakespeare going to men, and that young lady is the true tragedy of Hamlet, that the playwright did all he could to silence women.

JENNIFER

But Shakespeare wrote for women as well. What better stage role exists than that of Lady Macbeth?

MARGARET

Oh please young lady, shut up and listen. Shakespeare did all he could to silence women, so just shut up.

JENNIFER

In my English class...

MARGARET

(Interrupting) Did I ask you about your English class? Did I ask any question of you?

JENNIFER

No ma'm.

MARGARET

When I was young, female actors were encapsulated. Our roles consisted of swooning over leading men many of whom swooned over leading men.

(JENNIFER giggles)

MARGARET (Continued)

Oh please don't giggle. Of all emotional responses to stimuli giggling is the most off-putting. (Looking her over with disdain) So you're the one playing me as a teenager.

JENNIFER

Yes Miss Dawson and it's an honor for me.

MARGARET

I don't understand why they want to cast a skinny shapeless bland girl to play me. Even at fifteen I had breasts and curves and pizzazz.

JENNIFER

Well...

MARGARET

That wasn't a question. You needn't strain yourself to respond. And there's another point. Even at fifteen I dominated every conversation, whether with peers or adults. When I agreed to allow the making of my biography I never took into account the fact that any actor portraying me would only bring about the lightest shade of who I really am. You have no texture young lady, no nuances.

JENNIFER

How could you know that ma'm?

MARGARET

I saw your film, that godawful thing about the flower show and your prize rose.

JENNIFER

That was my first film. I was eight years old.

MARGARET

Well it was the only film of yours that I saw and you whimpered and pouted and made me wonder why your parents pushed you into this profession.

JENNIFER

They didn't push me into anything. They supported my decision to pursue a career as an actress.

MARGARET

Bullshit!

JENNIFER

What?

MARGARET

Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit! Have you never heard the word before?

JENNIFER

Yes I've heard the word but I don't understand why you're using it. What's bullshit?

MARGARET

They supported your decision is bullshit. You were eight years old when you made that film. That means that they were sending out your headshots when you were even younger. You are an "actress" - and I use that word loosely - because your parents decided that you would be an actress. Probably to assuage their guilt for having failed in their own lives. You do know what the word assuage means.

JENNIFER

I think so. But what is all of this about? Why are you attacking me and my family?

MARGARET

I'm not attacking. I just don't enjoy hearing revisionist history, that's all.

JENNIFER

Revisionist history?

MARGARET

Your so-called decision to become an actress at age seven or five or three. Your parents made that decision, not you and they did it to fill a void in their own existences.

JENNIFER

You don't know my parents. You don't know anything about me. Now I have tried to be polite. You have an excellent body of work that I do admire, but...

MARGARET

(Interrupting) STOP IT! Have some respect. I am a three-time Oscar winner and when I was your age I won a Tony on Broadway, something that you young woman could never hope to experience. Do you know why? Because you're bland, you're white bread, you are one of ten thousand pretty vacuous faces who trod the boards in desperation to be noticed. "Excellent body of work..." What is a body of work? Tell me that. Tell me that you understand what a body of work is and that you're not just mouthing words that you've heard others use.

JENNIFER

Your body of work. Your movies.

MARGARET

I am sixty-seven years old. I am defined by far more than the movie roles I have assumed. I am a full, fleshed out human being. I am three-dimensional and resent being judged based on my two-dimensional images. And in fact I resent being judged by a child with no worldly experience.

JENNIFER

Miss Dawson I'm terribly sorry if I've offended you. I think we're just getting off on the wrong foot for some reason and I apologize.

MARGARET

I read about you in Teen Magazine. The prepubescent boys seem to have placed you on a pedestal. I suppose that bosoms are not very meaningful to them yet.

JENNIFER

That's the second comment you've made about my breasts.

MARGARET

No, that's the second comment I've made about your lack of breasts.

JENNIFER

I'm sure that the viewing public won't recall that at age fifteen you had large breasts. Most of the viewing public wasn't even born when you were fifteen anyway.

(MARGARET slaps JENNIFER in the face)

JENNIFER (Continued)

OH MY GOD.

(JENNIFER is hurt and is whimpering as SHE rubs her face)

MARGARET

You'll survive. And next time you won't be so insolent when speaking with an elder.

JENNIFER

Get out of my dressing room!

MARGARET

Don't be a diva.

JENNIFER

Get out. I'm getting my mom.

(SHE moves towards the door but is stopped as MARGARET grabs her arm)

MARGARET

You need your mom to fight your battles?

JENNIFER

Let go of me. You're hurting my arm.

(SHE twists loose. MARGARET holds her hands up innocently as JENNIFER rubs her arm)

MARGARET

If my withered old grip has caused you to writhe in agony then you really need to seek medical help. And perhaps while you're being treated you can explore the possibility of implants. Speak to your parents. Tell them the investment will surely be returned a thousand fold as your career progresses. In fact perhaps our producers might delay the shooting until after your surgery for the sake of breast-accuracy.

(JENNIFER stares at her incredulously)

JENNIFER

Are you sick? Is that what's going on here? Are you supposed to be on medication?

MARGARET

Why do you ask that? Because old people are supposed to be on medication?

JENNIFER

I ask that because you are behaving erratically. Miss Dawson I am trying to respect you, I really am but you have been extremely rude to me from the moment you walked in and I just don't think that's very nice.

MARGARET

Well I'm not on medication, I don't need medication and I am not behaving any more erratically than you are.

JENNIFER

I'm not behaving erratically at all.

MARGARET

Oh really? It's not erratic to verbally abuse a guest? It's not erratic to cry for mommy at age fifteen?

JENNIFER

I didn't verbally abuse you. Miss Dawson I have tried to be as respectful as possible under extreme circumstances. All of the verbal abuse has come from you. Telling me to shut up the very instant you walked through that door. Telling me that you don't understand how a boy might find me attractive. It's insulting. It's hurtful. And it's bizarre.

MARGARET

Bizarre?

JENNIFER

You remind me of Sunset Boulevard, of Norma Desmond.

MARGARET

Are you trying to impress me with your knowledge of film? Because if your attempt is failing miserably. Norma Desmond was a narcissist. Me, me, me. That is not who I am. Or is it simply the fact that I would be about the same age as that fictional character? Is that the basis for your comparison? Dare I say that you remind me of Old Yeller because he was fifteen in the movie of the same name?

(JENNIFER laughs despite herself)

MARGARET (Continued)

Why are you laughing? Are you a moron?

JENNIFER

No I'm not a moron and that's a terrible word to use.

MARGARET

Terrible? You are a moron. Words are tools, slaves to us. We are able to communicate our thoughts with pinpoint accuracy when we use words appropriately. There is no word in the English language that is terrible to use.

JENNIFER

(Pause for effect) Fuck you! It's not a terrible word. No word is terrible so fuck you Miss Dawson. Am I communicating my thoughts to you with pinpoint accuracy?

MARGARET

(Smiles) They have chosen a potty mouth to represent me on screen in my youth. Hurrah! Perhaps the biographer will have you utter that word in your portrayal. If somehow he fails to include it in the script be sure to ad lib. It will facilitate the ruination of my character before the eyes of the world. Those "people" to whom you refer, the people who are too young to know the real Margaret Dawson will be able to draw their conclusions from a flat-chested potty mouth with no acting chops.

JENNIFER

I have acting chops. I've already had lead roles in four movies.

MARGARET

Lassie has been in fifteen movies and I assure you that dog had no range whatsoever.

(JENNIFER nervously throws a piece of popcorn into her mouth. Suddenly she begins to gag, seemingly choking and unable to breathe)

MARGARET (Continued)

(Panicking) OH MY GOD. YOU'RE CHOKING. What should I do? I don't know that Heimlich thing. (SHE tries awkwardly to help JENNIFER who seems to be fading. Frantic) I'll get help. I'll be right back. I'll get someone.

(SHE takes a few steps towards the door as JENNIFER stands erect and smiles, stopping the pretense)

JENNIFER

Don't bother. I learned that in acting class when I was nine.

(MARGARET moves to a chair and slumps into it)

MARGARET

You could have given me a heart attack.

JENNIFER

You said I couldn't act.

MARGARET

(Trying to catch her breath, SHE waves an arm as SHE speaks) That's - that's not acting. That's a cruel childish prank.

JENNIFER

You believed that I was choking yet I was not. What would you call it if not acting?

MARGARET

(Clutching her chest) I would call it attempted murder. I would like to meet your parents. I would like to gaze upon the people who have spawned you.

JENNIFER

Spawned? Why?

MARGARET

I am locked in as technical advisor to this project and I cannot imagine spending time on the set with a more disrespectful no-talent than yourself. Yet if I were to find that you are the product of a union of two even more loathsome creatures then I might be able to rationalize some sort of victimization to you and carve out an area within my mind that allows our co-existence during the filming.

JENNIFER

Are you a moron?

MARGARET

Stop mocking me!

JENNIFER

What's good for the goose...

MARGARET

Trite, cliché, other people's words! That's all you can speak. Other people's words.

JENNIFER

(In her face) Fuck you were my words.

MARGARET

I was hoping your teats would grow, not your balls.

JENNIFER

My parents are in for a huge surprise.

MARGARET

Why, are you going to run off to a convent? One can only hope.

JENNIFER

They have a great admiration for you. They were very excited to learn that you wanted to meet with me, alone. My dad wanted to film the meeting.

MARGARET

(Looking around suspiciously) He didn't plant a camera.

JENNIFER

No, of course not.

MARGARET

Because if he planted a camera it would violate my right to privacy.

JENNIFER

No my mom told him that was ridiculous.

MARGARET

So he did think of it.

JENNIFER

He was joking. And anyway my mom stopped him in his tracks.

MARGARET

Perhaps your demon seed only came from one parent.

JENNIFER

My dad is the most wonderful man in the world. Oh and my mom is the most wonderful woman.

MARGARET

Isn't that fortunate. Six billion people in the world and the most wonderful man met the most wonderful woman and they had the most wonderful daughter.

JENNIFER

And the most wonderful son. My brother Alan. He's nine.

MARGARET

And is he an "actor" as well?

JENNIFER

No he's shy. He wants to be a professional basketball player.

MARGARET

Is he black?

JENNIFER

(Laughing) No he's whiter than me.

MARGARET

Whiter than I.

JENNIFER

Yes even whiter than you.

MARGARET

That's not - oh never mind. I must have killed babies in my last life to deserve this.

JENNIFER

Oh my God. That's a terrible thing to say.

MARGARET

What other reason could there be?

JENNIFER

But to deserve what? Your life is a storybook. Child star, Hollywood mansion, trillions of dollars, six husbands!

MARGARET

I did not have six husbands. Oh wait I always forget Fernando.

JENNIFER

I worry about whether I'll ever have a husband, someone who truly loves me for me and not for my movies, something lasting for eternity and you've been able to do that six times.

MARGARET

(After a long look of disbelief) I'm sure there's a pimply-faced young man masturbating to photos in Good Housekeeping at this very moment who would find an androgynous potty-mouth someone to die for. And in any event you are a child star, you have a Hollywood mansion, you have trillions of dollars.

JENNIFER

No we're not wealthy like that. My parents say that we're on our way but it's a long journey. And I'm thankful for that. I pray to God every day thanking him for my good fortune.

MARGARET

Yes of course. God did this for you.

JENNIFER

And he did it for you as well. You won three Oscars. God is good.