

The Casting Couch and Me

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Joan Wood

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The uninhibited memoirs of a young actress

by

Joan Wood

A Sam Post Book



WALKER AND COMPANY
NEW YORK

The Casting Couch and Me

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First published in the United States of America in 1974 by the Walker Publishing Company, Inc.

Published simultaneously in Canada by Fitzhenry & Whiteside, Limited, Toronto.

Library of Congress Catalog Number: 73-90386

Designed by Barbara Bedick

The Casting Couch and Me

for
Donald Bain

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*Be nice to this guy,
sweetheart;
he can be good
for your career*

I was into my second six-minute exposure period when the big guy with the muscles and the bikini bathing trunks ran past and kicked sand in Morton's face. Morton was my beau of the moment, and one of the things we shared in common was the fact that we were both extremely fair-skinned and sunburned easily. Besides disliking the pain of a sunburn, I was also aware that aspiring young actresses with blistering noses and peeling thighs were not in particular demand. That's why, on this blazing hot August Wednesday, Morton and I were almost totally covered with towels as we shared a blanket on the sands of Long Island's Jones Beach.

As I said, however, I was into my exposure period when Jungle Jim ran past.

"He kicked sand in my face," Morton said. He was still under his towels. Besides wanting to avoid sunburn, Morton also covered up at the beach because he was, and still is, the skinniest man I've ever known. He has to be careful walking in the city to avoid gratings in the sidewalk. When Morton stands sideways, it's possible to miss him completely.

"Why don't you say something to him?" I suggested.

"He's just a big jerk," Morton grumbled.

The big jerk ran past again, sand spraying from his heels. I lifted my head and saw that he was playing ball with another muscular guy. I couldn't help noticing their bikini trunks and the huge bulge in their respective crotches. Did they sell false male crotches? I didn't doubt it.

Back came the muscle boys, and a wave of sand hit Morton in the face just as he sat up to change stations on the radio.

"They did it again," Morton whined, spitting sand from his mouth.

"Hey," I yelled. "Why don't you play some bloody place else!"

The muscle boys stopped their game and came over to the blanket.

"What did you say?" one of them asked as he leaned on his chum's shoulder.

"She said go play someplace else," Morton said, pulling up a towel to hide his puny chest.

"Get lost, twerp," Morton was told.

"Now wait a minute," I said, getting up and facing them. "This is a big beach. Who do you think you are kicking sand in other people's faces?"

"Yeah," Morton added.

"You . . . are . . . British, aren't you?" one of the muscle boys said.

"I'm not Italian," I replied.

"How tall are you?" I was asked.

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“Five-three.”

“Weight?”

“One-ten.”

“Bust?”

“Wait a minute. What the hell is this?”

“What’s your bust?”

“That’s none of your business,” Morton said, rising unsteadily against the beach breeze.

“Thirty-five,” I answered.

“Waist?”

“Twenty-three.” I started to laugh. It was a funny game.

“Hips?”

“Thirty-four and a half.”

“How old are you?”

“Joan, stop talking to them,” Morton said.

“Shut up, twerp,” Jungle Jim said.

“No, you shut up,” I said to the beach bum.

“You are perfect,” he replied. “Really perfect.”

“I am?”

“Yes. Do you act or model?”

“Both.”

“Isn’t she perfect?” he asked his muscular buddy. “For Horace?”

“Yeah.”

“Perfect!”

“Horace?” I asked.

“Horace Sims, the famous Broadway agent and producer.”

“I don’t know him.”

“You will,” said the beach bum. “He’s been looking for a British actress with exactly your physical qualifications. We’re good friends of his. You must go see him.”

Morton tapped me on the arm.

“What, Morton?”

“They’re just a couple of phonies on the make,” he whispered in my ear.

One of the beach bums ran back to his blanket and returned with a slip of paper. He handed it to me.

“Call him first thing in the morning,” he said. “Believe me, this could be the break you’ve been looking for.”

“Thank you,” I said.

“Oh, one thing to remember,” the muscle boy added, pointing to the slip of paper. “Be nice to this guy, sweetheart; he can be very good for your career.”

I sat on the blanket and read the slip of paper. On it was the name, Horace Sims, his address in New York City, and his phone number.

“Isn’t this exciting?” I asked Morton after we’d covered up again.

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“I don’t understand you, Joan. Those two creeps come up and hand you a line and you’re all hepped up”

“Morton, that’s a ridiculous attitude to have. After all, Lana Turner was discovered sitting at a drugstore counter.”

“I don’t believe it. That’s just what those Hollywood press agents tell the public. Those two guys were just on the make for you.”

I sat up and looked over at their blanket. One of them was kissing the other on the ear, and his hand covered his padded crotch. I nudged Morton.

“Morton,” I said, “look at them. They’re gay. How could they be after me?”

Morton got up, folded his towels and said, “Maybe they’re having a remission.”

*I'm all there,
on that
2 piece of paper*

I got up bright and early the following morning, Thursday, and set off on my theatrical rounds. I'd been doing it for quite a long time now. On that particular morning in August, I'd been at it for only six months.

I carried with me the two staples of an actress's bag of tricks—portfolio of photographs and a batch of resumes. The resume I was using in my earlier days had all the standard ingredients, and the photos showed me in various moods.

That's me. I'd been handing that piece of paper, with certain variations, to secretaries all over New York and London. It wasn't a great resume, but it was the professional Joan F. Wood. There is also a personal Joan F. Wood. Sometimes it's tough to separate them.

My resume doesn't include hobbies, civic interests, sports and family status. Agents and producers really don't give a damn about them. But they do care about bust size, sometimes for less than professional reasons. I remember stopping in to see a so-called producer one afternoon. He was a fat, sweaty man with six strands of wet hair strung over his bald head and fingernails that made a garage mechanic look pristine. I handed him my resume. He looked up at me through bulging, bloodshot eyes, looked down at the first items on the resume, looked up again and grunted, "Thirty-five bust? You got no tits!"

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RESUME

Joan Wood

HT: 5'3
WT: 110
EYES: Green
HAIR: Blonde
BUST: 35
WAIST: 23
HIPS: 34½
AGE RANGE: 22 to 30

Actress
Spokeswoman
Model
Contact:
239-1876

FEATURE FILMS

"Return of the Vampire" . . . Hammer Films, England
"The Constable" . . . EMI Productions, England

DOCUMENTARIES

"The Sunny Side of London" . . . Anglo-American
"England on Wheels" . . . Dover Productions, England

TV COMMERCIALS

Ajax
Campbell's Soup
Collins & Aikman

THEATRE

Bristol Repertory of England
Royal Court Theatre Workshop
Pittsburgh Playhouse
San Francisco Workshop
Actor's Studio

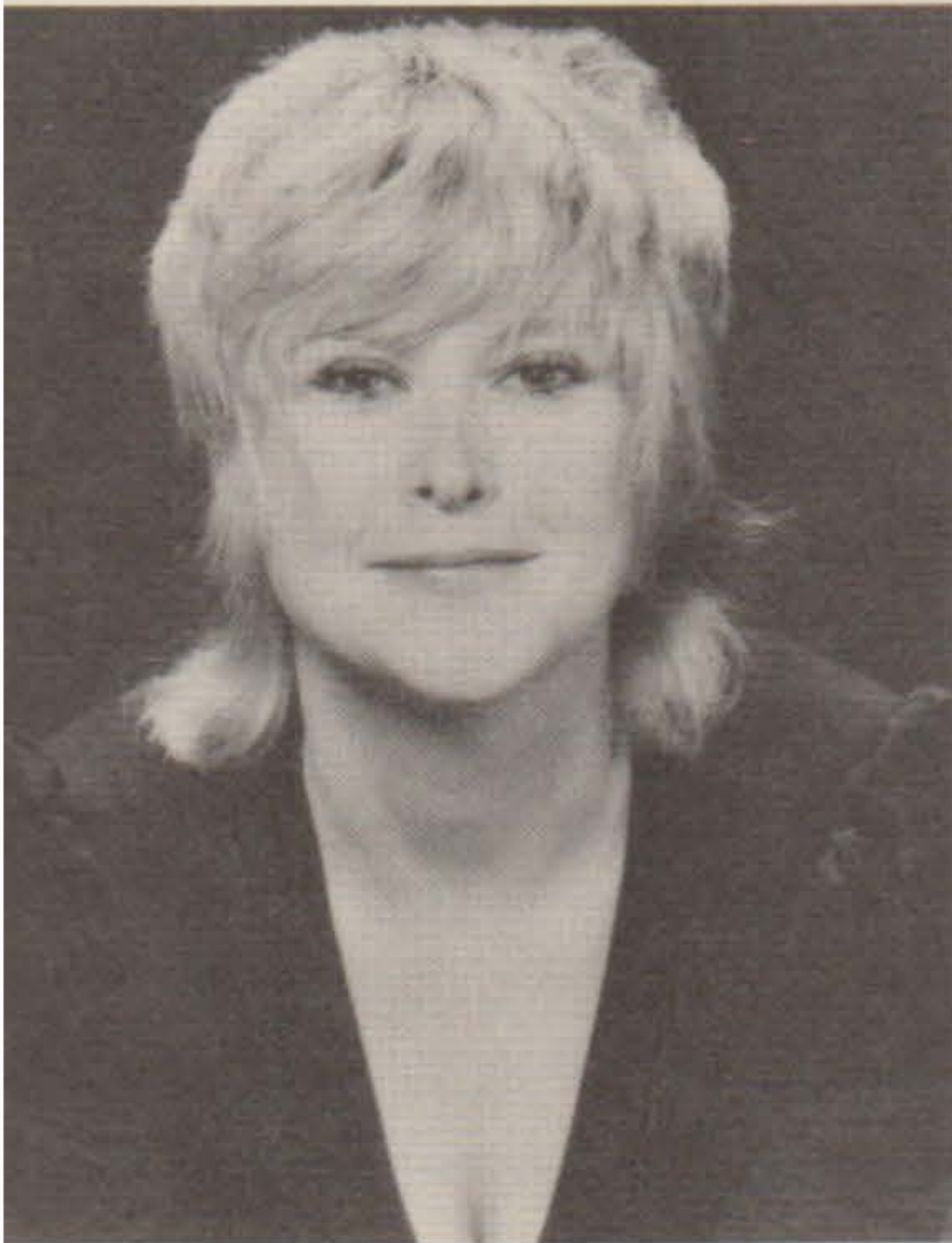
TRAINING

American Academy of Dramatic Arts
Lee Strasberg Institute
Cherry Lane Theatre Workshop

CAN DO

All Sports
Modern Dance
Art
Write
Mime

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I am an average gal. What constituted “tits” to that producer must have been some supermammary creature who needed help to get up whenever she fell down.

A quick glance at the professional section of my resume tells any astute agent or producer the following things: I am

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British; I have not had extensive working experience; I have had pretty decent theatrical training.

He skips down to the Can Do section. He knows from reading it that I am athletic enough to feel at home in a commercial in which a sport is being played. He knows I've learned enough about dancing to not fall over my feet when asked to do a quick turn. I can draw a little, and I'm not afraid to sit at a typewriter and take a fling at creating a scene. Also I have obviously received some training in mime. He learns a lot from my resume.

What he doesn't learn is whether I will, upon demand, strip off my clothes in his office, assume a coy pose on his pullout, eighty-inch Castro convertible couch, and give my body to him with the hope that he will return the favor and give me a part in his next production.

Of course, legitimate agents and producers aren't really interested in knowing whether I'll put out for a part.

Legitimate . . .

They're as rare as dedicated doctors.

I have this friend Clarise—a pretty blonde who's been making the rounds for ten years in search of stardom. Clarise has played the casting couch scene so many times, in so many offices, in so many cities, that she's lost count. It might have been easier for her to keep score if she could have remembered each incident by the role it got her in a play or movie. But that wouldn't work because she's never gotten a role from an agent or producer whom she's balled. Never.

I hadn't seen Clarise for a while but bumped into her late one afternoon in a hotel lobby. She offered to buy me a drink and I accepted. I was on my second drink when I asked her, "Clarise, how many times do you figure you've put out for a part?"

She shrugged. "A hundred maybe. Two hundred? I really don't know."

"What are you doing now?" I asked.

"Topless dancing. It's a mob joint on Broadway. But I quit last night. The owner batted me around a few nights ago because I wouldn't sit with a customer and play with him in the booth. I don't need rough stuff."

I was expressing my sympathy to her when she glanced at her watch, gulped down the remains of her drink and told me she had to run.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I've got a trick at the Waldorf. He's a big spender from Indianapolis. All he wants is for me to be naked and spank him. He lays a hundred on me every time he comes in town. Take it easy, Joan. Good to see you."

Well, at least Clarise was getting what was promised her at the Waldorf. At least she was having the favor returned. Favor? Actresses are supposed to give their talent as a favor. That's what real agents and producers expect. Sure, every guy in the business, big and small, has his fling once in a while. Sometimes they're quickies, sometimes they're long-term. Sometimes they occur on a bed and sometimes on an office couch. Successful agents and producers expect some feeling of a relationship with the girl they take to bed. Casting couch creeps want nothing more than a quick release. Supply-and-demand, give and take, buyers and sellers.

I have another friend Lonnie. Lonnie came to New York from Atlanta, Georgia, where she'd won a second-rate beauty contest and became Miss Southeast Drive-In of 1971. One of the judges for the contest, a local TV personality, swiped Lonnie's virginity after the contest. He took her to a motel and told her he had this friend in New York who was "the hottest theatrical producer in town."

So Lonnie came to New York and looked up the hottest producer in town. His name was Michael, and he was an out-of-work actor and model whose last job was modeling suede jackets for the Sears Roebuck catalog.

Lonnie sure was impressed with Michael. What did she know? He told her he was in the process of casting for a musical, and took her to his apartment, a penthouse on Park Avenue. Lonnie gasped as she walked around the apartment. If she had any doubts about Michael, they were now relieved. As far as she was concerned, anybody who lived in such a lavish place with a goddamn jungle growing on his terrace and inch-thick carpets and floor-to-ceiling mirrors with that classy fogged effect must be some kind of big shot. No doubt about it. What Lonnie didn't know was that the pent house belonged to a friend of Michael's, a middle-aged voyeur who allowed guys like Michael to use the place in exchange for being allowed to watch their sexual conquests through the smoked-glass mirrors. Favors. The scratching of backs.

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“Look, Lonnie,” Michael told her at the penthouse the second time they made it together, “go see this guy.” He handed her a card. “He’s a real heavyweight, sweetie. Be nice to him; he can be good for your career.”

Lonnie went to see Michael’s friend and ended up on his casting couch. It’s like a fraternity. One guy passes on a “hot one” to the next, and the routine continues until she’s cooled off and goes home to Atlanta, or goes to the Waldorf where, finally, she gets what she bargained for—a cheap trick! I’ve met the voyeur with the penthouse and the smoked-glass mirrors. He invited me to watch with him but I declined.

In fact, six months in America and I still had resisted the casting couch. And on this hot August Thursday morning, portfolios and resumes in hand, I was determined to stick to my principles.

I came out of the subway and felt the heat bubble up from the pavement. There is no hotter place on earth than New York City in the summertime. Yes, I know, the temperature in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia goes higher, but New York is the worst.

New York smells bad in the summertime, too. The heat catches the odors and carries them to you in a big plastic bag. Once that bag goes over your head, the smells stay with you through the day and into the night.

Winter is a better time to assault the bastions of show business in search of that elusive stardom. Casting agents seem to realize that if you arrive with your feet covered with sooty New York slush and your hair wet and tangled and your face a blooming scarlet from the wind, you’re in that condition because of forces beyond your control. But walk into an office with swollen ankles and blistered feet and stained underarms and beads of perspiration on your blackened face, and the clown who’s been sitting in front of his air conditioner all day looks at you like some unkempt, unclean, uncultured and thoroughly undesirable match girl.

That’s why I prefer winter over summer.

I arrived in the city at nine. My first appointment was at ten with a very important director who, rumor had it, was looking for fresh young actresses with British accents for an upcoming film.

I headed straight for my favorite newsstand where I could pick up copies of *Backstage* and *Show Biz*, the theatrical trade papers in which auditions are listed. The newsstand dealer was a short, bald, blind man who never failed to perk me up.

“That you, Joan?” he asked as I handed him the dollar.

“Sure is, love.”

“Wanna ball?” he asked.

“Not today, love.”

“Got somethin’ against the blind, huh?”

“Afraid I’d fall in love, that’s all.”

“I’m good in bed, love,” he said with a phony British accent on top of his Bronx mutterings. “I can see it now, the two of us . . .” I laughed and walked away. We’d been having that conversation every week the past six months. He’d latched onto my British accent the first day I bought the papers from him, and we’d bantered back and forth ever since. It only happened on Thursdays because that’s the day when the trade papers came out on the stands. That’s why every aspiring actress in town is on the streets on Thursday, which is something to keep in mind in case you’re queer for aspiring actresses. If you have a thing for cartoonists, try Wednesday. Magazine editors set aside Wednesday to see cartoonists.

I made my way to a coffee shop two blocks away. I’d staked out this coffee shop very carefully, and knew that not only was it cheap, but that it had the slowest service on the west side of town. Slow service is important to an aspiring actress. It gives you time to read the trade papers without being hassled for your seat.

Nothing had changed in the coffee shop. The waitress, a dumpy girl with freckles and a bosom that looked more like a dirigible beneath her yellow uniform, ignored me. I did nothing to draw her attention, opened the trade papers to the casting call pages and scanned the ads.

Casting Jobs

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TEEN MODEL

Debra Productions, Inc. is still holding interviews for Teen Model of the Year. Send pics. Debra, 160 W. 44th St. Deadline approaching.

CHORUS BOYS WANTED

Geri Productions is looking for male dancers who can sing. Call 903-4376.

BAD FINGERNAILS WANTED

Girls with bad fingernails wanted to demonstrate at trade convention. Salary, publicity and exposure excellent. Call UN-6-1370 for appt.

MALE NARRATOR FOR FILM

Male wanted for a 30-minute nature film voice over. Perfect diction, cultivated voice a must. Phone 539-0774 between 10 and 12 P.M.

SCRIPTS WANTED

Able Productions is looking for straight plays. Send scripts with self-addressed envelope for return to Able, 345 W. 50th St., Room 432. No visits or phone calls.

JANE AGENCY SEES MODELS

Petite-sized female models, no experience necessary, should apply 1:00 to 4:00 P.M. weekdays. Call DA-6-2245 for appointment.

ITALIAN ACTORS NEEDED

3 male Italian actors in 40's for TV drama. Send resumes and pics to Patsa Productions, 503 Bethune St., N.Y.C.

SUBURBAN HOUSEWIFE FILM

Non-Screen Actors Guild film about suburban housewives needs five females in 20's. No nudity. Call 914-883-0320.

KANIS PLAYHOUSE

Director Greg Cline accepting photos and resumes from Equity men and women. Five straight plays and four musicals. Send to Greg Cline, Kanis Playhouse, P.O. Box 445, Patterson, N.J.

HORROR FILM

Student production needs long-haired bleached blonde about 50 years for vampire victim. Call 781-2341.

CASTING ACTRESS FOR "THE BIG KNIFE" AND "LOOK BACK IN ANGER"

Actress in 20's wanted for part in these plays. Small salary. Auditions at 333 W. 22nd St. Call CH-3-0184.

TAP DANCERS

Auditions for new Limbo' Ballet Company looking for male and female dancers. Call for appt. before noon: 427-7954.

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GIRL MODELS FOR BOOK COVERS

Top rates for the right animated topless go-go type gals. Detective and romantic book cover situations to be photographed. Send resume and photos to Pert Studios, 31 Goober St., Little Neck, L.I.

Most ads in trade papers are for porno movies being shot on some godforsaken island where there'll be more sex off-camera than on. You can always get porno work if you really need it, and if you're young and willing. I became involved once with a porno producer, but I'll get to that later. For now, I was looking for legitimate work in the theatre. Three ads caught my eye, and I circled them with a red grease pencil I always carry with me.

I was about to head for the pay phone which, up until that moment, had been occupied by another actress I'd seen before on my rounds, when the waitress thrust her bosom across the counter.

"Wadda ya want?" she asked.

What I wanted, and what I ordered, were two different things. I wanted two of the vanilla frosted donuts that were being dive-bombed by flies as they sat on a platter. Instead, I ordered dry toast and black coffee. Aspiring actresses have to watch their figures. Sure, fat actresses can act as good as skinny ones, but unless you're established, first visual impressions count. Besides, you can never tell when a lucrative modeling job will be offered you, or a porno film that could make the difference between starvation and a full belly. Fat girls aren't in much demand for porno films except for the kinky raincoat crowd on Broadway.

Although I was relatively new to the business of making rounds in New York, I had learned how to screen ads in the trade papers before calling for an audition. There are always acting jobs advertised, but most of them are for Off-Off-Broadway shows that don't pay any salary. They could be a good exposure for your talents, but usually no one comes to see them except friends of the producer, or out-of-town businessmen slumming in the Village in search of runaway love-children who love to screw. I have nothing against acting for nothing, but I like to eat.

There are also usually ads for auditions for Equity shows on Broadway and Off-Broadway. You quickly learn that these ads never amount to anything. Equity rules call for open auditions. The fact is, however, that most roles in larger productions are cast long before the ads appear. The ads are run to stay within the union regulations, and auditioning is a waste of time.

The three ads I decided to follow up were the following:

... a theatre company was casting roles for *Look Back in Anger* and *The Big Knife*. It advertised a small salary, and was holding auditions in the Chelsea district. The small salary didn't bother me. A good role at that stage of my career was worth money, as long as it paid something that I could apply against my mounting bills.

... a non-SAG (Screen, Actor's Guild) film about suburban housewives was being cast. The ad promised no nudity, so it sounded legit.

... the third ad was for girls with bad fingernails. Talk about an age of specialization. The ad was placed by a false fingernail manufacturer that needed girls to demonstrate its product at a trade convention. The ad boasted good pay, good publicity and good exposure. Most convention ads say the same thing. The money usually is good, but as far as publicity and exposure are concerned, you can forget it.

If you happen to be a bit of a hustler on the side, convention business can be good. I know a few gals who grab convention demonstration jobs and use the "exposure" to turn a few tricks with conventioners.

I decided to respond to the false nail ad because my ego needed a boost. I knew I had the worst nails in town. They couldn't turn me down.

I paid for my toast and coffee and walked over to a bank of phone booths in an office building around the corner.

"Hey, baby, wanna fuck?"

Damn hard-hats.

I made my calls and lined up appointments. I'd already left the booth when I remembered the slip of paper given me at the beach. I fished it out of my pocket and called the number.

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“Hello?” It was a man’s voice. Well, it might have been a woman’s voice, a woman with a cold. The voice was very nasal, and obviously came through a very tiny mouth.

“Mr. Horace Sims, please,” I said.

“This is Horace Sims.” The mouth was getting smaller.

“Mr. Sims, my name is Joan Wood. I’m an actress and . . .” I realized I’d never learned the name of the muscle boy on the beach. . . and a friend of yours suggested I call you.”

“A friend?”

“Yes, a young man I met at the beach. I’m sorry, but I’ve forgotten his name.”

“That’s all right. Friends need no introduction.” “That’s so true,” I said.

“You’re British.”

“Yes. I’m British and he said you were looking for a British girl with . . .”

“Bust?”

We went through the measurements routine. “Perfect,” said Mr. Sims. “Just perfect. When can you come see me?”

“How about late this afternoon?”

“Five?”

“Fine.”

I hung up and raced for my ten o’clock appointment with the film director who was looking for young British actresses. I don’t like to be late for appointments, even though I know that being on time at a producer’s office is like being on time for a doctor’s appointment.

“Mr. Wallington has already filled all the parts,” the director’s secretary told me after she’d sneered at my resume. “However, I know he’d be happy to see you personally to discuss possible future projects. He can be reached at his hotel suite. Do you wish me to call him?”

“No, thank you.” A female pimp for her boss, that’s what she was.

I went on to the offices of the TV show “To Tell The Truth.” Word was around that the casting people for the show had decided to use actors and actresses as imposters. In this program someone with a real story to tell is flanked by two imposters. A panel of celebrities ask questions of the real person and imposters, and the panel votes for whom it thinks is the real person. If you lie pretty good, you can make a few bucks because the imposters are paid fifty dollars for every wrong vote.

I was wearing my best blue jeans, a bright shirt and platform shoes. I wear platform shoes because they give me added height and a slimmer look. If someone is looking for a shorter, heavier actress, I can always slip out of them and work barefooted.

It’s always nice to visit the offices of a successful TV show because they are generally modern, bright and cheerful, as opposed to theatrical casting offices, which make welfare hotel rooms look like the Oval Room at the White House.

By the time I got there, my portfolio had become a heavy burden in my hand. By the end of the day it would feel like the transcripts from the Watergate hearings. I was only too happy to put it down and to tell the chubby receptionist who I was and why I was there. She asked me to take a seat, which I gladly did. The only other person in the room was a chunky girl wearing a cheap, silky pants suit that bulged at the seams and had actually given way beneath one arm.

“Hi,” she said.

“Hi,” I said.

I was spared further conversation when the receptionist called the other girl’s name and ushered her into an office. She came out ten minutes later, her lip curled as a gesture of what she thought of the deal.

“Miss Wood.”

A woman in the inner office had me fill out a form on which I listed my hobbies, interests, subject matter in which I

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had an expert knowledge, travel, sports and family experiences. I looked down at what I had written and began to sink. None of it was terribly impressive.

“I’m a very good liar,” I said cheerily.

The woman smiled at me.

“Really, I am,” I said. I realized that I was putting her in a tough position. I was forcing her to say that she was sure I was, indeed, a good liar, hardly a pleasant thing to have to say.

“I am some liar,” I said weakly.

“Thank you, Miss Wood. We’ll put your application on file and call you if the right spot comes up.”

She popped off a Polaroid of me, attached it to my application, and put it in with six million other cards.

“Well, thanks,” I said. She nodded.

I called my agent from a booth.

“Joanie,” he said, “get right on over to Joel Reid’s office. He’s casting for a monster movie and I laid it on very thick for you. As far as he’s concerned, you’re the finest actress in New York today. This could be it.”

I decided to walk to Mr. Reid’s office at Fifty-Eighth and Seventh Avenue. It was a bad decision because by the time I arrived, I was the consistency of a wet noodle. I poked my head in a small barber shop and asked if it had a john.

“Sure I got toilet,” answered the little bald Italian barber. “You wanna use?”

“Yes, please. I’m an actress and I have an appointment and it’s so hot and ...”

“Use, use, lady.” He smiled and waved me to the rear of the shop. I smiled back at him. Nice man. I applied makeup and combed my hair and tried to shake some of the moisture from my clothing.

“Thank you very much,” I said to the barber on my way out, wishing I had a spare quarter to throw his way.

“An actress. You should be a momma,” he said.

“I’d like to be,” I replied, closing the door behind me.

Mr. Reid kept me waiting ten minutes. When I was finally led into his office, he took my resume with only a fleeting glance at me.

“I really appreciate seeing you,” I said.

“British accent?”

“Yes. I’m British.”

“Sorry. I don’t have any roles in this film for an actress with a British accent.”

I leaned forward in my chair. “What difference does it make what accent an actress has in a monster movie? Surely monsters aren’t so fussy that they wouldn’t attack a girl with a British accent.”

“Sorry, Miss Wood, but I just can’t use you. Your agent should have known I wanted American girls for this film, but thanks anyway for stopping by.”

I got outside, went into the barber shop and asked if I could use the pay phone on the wall.

“Use, use, lady. Did you get the part?”

I shook my head and walked toward the phone.

I dialed my agent. “Why the hell did you send me on that wild goose chase when you knew he didn’t want a British accent?” I screamed. A man who was being shaved sat up and looked at me nervously.

“Joan,” my agent said, “I figured you’d win him over. Nothing ventured, nothing gained,” he added with a weak laugh.

He sounded like my father who had a million proverbs always ready.

“Get a haircut,” I snapped, hanging up the phone with a loud bang. The man getting a shave cringed. I walked past the chair, swung around as though I had a machine gun in my hands and went, “ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah.”

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“She’s an actress,” the barber said to his customer.

I walked along the street, still fuming. I kept envisioning Joel Reid’s newest monster flick with the heroine, a beefy Spanish broad, shouting OU every time the monster bites her throat.

My appointment with the false fingernail outfit was at noon at the Hilton Hotel at Thirty-Third Street. I ran for a bus that was loading passengers on Seventh Avenue and had the door slammed in my face.

“Hey,” I yelled at the driver, a Neanderthal type who ignored me like he’d been ignoring hysterical women banging on bus doors all his life.

“Damn damn,” I muttered to myself.

“Excuse me,” a male voice said. I turned to look into the eyes of a thin, pasty-faced middle-aged man in a cheap suit.

“Yes?” I asked.

“Are you a prostitute?” he asked.

“Am la...?”

“I have some money.”

“Shove off.”

“No, I’m no cop or anything. I’m from Des Moines.”

I hailed a cab and tumbled into the back seat. The little guy in the cheap suit looked at me with disbelief. I thumbed my nose at him.

“Come on, lady, where to?”

“The Hilton at Thirty-Third Street.”

The flag went down and the meter instantly registered sixty cents. I hate spending money on cabs, but I always seem to end up doing it because I run late. I lit a cigarette and relaxed against the seat. The cabbie slammed on the brakes.

“Can’t you read a sign, lady?” he snarled, pointing to a hand-lettered one on a Kleenex box. It read THIS DRIVER HAS AN ALLERGY. DO NOT SMOKE. I sighed and tossed the cigarette out the window. He finally screeched to a halt in front of the Hilton. I handed him the exact fare, one dollar and forty cents. I always try to tip a cab driver, but he’d upset me.

“Cunt!” I heard him mutter as I slammed the door.

The lobby was teeming with people. I found the right elevator and was rushed up thirty-five floors so fast my ears popped. I entered the suite that had been taken by the false nail manufacturer, and gave my name to the lady at the desk. I turned around and there they were, the other hundred actresses with their calcium deficiencies, chasing their big break.

“Good God,” I told myself as I found breathing space along a wall and leaned against it. A tall, slender gal in a black leotard and short skirt suddenly started laughing. She looked at me and said, “Do you realize how ridiculous this scene is?”

I broke up and confirmed that I did, indeed, realize it. We compared nails and were into a rap session about our careers (she was a dancer) when our names were called. We entered the suite’s bedroom and were confronted by a tight-lipped older woman.

The ritual was like being arrested and processed at a police station. We lined up and held out our hands. The older woman passed along the line and examined our nails closely. She snapped her fingers and a man appeared with a Polaroid camera. He took pictures of each of our hands.

“Leave your resumes at the desk,” the woman told us.

“How many girls are you hiring?” I asked.

“Six.”

Another hundred girls had joined the first hundred in the waiting room, and every one of them had, I was confident, worse nails than mine.

The Casting Couch and Me

“See you,” I told the dancer.

I was wilting fast. It was 12:45. My next appointment, the audition for the two stage plays, was at one o'clock at Twenty-Second Street.

The auditions for *Look Back in Anger* and *The Big Knife* were being held in an old loft building that had been converted into a theatre. A young girl sat behind a desk in the makeshift lobby and I gave her my name and resume.

“The director will see you in about fifteen minutes, and if you have a monologue please be prepared to perform it for him,” she told me.

“OK,” I replied. “Where’s the ladies’ room?”

I sat in one of two stalls in the ladies’ room and took some deep breaths. I hadn’t performed my monologue in a few days and wasn’t sure I had it down letter-perfect. All actresses worry about forgetting their audition monologue, even though they may have performed it hundreds of times. My audition monologue was St. Joan’s heartbreaking plea for her life. I’m certain George Bernard Shaw, the author of the play, never considered having that dramatic speech delivered in a graffiti-ridden stall of a ladies’ room, but that’s where I ran through it.