

Phoebe

A One Act Play

By Alan Goodchild

Tilford Institute performance as part of 'Prologues' - July 2023

Woking Drama Festival performance October 2023 – Commendation.

National Drama festival Finalist 2024 – Commendation.

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Cast List

Character	Gender	Age
Suzanne	Female	30
Madeline	Female	55+
Joan	Female	55+

Properties List

Set and props on stage:

Sign hanging or on counter: Austentatious

Two small tables. Gingham covers.

Four chairs, two at each at table.

Small counter centre stage

Tea pot on counter

Two sets cups and saucers on counter

Small cake stands and various cakes including scones on counter

Props off stage:

Cleaning cloths for Suzanne and Joan

Handbag for Madeline

Photo of Phoebe for Madeline

Scones

Scene 1 - The café

(Two small tables with chairs, small counter centre stage rear, cake stand etc. Cafe signage 'Austenteatious'. Suzanne Gray, the daughter of Joan: and her husband Harold, the proprietors, tidies the tables in readiness for opening. She hums the tune along with the radio as she works. Suzanne rehearses for an upcoming job interview. She considers several options for her opening salvo. She picks up a menu as a prop and sits as if entering the interview room. First confident, business-like.)

(SFX: Queen: I want to break free. Fades before she speaks)

Suzanne: Good morning, my name is Suzanne, Gray. I manage a thriving catering business in a picturesque village in Hampshire. We specialise in classic French cuisine laced with old school charm. **(reflects)** Like hell we do.

(She ponders it. She stands, cleans tables again then repeats the movement. More sassy, amusing. (gives a Vegan hand sign)

Suzanne: Hi, call me Suz, my baby is a niche food cabin in the Southern hills. We've a Quinoa-Kimchi Fusion type base. We live and breathe new-age, I'm more Vegan than Mr Spock.

(Enter Madeline unbeknown to Suzanne. Suzanne realises she can't do either truthfully. Her mood changes to sombre)

Suzanne: Hi, I'm dopey, single Suzanne, I mop tables, pick the chips out of the sugar and let the old ladies leave without paying.

Madeline: That's benevolent of you.

Suzanne: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't hear the bell.

Madeline: The door was held open; I thought it would be ok.

Suzanne: It's ready for George, he delivers bread on a Wednesday.

Madeline: But it's Tuesday.

Suzanne: Jim then, Jam's and stuff.

Madeline: And Thursday?

Suzanne: Bob, cakes.

Madeline: No home baking?

Suzanne: Scones. Just scones, always scones.

Madeline: Do you wedge the door open for all of them? They're that regular?

Suzanne: Yep, as clockwork.

Madeline: You're not very security conscious.

Suzanne: No need round here. Nothing ever happens.

Madeline: Are you sure? Jane Austen must have got it from somewhere. I see the crafty connection.

Suzanne: Oh God, you're not from the Intellectual Property Office, are you? We can't lay claim to much of a link.

Madeline: You're in Hampshire. It said that I was entering 'Jane Austen country' on the sign up the road.

Suzanne: Bit tentative though, isn't it?

Madeline: Perhaps. Have you read her books?

Suzanne: Every single one. I have lots of spare time.

Madeline: That's enough of a link for me. Now, am I old enough for a free tea?

Suzanne: You most certainly are not.

Madeline: Right answer! Will you join me in a cup? I don't know anyone round here, you may call me Lilly no-mates.

Suzanne: Not sure I can spare the time.

Madeline: Go on, fight your way through the crush.

Suzanne: We get coaches.

Madeline: In your car park?

Suzanne: Small coaches, occasionally.

Madeline: If one arrives, you'll be excused.

Suzanne: If one arrives, you'll be on the clock.

(This pleases Madeline. Suzanne pours two teas and brings them to the table. She carries the tray in both hands and takes the teas off in both hands. She sits)

Madeline: I like it here. More than you it seems? Were you rehearsing for something big?

Suzanne: I was trying to. I have a job interview in London. It's a posh restaurant in Knightsbridge.

Madeline: Ah.

Suzanne: My problem is, that I may have slightly exaggerated my status and experience.

Madeline: As one should.

Suzanne: Grossly exaggerated actually.

Madeline: You have a foot in the door now, that's half the battle. I lie with a passion to get where I want to be. I once told a panel of interviewers that my greatest love was water skiing.

Suzanne: I'm guessing it wasn't?

Madeline: I'd never been on a water ski in my life, couldn't swim very well either. I got the job though. I successfully sold over-priced adventure holidays to unsuspecting young things for five years. That gave me the money to start my first business. Then I learned to water ski, on lake Garda in Italy.

Suzanne: Why wouldn't you? **(Dreamy)** It's not Godly though is it, fibbing?

Madeline: Do you have a faith?

Suzanne: Not actively. My parents do though.

Madeline: Ah. And do they know of your slight exaggeration?

Suzanne: I may have neglected to mention it.

Madeline: Then what the eye doesn't see...

Suzanne: The heart doesn't grieve over?

Madeline: Carpe diem, seize the day, young?..

(They make to clash cups, but steady them in both hands as they both have tremor)

Suzanne: Suzanne. My name's Suzanne.

Madeline: Suzanne Gray?

Suzanne: Daughter of the proprietors, Joan and Harold Gray. **(puts hand to heart)**

Madeline: And soon to be high class restaurateur. I'm Madeline. Madeline Jenks.

(They shake hands at Madeline's request)

Suzanne: Are you local?

Madeline: Just visiting.

Suzanne: Have you been to Chawton?

Madeline: I haven't.

Suzanne: You must go, it all kicks off there with Jane Austen. The cottage has been open as a museum since 1949. It's packed with her letters, her handwriting was beautiful, if a bit small. There's also a museum in Bath that's quite good and-

Madeline: Are you on a retainer?

Suzanne: I wish. No, I'm just a fan.

Madeline: Have you always been a bookworm?

Suzanne: As long as I can remember.

Madeline: My daughter would have been, I'm sure. Is yours hereditary?

Suzanne: Doesn't appear to be, neither of my parents are, save the bible and the book of common prayer. Would you like a daughter? I'm not expensive to run.

Madeline: I had one. She died.

Suzanne: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean-

Madeline: It was a long time ago. She loved books, we both do, did. Do.

Suzanne: Is a love of reading usually hereditary?

Madeline: Do you know I think it is. My Mum read constantly. Copies of the People's Friend littered the front room. It was a very moral publication but she also read the spicy stuff: Lady Chatterley's Lover and others. She wouldn't let me see those till much later.

Suzanne: Spicy stuff wasn't on the menu at ours, perish the thought, hail Mary's and all that. Did your Mum let you look in the end though? Or did you steal a peek?

Madeline: I am undone. I was scolded, but when she calmed down, she said that variety was the spice of life and that everyone should experience everything they can. Just not at my tender young age, she added as a footnote. She also said that you might as well be dead as out of the fashion.

(They both quite obviously look at Suzanne's uniform)

Suzanne: Amen to that.

Madeline: Amen indeed, this is not a rehearsal young Suzanne, a life span is not to be repeated. You've got one shot and that's your lot.

Suzanne: That's a sobering thought.

Madeline: On the contrary, it's an enlightening one if you let it guide your actions. Not recklessly of course but the occasional risk is usually well worth the taking. Tell me, Suzanne, what have you done in your life that was risky?

Suzanne: I flashed my knickers one day. A proper moon shot.

Madeline: That's bold. And what happened?

Suzanne: He cried, we were seven.

Madeline: Difficult age, seven. Do you remember why you did it?

Suzanne: Yes, Juliet told me that she was going to marry him. I got told off.

Madeline: That could have been deemed a crime of passion. The case would most probably have been dismissed.

Suzanne: Mum was mortified.

Madeline: Oh, come on.

Suzanne: No, mortified, Dad too, especially.

Madeline: And what of the boy, was he scarred for life?

Suzanne: Nope, perfectly happy and living with a policeman in Dover, last I heard.

Madeline: Then neither you nor Juliet would have benefitted by your actions?

Suzanne: Obviously not, but we still laugh about it. Brazen Hussy, she calls me, out loud, in the pub. 'Oi, Brazen Hussy, vodka!' Get's me noticed if nothing else.

Madeline: I'm sure it does, we all like to play the bad girl on occasions. But, if you want to be noticed, then why work here in a small cafe?

Suzanne: It's the family business thing. I wanted to go to art college but that wasn't possible.

Madeline: To study what?

Suzanne: Acting, drama, serious stuff not Flash Dance, all that cavorting around, haven't got the legs for it anyway.

Madeline: Me neither. So, what stopped you?

Suzanne: Was it John Lennon who said that Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans?

Madeline: The original quotation was by an American called Alan Saunders, John used it in Beautiful Boy. What plans, what life?

(Suzanne pauses)

Suzanne: You're very familiar.

Madeline: Oh, I'm sorry I don't mean to pry, it's just-

Suzanne: No, no. Not that familiar, familiar as in, I have a strong feeling that I know you.

Madeline: I have a lived-in face.

Suzanne: You've an attractive face.

Madeline: Now you're trying to sell me something.

Suzanne: You're buying the teas. I'll do that next for the cake.

Madeline: Not if the coach comes in.

Suzanne: Never on a Tuesday.
(Madeline pauses and is amused by Suzanne)

Madeline: What if we have met?

Suzanne: Then I'd know who you were.

Madeline: I'm Madeline Jenks, widow and fellow bookworm with an interest in the lives of daughters.

Suzanne: Aha. You're writing a book.

Madeline: No, no book. And I'm no journalist.

Suzanne: You're a complete mystery then Madeline, but a nice one.
(They both sip their tea. Madeline: is tapping her fingers on the table)

Suzanne: I do that.

Madeline: Do what?

Suzanne: Tap my fingers, like that.

Madeline: I think it's common.
(Suzanne holds up her hand. It shakes)

Suzanne: It covers up the tremor in my case, I've had it since I was young. Mum took me to the doctor, I had tests, had to write zero to ten while I counted back from 100 just in case it was a brain issue, which it wasn't, thank God. Just one of those things he said, bad luck, a cross I'll have to bear. It's why I carry things in two hands. Made for this job wasn't I?

Madeline: They gave me beta blockers as a young woman, I wouldn't recommend it. It felt like someone else was working me. 'Take these if you have to go for an interview or something important,' the doctor said. My Dad maintained that a large whisky was just as good, he suffered too. Never pick up anything in one hand Maddy he said. He dropped a full pint once, in the public bar of the Red Lion, drenched his trousers and devastated him.

Suzanne: So, we're both flawed.

Madeline: But well equipped to avoid the pitfalls.

Suzanne: Don't drink pints?

Madeline: Don't drop pints, drink them by all means. Girl power.

Suzanne: You're very easy to talk to.

Madeline: So are you Suzanne. It's a treat, and a nice surprise.

Suzanne: You expected the dim waitress?

Madeline: I hoped for exactly what I've found.

Suzanne: What was your daughter's name?
(Pause, Madeline reflects)

Madeline: Phoebe.

Suzanne: Get the F... This is too weird. That's my middle name.
(Suzanne stands and moves away)

Madeline: She died of something akin to a genetic disease. She was nine, a long time ago. I still carry a picture.

Suzanne: Can I see?

(Suzanne sits again. Madeline retrieves a small photo of Phoebe from her bag)

Suzanne: You had twins?

Madeline: No, just Phoebe. This picture was taken by the midwife, the other baby was someone else's on an adjoining ward. They took the babies away back then to allow us to sleep, whether we liked it or not. It was called the Rosie maternity unit. It replaced the one on the site of the old poor house in Mill road. The original catered for prostitutes, spinning girls, vulgar youths, unruly vagabonds and rogues.

Suzanne: I won't ask. They look like little mirror images.

Madeline: They do, don't they? So, what happened in your young life while you were busy making other plans?

(Suzanne gives back the photo)

Suzanne: I'm not sure I should say.

Madeline: Then don't, if it hurts, we can just drink tea and be genteel, if a tad shaky.

(Suzanne considers)

Suzanne: There was a boy, older than me as usual. He was fun and he had a motorbike, and we drank lager. He said he wouldn't.

Madeline: But he did?

Suzanne: I was fifteen, nearly sixteen but far too young. I went away, was sent away, to my aunt's in Colchester for a while.

Madeline: And the baby?

Suzanne: Little girl, lots of dark hair, brown eyes, tiny hands, adopted, no contact.

Madeline: She'll be a reader.

Suzanne: I expect so.

Madeline: Any more tea in that pot?

Suzanne stands and goes for another tea. Madeline looks at the photo again as she returns.

Suzanne: It used to hurt, almost too much to bear, but I was very young and stupid-

Madeline: And time heals.

Suzanne: But it leaves an ugly scar.

Madeline: Have you tried to find her?

Suzanne: I mustn't, I mean I don't feel I should, legally I probably shouldn't.

Madeline: Do you want to?

Suzanne: Once I make something of myself, yes.

Madeline: You are something Suzanne, you are very much something.

Suzanne: Not if I fail this interview I'm not.

Madeline: Then let's test you. I'll play the interviewer, you just be you.

Suzanne: I couldn't do that.

Madeline: You wanted to act, I have acted on stage and I've run a fairly large company, so treat this as an audition and act the part you want to get. I'll guide you, OK?

(They stand and pull chairs accordingly. They sit opposite at the other table. Suzanne exits but stays in view. She enters when called)

Madeline: Come in Miss Gray. May we call you **Suzanne**?

(Suzanne enters a little nervously, nods a 'yes')

Madeline: Please, take a seat. How was your journey in?

Suzanne: Fine.

Madeline: Liar.

Suzanne: What?

Madeline: This is London, I live there, it's never fine.

Suzanne: But what if it was?

Madeline: First impressions are important. Your answer almost ignores their question: 'Yeah fine thanks, can I have a more interesting question now please?' You see? So give them a more interesting answer, one that shows initiative.

Suzanne: Lie you mean?

Madeline: Not exactly, honesty is the best policy, all good companies expect it, but they also look for small things that show initiative, right from the off, don't lose the opportunity to show them. What problem solving could you possibly have done on the way into London, given the chance? Get me? Now, how was your journey in, Suzanne?

Suzanne: It was easy thank you. I checked three different routes across town last week to find the best. I know London can be tricky.

Madeline: Good. That's impressive Suzanne, are you always this diligent?

Suzanne: If I want something I do my best to get it.

Madeline: Good. And do you want this job?

Suzanne: I wouldn't be here if I didn't.

Madeline: Ah. No. Too familiar and fairly close to ridiculing them. 'I wouldn't be here if I didn't, pratt!' See? Keep them at a respectable arm's length. Ask yourself why would they want you to want this job, then answer them with something you'd want to hear in their position. Step in their shoes if you like and believe in yourself. So, Suzanne: And do you want this job?

Suzanne: Yes, I do. I would love the challenge, and I know that I am ready for it.

Madeline: Excellent, succinct, respects their position as a challenge but one that you are willing and able to accept. Now the tricky ones. Ready? Your experience isn't at all what we would consider ideal for this role.

Suzanne: That's not a question.

Madeline: It's an old trick, making a statement that directly challenges your suitability for the role and adds pressure in so doing. So answer it, and rebuff strongly. Suzanne?

Suzanne: If you want someone to do the role they have practised somewhere else, then I agree. But I wish to develop the role, and myself, to top the industry and have others follow us. I want to be the best.

Madeline: Not confident?

Suzanne: My hands are clammy.

Madeline: Where do you see yourself in five years, Suzanne?

Suzanne: Will they still ask that one?

Madeline: Possibly. So where? And don't say 'in your seat' or that you'll open your own restaurant.

(Joan, Suzanne's supposed mother, enters the cafe unbeknown to either woman)

Suzanne: I see myself running the best restaurant in town.

Joan: No change there then.

Suzanne: This is a cafe Mother.

Joan: And an empty one with dusty tables. Idle hands dear, idle hands.

(Suzanne stands and goes to wipe tables. Madeline returns to the table)

Suzanne: We were role playing, Madeline is helping me.

Joan: That's nice, but don't raise her hopes too high, will you?

Madeline: She's very capable.

Suzanne: It's been really useful. Lot's to think about. I'll blow their minds.

Joan: Pride comes before a fall dear.

Madeline: Nothing ventured nothing gained?

Joan: London is a long way away.

Suzanne: It's an hour, and I'd move closer.

Joan: You'd move to London? (ridiculing)

Madeline: Lots of youngsters do.

Joan: Ah. Roads paved with gold. I think something more local.

Suzanne: We've been over this Mother.

Madeline: Have you always lived here, as a family I mean?

Suzanne: Yes, nearly all my life, we lived in Cambridge before here.

Madeline: Wow, this is a coincidence. It's changed a lot in the last few years I've heard, Cambridge. How old were you when you moved?

Joan: She won't remember that.

Madeline: What year was it?

Joan: Oh I forget, nineties.

Suzanne: Well, I'm thirty now and my first school was here, so.

Madeline: You were born in ninety-three, maybe?

Suzanne: This day in ninety-three, it's my Birthday today, the big 'three O.'

Madeline: Oh wow. Many happy returns Suzanne, I hope you have a wonderful day. Thirty is a good age to change tack, lots of the top women did.

Suzanne: See Mother, someone has my back.

Joan: It's not a question of having your back. This is a good business, and we all need to be local.

Suzanne: We care for my brother. (To Madeline)

Joan: Not things to discuss with a customer dear.

Madeline: That must be difficult.

Suzanne: There are others worse off, but the need is constant.

Joan: It's a labour of love. You should feel that too.

Madeline: Your brother is younger than you?

Suzanne: Twenty-five, physically.

Madeline: Was he born in Cambridge too?

Joan: No.

Madeline: But you were born in Addenbrookes? (to Suzanne)

Suzanne: Yes. Mother worked there.

Joan: Not for long. Hated the place.

Madeline: We lived in Brompton Road, just round the corner. My daughter was born in Addenbrookes too. The Rosie Maternity Unit, as was.

(Joan realises something strange is coming from Madeline)

Joan: Those scones won't bake themselves, Suzanne.

Suzanne: But there's still some left.

Joan: We always bake fresh you know that.

Suzanne: Yes but-

Joan: Please?

(Suzanne exits. Both women appear guarded)

Madeline: Your daughter is very good with customers, you must be very proud of her?

Joan: She's a mainstay of the cafe, I don't know what we'd do without her.

Madeline: She seems intent on a move?

Joan: We have a good business here.

Madeline: You have to admire her aspirations though; young people need a new challenge surely?

Joan: Oh, I can assure you that there are enough challenges in her life already. The job here suits her and it suits the family. We need her and she needs us, close by.

Madeline: London really isn't that far you know; my journey here only took-

Joan: I know where London is, thank you. Now, would you like anything else?

Madeline: Yes. I'd like you to look at something.

(Madeline takes the photo from her bag. Joan: makes herself busy)

Joan: We must make ready for the day I'm afraid.

Madeline: It won't take a second.

Joan: We have coaches.

Madeline: Never on a Tuesday, apparently?

Joan: A clean ship is a happy ship.

Madeline: It looks very clean to me.

Joan: We pride ourselves on cleanliness.

Madeline: Next to Godliness, Joan?

Joan: I'm sorry?

Madeline: I'd like another tea please and a scone, one of yesterdays will do.

(Joan pauses)

Joan: She suffers with her nerves, please don't make things worse.

Madeline: I wouldn't have said, she appears determined.

Joan: Raising her hopes won't be helping her.

Madeline: You're not helping me. A paying customer. Please, look?

(Madeline holds the photo up again. Joan moves, takes it and looks at it)

Madeline: They look like twins don't they? Suzanne thought so too.

(Joan keeps looking, she is trying to recognise her own daughter. She returns the photo and moves to the counter)

Madeline: The photo was taken by the midwife. But you know that don't you?

Joan: I have no idea what you are talking about.

Madeline: Janine, remember?, the Irish midwife? She sent me this two weeks after I left hospital. Lovely lady. She moved back to Ireland at some point. To a small home in Cork, never married. Worked at the University Maternity Hospital there. That's how we found her.

Joan: I'm afraid the scones are past their best, it'll be ages.

Madeline: Then I'll just have the tea. Please.

(Joan pours a tea and takes it to her)

Joan: I don't know who you are, but I would like you to stop encouraging my daughter. You don't know her.

Madeline: This isn't the first time you have seen this photo is it? Janine sent a copy of this to the other Mum. To you, Joan Gray.

Joan: There must be hundreds of Joan Grays in the country.

Madeline: We were in different wards, you and I. Why have you never shown it to Suzanne?

Joan: You are making a big mistake.

Madeline: What is wrong with your son?

Joan: That is personal, and I'll thank you not to pry into my family affairs.

Madeline: I know what it's like to care for a sick child.

Joan: Then you should be more understanding.

Madeline: What I didn't know back then, was why we had to care for her.

Joan: God sometimes makes choices for us.

Madeline: Crosses we have to bear you mean?

Joan: He guides us how to cope.

Madeline: There was no trace of the gene in either of our family lines. I know for a fact that Phoebe, our little Phoebe, wasn't ours. Janine has been very helpful, once she realised the gravity of what she hadn't done.

Joan: I don't know what you are talking about, and I think you should drink your tea then leave.

Madeline: I think you should be as honest as your faith demands. She needs to know.

Joan: You don't understand.

Madeline: Then explain it to me, because God knows I've tried to understand why someone would want to leave hospital with another woman's baby.

Joan: I left hospital with the baby I was given.

Madeline: You left hospital with the baby you took.

Joan: I collected my baby from the same place I left her.

(Suzanne returns to the café)

Suzanne: They'll be a few minutes I'm afraid.

Madeline: I have all day if necessary.

Suzanne: Do you really live in London?

Madeline: Yes, I have an apartment in Holborn. Will you need support on the day?

Joan: I think we should discuss this in private first before you go tearing off and make a fool of yourself.

Suzanne: Hopefully I won't. (Upset, hurt)

Madeline: I'm sure you won't.

Joan: Based upon two teas and a brief discussion?

Madeline: Call it maternal intuition.

Suzanne: I know you mean well Mother, but I need to do this.

Madeline: And I can provide the support you need in London.

Joan: No. I forbid it!

Suzanne: Mother!

Joan: She's a total stranger.

Suzanne: She's trying to help. She's just being nice.

Joan: Oh, you think?

(Joan throws a tea towel down and leaves the café)

Suzanne: You must excuse her; she doesn't mean to be rude. We have discussed this but she really does feel that my future is here, and that I ought to feel that too. But I don't. I need to get out.

Madeline: I don't want to add to your problems, if I should go then-

Suzanne: No, it isn't, you're not, it's the best thing.. She tries but..

Madeline: But sometimes you wonder whether your Mum knows you at all?

Suzanne: Sometimes we're like chalk and cheese.

Madeline: Then maybe it is time to move on, we all get there, you're not so special.

Suzanne: But am I wrong?

Madeline: In my opinion, you will be if you don't follow your heart. Take a risk, I can help make it a calculated one.

Suzanne: Then there's my brother.

Madeline: Don't you think he'd want the best for his sister?

Suzanne: He'd miss me.

Madeline: It's an hour, you said that, it works both ways. Nothing ventured?
(Suzanne considers)

Suzanne: It's on the 14th of next month.

Madeline: Where?

Suzanne: Bluebell's. Kensington High Street.

Madeline: Time?

Suzanne: Two thirty.

Madeline: And you're coming by train?

Suzanne: Waterloo, gets in at 12.28.

Madeline: Then in true detective style, I'll meet you under the clock. We'll go together on the tube and have a coffee somewhere close.

Suzanne: Would you do that for me? You only came in for a tea.

Madeline: Sometimes fate takes a hand. It's good for me too. Mum's the word though, best for all.

Suzanne: Mum's the word.

Madeline: Would you like me to talk to her once more before I go? It might help to know that her daughter isn't just disappearing into the smoke, never to be seen again?

Suzanne: She'll be protective of me whatever. I'll go see.
(Suzanne leaves to get Joan. Joan enters)

Joan: What do you want from me?

Madeline: I want her to have the life she needs.

Joan: What are you going to do?

Madeline: Why did you do it?

Joan: It was the hospital's mistake not mine.

Madeline: And Janine?

Joan: We worshipped together. I was her mentor. They were busy during that night, she made a choice, no-one knew. No-one would have known.

Madeline: Had my Phoebe not been diagnosed, later on.

Joan: I had no knowledge of that.

Madeline: Liar. You ignored Janine's letters for years.

Joan: She was at fault, not me.

Madeline: You threatened her, told her she'd never work again.

Joan: She didn't deserve to work again.

Madeline: She admitted her mistake and she told you that she couldn't guarantee that the baby you had was yours.

Joan: Neither could she say that my baby wasn't mine, not definitely.

Madeline: She begged you. Why didn't you contact the hospital?

Joan: There was a bond, I knew she was mine, I couldn't give her up. We'd tried for years, then suddenly...

Madeline: And when your son was born?

Joan: It was unplanned. It was God's way.

Madeline: Then may your God forgive you.

Joan: And who will forgive you? If you knew that the baby that you had might not be yours? You had my baby too.

Madeline: We knew nothing of this before Phoebe died. I chose the name Phoebe in hospital, no idea why. Janine eventually said that she sent you the photo too, just weeks after the birth. Then nothing. We found Janine again, finally, my late husband and I, years later. We still felt that Phoebe was ours.

Joan: Then you must understand how I felt.

Madeline: Understand maybe, in some small part. But accept what you did, no, never.

Joan: She won't thank you for breaking us up. She's only ever had this family.

Madeline: But you must pay for what you've done.

Joan: We have savings.

Madeline: Good.

Joan: So, it's blackmail?

Madeline: I meant good, then you can help her fund the life she wants. While I look after her in London.

Joan: Never.

Madeline: The choice is yours. It's either that or a DNA test, proof of parentage and court proceedings against both you and Janine.

Joan: Why now? Thirty years on?

Madeline: Twenty-one years on. Phoebe was nine when she died.

Joan: I am sorry.

Madeline: But you're not surprised.

Joan: It won't bring her back.

Madeline: She was your loss as well as mine. But mine was much greater.

Joan: And you want the heart of Suzanne in payment.

Madeline: I want her to have the best chance in life she can.
(Suzanne enters, she clearly hasn't heard anything. She must hear the next sentence)

Joan: And when she falls flat on her face and comes crying back to me again, you'll leave us alone?

Madeline: When she falls flat on her face, again? Don't you know what you have here? How lucky you are? My God. If there was any further proof I needed to confirm that you are not that girl's birth mother, that was it.

Suzanne: What?
(Joan and Madeline see Suzanne: and are both shocked. So is Suzanne)

Joan: Leave us please.
(Suzanne doesn't leave)

Joan: Get out!
(Suzanne doesn't leave)

Suzanne: It's my Birthday. **(Pause)** Not my birth mother?

Joan: It's not for your ears, it's all lies.

Suzanne: God, I hope it's not.

Joan: What are you saying?

Suzanne: I was fifteen when I needed you, I'm thirty today and I still need a mum.

Joan: I only did what was best.

Suzanne: For you maybe, not for me. I wanted to keep her, I begged you. You never even came to the hospital. (pause) So what was it, what happened to me? Was I adopted? Abandoned on your doorstep? What?

Madeline: I didn't come here to hurt anyone.

Joan: Oh yes you did.

Suzanne: Who are you Madeline?

Joan: It wasn't my fault.
(Madeline hands the photo of Phoebe to Suzanne)

Suzanne: Phoebe. And me?

Joan: It was an honest mistake.

Suzanne: But Phoebe died.

Madeline: Yes, nine years old. Everything I have told you has been true.

Suzanne: Of a genetic abnormality.

Madeline: Yes. We didn't know the full extent until the technology could tell us.

Suzanne: That doesn't appear in you or your husband.

Madeline: No. We've had all the tests.

Suzanne: But that does appear, in my brother? **(to Joan)** What in God's name have you done?
(Extended pause as the gravity of it sinks into Joan)

Joan: (to Suzanne) There is no medical proof of any of this. (to Madeline) You, (threatening, emotional) You come in here and say you don't mean to hurt us, just look at what you've done, and for what? You'll leave us all here, in misery, and go back to your perfect life in London.

Madeline: My life will never be perfect, but it is as good as I can make it, and I want the same-

Suzanne: Under the clock you say? (to Madeline)

Joan: What?

Madeline: 12.38.

Suzanne: Business dress?

Madeline: Trousers preferably, blouse, single colour, smart.

Joan: She has no proof, it's all lies, he's your brother..

Suzanne: Can I stay at yours?

Madeline: You are more than welcome, I have a spare room, stay for as long as you like.

Joan: You ungrateful little-

Suzanne: You're good at finding people too aren't you? (to Madeline)

Madeline: Very.

Joan: Suzanne, you can't, you mustn't, what's done is done.

Suzanne: She'll be fifteen this year.

Madeline: Don't let her get to thirty before you try.
(Joan stands and makes to leave)

Joan: May God forgive you for what you've done. (to Madeline:)

Suzanne: And may God forgive you for what you didn't do.
(Joan leaves. Madeline: is visibly shocked)

Madeline: I honestly didn't come here to hurt you, Suzanne.

Suzanne: I don't care if you did, or you didn't. I knew that something wasn't..

Madeline: I think you've burned the scones.

Suzanne: Oh, fuck the scones.

Madeline: That's my girl.
(Madeline and Suzanne hug. They exit)

END OF PLAY

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