

The Bette Tapes

Episode 4

Written by Lindsay Sharman
Music and Sound Design by Laurence Owen

Bette Tapes THEME TUNE.

BETTE

Long Cat Media presents 'The Bette
Tapes', episode 4.

INT. OFFICE, MOCKERY MANOR

CLICK

BETTE

Time: 3.30pm, date: November 12th
1994, place: my office, Mockery
Manor.

Small problem. I've just been totting
up the profits from all my cases
and... it turns out, I'm about 6
grand short of the desired amount.
Oh.

It's so unfair. I've been doing so
much better recently. If I just had a
few more months, I could earn the
money back. But MY loan is with the
unstoppable bank of Margot, and she
comes to collect in 7 days time. If I
can't pay her back on the 19th, she's
going to kick me out of my lovely
office and force me into the family
business... which was probably her
plan all along. She no doubt thought
I'd fail to get my PI firm off the
ground, that I'd come crawling back
to Mockery, humbled, grateful for the
opportunity. Well, I am not humbled!
I am not!

Dammit, what do I do. I need to find
6 grand in the space of a week.
Time to hit my contacts and find the
best-paying and briefest case of my
whole damn career.

CLICK

INT. GYM ROOM, SAINT CANDIDA'S SCHOOL FOR YOUNG LADIES

CLICK

BETTE

Time: 11-something am. Date: 14th November. Place: the stinky gym room of Saint Candida's School for Young Ladies.
Ughhhhh! God. Can't believe I'm back here *again*. This isn't even a 6 grand case. It's a £150 case.

Don't think about it, Bette. Postpone the panic.

So! What shall I call this case. How about... the Case of the Budding Master Criminal. Oh yes.

My client is one Ms Trotter, the headmistress of St Candida's. Ugh. The last person I'd want to take a job from, she's the bloody reason I'm 6000 quid in debt. And she's dodgy as hell! She literally blackmailed me into buying Steven. Oh, sorry, 'Steven' is the name I gave to Lady Katya's foal, named after Steven the lead singer of Foucault's Pendulum. Oh, Steven, you're costing me a fortune. Horses are SO expensive. There's the stable costs, and feed and saddling and grooming and vets fees and on and on. And as I have zero savings, the cost of it all goes straight onto my debt to Margot.

I should just sell him, really, but Meat's become very fond of Steven. Meat, my cat. I often find him curled up on Steven's back, asleep. They both had such an inauspicious start to life, I just can't separate them now, it would be too cruel. And they're so freaking cute together it makes me want to die.

Anyway, the case. The Case of the Budding Master Criminal.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

I've just come from Trotter's office where she filled me in on the details. Her office hasn't changed a jot since my school days. The same huge ebony desk. The same jaundiced walls and liver-coloured curtains. The same taxidermied animals cavorting in woodland tableaux. And Trotter right in the middle of it all, perched like a malevolent goblin on her leather chesterfield.

So anyway, there I am, standing before her, and first thing she says to me is "Armstrong, I need you to hunt down a reprobate. Shouldn't be too hard. Takes one to know one, birds of a feather, and all that."

And then before I could defend myself - although I suppose I did get in trouble rather a lot back in the day - before I could say anything at all, she launched into a tirade about the series of incidents afflicting St Candida's the last few months. Graffiti, teacher's cars keyed, despoiling of personal property, booby traps. Dozens of incidents, and they have no idea who's behind it... except for a single clue left at the scene of each crime. A note, detailing the 'sins' of the victim and thus why they 'deserved' the attack. It seems we have a vigilante. At the bottom of each note is a signature: the letters: F and U.

I did point out to Trotter that F U might *not* be a signature, but she still insisted that I start the investigation by interviewing all students whose first name starts with an F and surname starts with U. And here's a funny thing: there's five of them. All called Florence. Very common name.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

I have the notes here. So what I'm looking for are quirks of speech, themes and motifs, and a sense of who it is I'm dealing with. And THEN I'll talk to the Flo's.
Right. I'm going in.

CLICK.

CLICK.

BETTE (cont'd)

Alright! 75 minutes and half a packet of chocolate digestives later, I have collated a series of observations:
One. The handwriting is VERY bad. I'll wager the criminal is using their non-dominant writing hand to disguise their normal style.

Two. Occasionally, the criminal replaces the dot above the lowercase i's and j's with a tiny heart. A flamboyant, romantic personality, then.

Three. The crimes and accusations themselves have a recurrent motif. Un petit peu de 'Robin Hood', n'est-ce pas.

In one instance, the criminal scratched the word 'CORRUPT' on a teacher's car, and super-glued a note to the hood. The note accused said teacher of taking gifts from rich pupils in exchange for lenient marking on their GCSE and A-level coursework.

On another occasion, the head prefect's shoes were dusted on the inside with onion powder: a fact she only realised when her feet began to reek. She found a note in the toe of her Jimmy Choos that accused her of bullying a scholarship student for their cheap footwear. Ha! As you can imagine, that one really spoke to me. I'm starting to like this vigilante.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

And then we have the graffiti incident, and this one must've been a doozy to pull off. The graffiti was painted on the stage curtains in the assembly hall, where the school plays are performed. The reveal happened at the curtain call of last term's performance of 'A Midsummer Nights Dream'. The play finished, the curtains were shut, et voila, there it was, in foot-high letters: 'Miss Thomas licks the arse of the rich'. The audience went wild. Miss Thomas was furious.

Miss Thomas is the director of the school plays. I remember her from when I was a pupil; I can personally verify that she does indeed lick the arse of the rich. Everybody knew, if you wanted a decent part, then you'd better be from a 'good' family. And in addition, thin, glossy, hootingly confident, and a total suck-up.

I auditioned for the Christmas show one year. She took one look at my ill-fitting secondhand uniform and gave me the role of 'disgusting crone with one line'. I was quite happy with that. I love a good crone; I really went to town with the warts, and I spent weeks perfecting my cackle (*cackles*). See? You don't get that kind of quality without hard graft and dedication.

(sighs) The whole thing should've been jolly good fun, but Miss Thomas was like Jekyll and Hyde. Big smiles and flattery when speaking to the leads; positively hostile to anyone with a small part.

Hmmmmmmmm. That gives me an idea. I'm gonna get my hands on the Midsummer Nights Dream cast list... particularly the rude mechanicals.

KNOCK KNOCK.

BETTE (cont'd)
 Who could that be?
 (calls, unsure) Come in.

DOOR OPENS

FLO NUMBER ONE
 Miss Trotter told me to come see you.

BETTE
 She did?? Who are you?

FLO NUMBER ONE
 Flo Updike. Miss Trotter also told me
 to tell you she's sending Flo
 Umbrage, Florence Underwood, Flo
 Uckerman and Flo Upchurch to see you
 too.

BETTE
 For Gods sake, she couldn't just
 leave me to it, could she.
 (sighs) Come in, then. Pull up a gym
 mat.

CLICK

INT. GYM ROOM

CLICK

BETTE
 Time: bit later, place: haven't
 moved. As I suspected, the Flos were
 a total dead-end. Flo Updike is only
 nine years old, for crying out loud.
 Once all the Flo's arrived, I handed
 round paper and made them write out
 the lyrics to the school song. No-one
 even questioned it. They just jolly
 well got on with it, which told me
 all I needed to know. The Flos are
 incurious good girls. Obedient
 conformists. And, as suspected, none
 of them drew a single heart above a j
 or an i.

I also asked for their opinion of
 Thatcher's dismantling of the unions
 and response to the Miner's Strike;
 nothing but blank stares.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)
 Our master criminal would surely be aware of this country's crimes against the workers.

The Flo's are innocent. Boringly innocent.

But it wasn't a complete waste of time: Flo Underwood was in A Midsummer Night's Dream last term, so I got her to tell me the names of her fellow thespians.

KNOCK KNOCK.

BETTE (cont'd)
 Oh, who is it now. (calls) If you're called Flo, I'm not interested! Go away!

Door opens.

HEADMISTRESS
 I beg your pardon.

BETTE
 Oops. Hello Ms Trotter. How can I help you?

HEADMISTRESS
 What do you think? I'd like to know which Flo to expel, of course.

BETTE
 Ah, now, about that...

CLICK.

INT. CANTEEN

CLICK

BETTE
 Time: 6pm. Place: the boarder's canteen. In front of me, a heaping plate of mashed potato. I needed something comforting. I've been rather thrown for a loop.

I told Trotter my reasoning for the Flos' innocence. She was not pleased and said she was sure the culprit was Flo Updike.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

Apparently Flo's own parents warned the school that their daughter needed to be closely monitored for aberrant behaviour! Isn't that awful.

But then, THEN Trotter gave me a very pointed look and said... 'history repeats itself, does it not?'

I was rather confused, as you can imagine, and I asked what she meant. And Trotter told me...

(soft, small) It seems that, on my first day as a boarder, my parents informed Trotter that sending me to Saint Candida's was, in fact, their second choice. Their first choice was a 'correctional facility' for teenage delinquents. And the only reason they didn't send me there was because... because my aunty Janet stepped in. She begged my parents for leniency on my behalf, and promised that she'd pay the school fees in return.

Aunty Janet saved me. I can't quite believe it. I'd always thought that Janet and my parents conspired to send me to the worst place they could think of.

God, I was so angry at her for getting involved. I never replied to any of her letters, or returned her phonecalls. I thought she was a busy-body. But it would've been so much worse for me if she hadn't got involved.

Oh, and it gets worse! When I started here, my parents gave Mrs Trotter my diary. My diary! I remember, I thought I'd lost the bloody thing. But no, my darling parents had not only read my private thoughts, but they also made sure that Trotter was aware of the 'strange fixation' I had developed on a classmate at my old school, just in case it happened again.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

God, I remember always being told by the teachers to sit at a different table to my friends; I thought it was because I was too chatty but it was probably because...
How could they?

Janet wouldn't have read my diary, or thought badly of me because of my... aberrant behaviour. She just wanted to protect me. Oh Janet. I'm so, so sorry. If only I'd known before...

Beat.

(mutters) Trotter also told me how much the school fees are. Yeesh. How ever did Janet afford it??
Oh God... it must've been Wizzard money. Of course. Oh, Janet. You naughty old thing.

CLICK.

INT. PI OFFICE, MOCKERY MANOR

CLICK

BETTE

Time: 11.54 pm. Date: 19th November.
Place: my office, Mockery Manor.

Well. This is it. Six minutes to go, and I don't have the money to re-pay my debt. Soon I'll have to bid goodbye to my freedom. Goodbye to you, my lovely office. Goodbye to the filing cabinets that had only just started filling up with case notes. Goodbye to my dictaphone. Actually, I'm not giving *this* up, I'll put this in my handbag, Margot will never know.

Oh, I solved the case, by the way.
Fat lot of good that's done me.

The culprit was Bottom, of course.
The flashiest of the rude men from A Midsummer Nights Dream. The most audacious, the most passionate.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

A leader of men. Of course it was Bottom.

Or rather, Claire Urquaheart: the sixteen year old girl who played the role. I knew as soon as I started interviewing her that she was the culprit. Claire has the watchful aura of the truly cunning. The quiet self-assurance of someone driven by a singular purpose. And also, her teacher let me look at her English literature coursework; it was *riddled* with hearts and Marxist subtext.

I didn't accuse her immediately. First, we bonded over our mutual distaste for Saint Candida's. Claire's a quiet scholarship girl from a very normal family, attending a school obsessed with sports and breeding, so naturally she's completely overlooked.

Of course, the most essential tool in a master criminal's kit is invisibility. The only reason Claire got the role of 'Bottom' was because someone dropped out at the last minute, and Claire was the only one willing to learn the lines in time. And it was that desire to be looked upon and admired that led to her downfall. By stepping into the spotlight, she revealed herself.

Claire's performance was a huge surprise to everyone. Especially Miss Thomas, who said she was a selfish performer, hogging the stage, too flamboyant, too eccentric, too... good. Miss Thomas was very annoyed that Bottom took the focus away from her favourites. No doubt she was extra horrid to Claire once she realised the girl had talent.

Naturally, I bonded with Claire over my own experience as a student with Miss Thomas, and told her she was absolutely right about her brown-nosing the rich.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

Claire stiffened in her seat for a moment, a deer in headlights. She didn't deny it. Too much pride for that. I reassured her that I had no intention of dobbing her in - because, really, how could I? It was like looking in a mirror, except not really; Claire's got far morechutzpah than I ever had. Dammit, she's who I could have been if I'd had the guts.

But I didn't completely let her off. I told Claire that I wouldn't reveal her identity to Trotter IF she stopped being naughty. No more F.U.'s to the school.

Claire was as still and focused as a chess master while I said my piece... and then she made a very good point. Trotter wouldn't settle for a mere cessation of criminal activity; she'll want to make an example with a very public punishment. She said even if I feigned ignorance and asked to be released from the case, that Trotter would find out I'd interviewed the cast of the Dream, and from there... well.... the headmistress is no fool, more's the pity.

Dammit, it's the Binty case all over again! Why is the criminal so often preferable to the client?

There was no arguing with Claire's logic. Her days at Saint Candida's are numbered. I said it might be better if she turned herself in. Less humiliating. I offered to accompany her to Trotter's office for moral support, but she said no, she'd do it herself, she just needed a couple of hours to prepare. And then she broke for the first time, crying "it's not fair! I had so many plans. I'm barely half way through the dossier."

Yes, that's right: dossier. Turns out she's been collecting intel on students and teachers for years.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

She's collated a file of incriminating and scandalous behaviour.

Well. When she told me THAT, I replied very carefully indeed: 'oh dear. I imagine the local newspapers would be interested in that sort of thing, wouldn't it be shocking if they somehow got their hands on it?'

Claire blinked a few times, before nodding. And then I said, 'I imagine Saint Candida's would do quite a lot to avoid that sort of bad publicity. If Trotter received a copy of the dossier from an anonymous source and realised what was at stake, I imagine she could be convinced to stop looking for trouble. *If you know what I mean.*' And then I gave Claire a long, meaningful stare.

Yes, alright. That probably wasn't the 'right' thing to do. Yes, alright, so I encouraged a student to blackmail the headmistress. But Trotter did the same to me, don't forget, so it's basically karma!

Although... it's probably *not great* that a student now has so much power over the school... especially a somewhat rebellious, scheming student like Urqaheart.

But I think I made it VERY clear that she's to get herself out of trouble this time, and then she must become a model student. No more shenanigans. Maybe she'll do as I said? HMMMM.

I think I'd better keep an eye on her, in case her moral compass goes awry. Maybe I can be a mentor, of sorts? A responsible older sister. Yes. Maybe she can help me out with case work at the school holidays. Yes, she can be my work experience girl, I could do with some help around here...

The BONG of the clock striking 12.

BETTE (cont'd)
 Oh. Except there won't be a 'here',
 will there. Time's up.

Although... I wonder if Margot's even
 remembered our deal, I haven't seen
 her all day--

A KNOCK on the door.

MARGOT
 Bette.

BETTE
 Bugger.

TAPE CLICKS as Bette turns it off.

The scene continues.

BETTE (cont'd)
 Come in!

Door OPENS

MARGOT
 Hello dear.

BETTE
 Hello Margot.

Door CLOSES.

BETTE (cont'd)
 Gosh. Has it been two years already?
 Time flies when you're having fun.

MARGOT
 I'm glad to hear you've had fun.

BETTE
 Not just fun. Much more than fun. Not
 that it matters: a deal's a deal. I'm
 not going to try and squirm out of
 it. I don't have your money, I'm
 afraid. Not by a long shot. But I can
 sell the pinball machine and the car
 and my dark room equipment, that'll
 square off most of the debt. And then
 it won't take me long to work off the
 rest. Two or three months in the park
 should be enough. And then a few more
 months to save up for an office in
 town. Not as fancy as this one, but
 it'll be mine and I'll be glad of it.

(MORE)

BETTE (cont'd)

Because I'm not going to give up, Margot. I'm going to be a PI, no matter how long it takes. But I also want to say thank you. I don't think I did before, not properly, and I'm rather ashamed of that now. Because you've been very generous with me, Margot, you've given me the best start I could've hoped for. You gave me the time and money and space to figure out what the hell I'm doing. And so I will happily work the Waltzers for as long as it takes if it means that I get to keep--

MARGOT

Oh do stop talking, Bette. It's too late for speeches.

BETTE

Oh. Sorry.

MARGOT

Let's get this done and dusted and then I can go to bed.

BETTE

Right. Yes, of course. So do I start Monday?

MARGOT

No, Bette. I want to re-negotiate.

BETTE

Re-negotiate?

MARGOT

The terms of the debt. I don't want you to work at the park.

BETTE

You don't?

MARGOT

Your heart won't be in it. You'll be bored, distracted, you'll make mistakes. I can't risk that. Theme parks can be very dangerous places, you know.

BETTE

Yes, I am aware. But, Margot... how do you want me to pay you back?

MARGOT

Well, for a start, not by selling your equipment. You'll still need it.

BETTE

R...really?

MARGOT

I'm sure you'll solve enough cases to pay me back.
And let's say 15% interest on the debt month on month.

BETTE

15% interest?? That's higher than a bank!

MARGOT

Oh, are they giving out free utilities and office space with bank loans nowadays?

BETTE

Point taken.
Thank you Margot. Thank you. This... is more than I could have hoped for.

MARGOT

You're welcome. I quite like having a private detective in the park.
Goodnight Bette.

BETTE

Good night.

Margot WALKS to the door, OPENS it.

MOCKERY MUSIC starts up.

MARGOT

Oh, before I go... I couldn't help but hear. I think a work experience girl is a wonderful idea. Learning how to... manage people... is a most valuable experience...

Door CLOSES.

BETTE

You sly old thing...

MOCKERY THEME MUSIC at full whack.

CREDITS

You have been listening to The Bette Tapes, a Mockery Manor mini-series starring Hayley Evenett as Bette, with additional voices by Laurence Owen. Written by Lindsay Sharman, directed by Laurence Owen, music, sound design and editing by Laurence Owen. Join us next month for the first episode of season 3.