

LADIES AT THE ALAMO

by Paul Zindel

ACT II

Dede Cooper is the founder and artistic director of the Alamo, a multi-million-dollar regional theater complex in Texas City, Texas. Through her fierce will, hard work, and shrewd manipulation, Dede has parlayed this once small theatrical operation into a major cultural center. Now her power is being threatened. Joanne Remington, chairman of the board and important financial contributor, is critical of Dede's style, her artistic vision, and her inability to produce full-capacity audiences. She plans to replace Dede with Shirley Fuller, an ex-Hollywood star whom she will be able to manipulate and control. During the course of the play Joanne and Dede trade accusations and threats.

The scene below, set in the posh conference room of the theater, is between Dede and Joanne, and takes place just after Dede has exposed Shirley Fuller's history of alcoholism, sexual indiscretions, and mental instability. The "goober" referred to is a dried bull's penis, described as a "cane-like object." It was given to Dede as a gift. (For scene study purposes the single interchange between Dede and Bella may be ignored.)

DEDE, shutting off the intercom and crossing center: Well, I guess you owe me an apology, Joanne.

JOANNE, crossing to Dede: I owe you no such thing. Just because I made a mistake about Shirley Fuller doesn't mean I've made a mistake about you.

DEDE: And what is that supposed to mean?

JOANNE: It means I'm still going to bring someone down here to ride herd on you, that's what it means. *Crossing to the downstage right bar.* And that much I am still going to tell the Board of Trustees tonight. I don't think we misunderstand each other on that point.

DEDE, crossing to the desk: I don't think the problem is in the area of misunderstanding. I think it's more like misestimation.

JOANNE: Ha! You're the last one to correct my English.

DEDE, picking up the goober: Yes, but I am the first one to know you don't get very far in Texas by misestimation. Oh, I come from the dirt, all right—I'm just like a Prairie Dog—you know, you can't catch them. I'm here, I'm there—I'm over yonder—you can never tell where I'm going to be next. But I'm always out there somewhere. You know how those Prairie Dogs are. Just when you think you've got them, and you've run them down a hole—they pop up somewhere else. You just can't catch them.

JOANNE: If I were you, I wouldn't misestimate me. If you think that because I was raised with money and properly educated, that I'm weak, you're mistaken. *Crossing behind the desk.* I'll take over the Alamo myself tonight if necessary.

DEDE, moving upstage, around the desk and behind Joanne: Joanne, you're not a member of the family of clowns—as much as you would like to be. You have to be a poor clown to be in the theater. *Dede touches Joanne with the goober as she passes behind her, and then continues moving downstage right.*

JOANNE: Get that away from me, or I'll wrap it around your neck!

BELLA: Oh, Dede, did you hear that? She threatened you with physical violence!

DEDE, crossing left: Shut up, Bella.

JOANNE: What did you think? Just because you were born a poor hick you cornered the market on grit? You have no idea how strong a gal had to be to survive the onslaught of Biblical passages which defined a woman in my parents' house: "And the head of the woman is man" that's Corinthians; and Timothy, "Every woman should be ashamed of the thought that she is a woman." *With a yell, Dede holds the goober in front of her like a weapon and charges at Joanne. Joanne merely lifts a hand and stops her with her icy tone:* Stop that, you animal!

DEDE: That is what you find repulsive about me, isn't it? I bleat like some kind of animal. *Crossing to left center.* Is that why, in all these years, you have never once invited me to your house, you son-of-a-bitch!

JOANNE, crossing to right center: You'd be out of place at any

party I gave. You're raised like a mongrel, you can't just put on a lime-green dress and expect the mud doesn't show anymore.

DEDE, *crossing to downstage right of Joanne*: You belong to some other race, don't you? You and your herd are a genetically pure pack of cows. All the right brands. *Dede turns and again smacks Joanne with the goober.*

JOANNE: I told you to keep that away from me!

DEDE, *moving right*: Well, my mama told me, "You keep a cattle prod around, Dede, sometimes one of them high-bred cows doesn't want to go into the corral. You've got to give her a good whack!" *Dede whirls about in order to hit Joanne again, but Joanne catches it in her hand and pulls it away from Dede.*

JOANNE: Don't you dare touch me with that filthy thing again, or I'll smack you across the face with it. *Joanne realizes that she is now holding the goober in her hand and is repulsed by the contact. She throws it away upstage.* You disgusting mutt!

DEDE: Joanne, we are ladies here at the Alamo! Ladies!

JOANNE: You are not a lady! You are a rodent—that's what a prairie dog is! Something I was taught to despise ever since I was a child. You are a destructive mammal burrowing under the earth, tearing apart and chewing at the roots of anything that's trying to grow! You are devouring this theater with no sense of where you're going or the importance of what it is you're destroying! *Crossing to the desk to pick up her bag.* I and the Board of Trustees will begin legal action tomorrow and we'll have you out of here in a week. *Dede grabs the hammer from the desk, and crashes it down on the desk. She then holds it above her head and crosses to block Joanne's exit.*

DEDE, *screaming*: Is that what you goddamn think! Huh?

JOANNE: You're as sick as the others.

DEDE, *exploding, wielding the hammer high over Joanne's head, and forcing Joanne back downstage left till she ends up sitting on the edge of the platform*: BULLSHIT! If I was a man you'd just say I'm belligerent. But just because I'm a lady, I'm sick, huh? Now, I want you to stay here, and you're going to stay a while or this hammer is going to come right down and crack open your skull. You just don't blink an eye, or I will tear off your scalp with the hook on this thing, you understand me? You will at best go running down the hall with this protruding right out of your temple! I am not devouring this theater, lady! Everything this theater has, I gave it! And I have given it as an

amateur. Yes! Out of love. And I am proud to be an amateur, and I am ashamed that I had tried to forget it for so long. You know, you made the mistake of reminding me how immune I am to your kind of bigoted aristocracy. And if I want to I can invent a story about you being a dyke. I'll make up that you are a dyke, you've been living with a dyke and Bella and I say we have seen you be a dyke—and if that don't work, we can make you black! And I point out to you that the members of the Board that I have not charmed, Bella has amused. Now I'm telling you what you're going to do. You came in here tonight and you made a fuss. And the kind of fuss you made in here tonight is the kind of thing that I can kill you for. You are not in this room with the Persian Lamb Set, honey. You are in here with the Monkey Fur Set. I did not drip my blood around this town for almost twenty years to have you fussing me out. Now the only thing I want to know is am I going to have to kill you? *Lifting the hammer again and moving in on Joanne*: Did you hear me, you female son-of-a-bitch? Do I have to kill you?

JOANNE, *screaming and covering her head*: No!

DEDE: No? *Crossing to the desk*: Well, I didn't think I'd have to. *Crossing to center*. Tonight you will resign as President of the Board. In fact, you *have* resigned and your resignation is accepted! Tomorrow I will appoint another Miss Moneybags and if she does not have a foundation I'll help her invent one. There are fifty people in this town just dying to be what you are—a parasite! A leech that sucks on the backs of talented people. And there's twenty different kinds of talent—and one of them is the talent to survive! Now you just go on sitting around in your basic black and your goddamn pearls! You never did an honest day's work in your life. All you ever did was ring your bell and some servant came running to wipe your ass. Well, honey, I don't come running when you ring your bell. I may be a national joke, you son-of-a-bitch, but I am a local success! And I don't care where you see me, if it's in a theater lobby or a restaurant or in the street, you get up and get out of my way. Now go on, get! Get! Get! *She chases Joanne out the door with the hammer. Dede stops at the door. She is exhausted. She turns and throws the hammer across the floor, then crosses down right to the bar.*