

**Big city, big dreams, big breasts...**

Before she was Mrs. Mayor, Kate Bishop had her share of drama as a struggling actress in search of her first break.

# Don't Call Me Katie

by Margo Candela

An **UNDERNEATH IT ALL** Inspired Short Story

**Work-in-Progress**



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I know for a fact that my brown 1980 Honda Civic hatchback can go either five miles or 40 minutes, depending on Los Angeles traffic, when the gas tank is empty and the needle is on E. I have a grand total of \$9 to my name and I know by the beginnings of the crankies, I'll have to use some of that to buy tampons and a bottle of Midol, but only if it's on sale at the drugstore.

I check my watch, a high school graduation gift from my mom back in Tucson and the only decent piece of jewelry I own. In exactly one minute I'll be late for my 1:30 casting call. I circle the block one more time, looking for a meter with at least a little time on it and finally give up when a spot opens up right in front of the building where Giant Ear and Eye Production Offices is located on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor.

I dig through my purse, with its strapped held together with a jumbo sized safety pin so it looks a little punk, for some spare change and walk as fast as my dignity will let me. Taking a deep breath outside the doors of Giant Ear, producers of such hits as *SuperMarket*, *SuperModel* and *The Trailer Park Diaries*, I run a finger over my teeth to make sure there's no stray lipstick on them and adjust my purse so the safety pin faces the back and walk straight in on my worst nightmare.

My agent promised me I'd be the only blonde of the bunch. Instead I'm swimming in a sea of bad dye jobs, cheap perfume and desperation. When the call went out for a young (18-25), sexy/wholesome co-ed type and it seems like anyone who remotely fits the criteria is

here—typical for an open casting for an acting job in Los Angeles—my agent Corrine Masters called me first thing this morning.

“I don't care who you have to kill, blow or beg to cover your shift, Katie, get your butt down there. I got a good feeling about this one.”

So far all of her good feelings have left me with fallen arches from doing trade shows in cheap high heels and a mysterious rash I haven't been able to get rid of from a gig as a third rate magicians assistant where I had to shimmy into the still warm costume of the girl who'd just been fired.

When I sort of hinted I'd rather work my shift and at least come home with some money in my pocket, Corrine, as always, knew what to say. “Listen, sweets, we've hit a dry spell. It happens. You didn't come out to Lala Land to be a waitress, you came here to be a star and my number one priority today is to make that happen.”

So here I am here to re-read for a part on *Love and Lies*. It's a bit part with a few lines and, as far as I can tell, it'll go nowhere, but I need to beef up my resume or I'll find myself working a coat check somewhere telling people I'm really an actress and not even believing it myself.

I count six girls ahead of me. One I recognize from a recent beer commercial. Not good. She could get hired just because the casting director likes that particular brand of suds. Or someone can whisper in his ear that's she's overexposed and she'll be done before she even opens her mouth.

You never know which way anything is going to go in this business. I've left auditions in tears and got the call I'd booked the job. And then I've treated myself to my share of premature

shopping sprees and jumbo margaritas only to find out “they decided to go in a different direction.”

I could be looking at another wasted afternoon sitting in some hallway of a dreary production office because the casting director can't tell one of us from the other. But I'll stay until they make it very clear there's no hope of me booking this job. I'm here and I'm totally committed, Corrine knows this and she also knows at this point I'll consider anything, even a dog food commercial, as long as it keeps me from working a booth at the LA Convention Center for the Real Estate Wealth Expo next month. There's nothing worse than having to make nice for a bunch of dicks and bitches who think they're better than you are because they invest in condos built on former toxic waste dumps in poor parts of the city.

“Hi. I'm Kate Bishop. I'm here for the reading.” I give the production assistant, PA for short, a huge smile as I hand her my headshot with my stats (agency, height, measurements, weight, etc.) printed on the back of it.

The PA may be on the chunky side, have bad skin and miserable cuticles, but now she has the power over all of us former prom queens and small town beauty pageant runner-ups. She has the clipboard with all our names on it. Piss her off and your name gets moved to the bottom of the list or right before lunch when the casting director would rather be somewhere else. There's nothing worse than having to audition in front of people who are eating \$10 club sandwiches when all you've had is a cup for weak Folgers coffee and a handful of stale saltines. Corrine's first lesson was: “If they ask, you're never supposed to take them up on the offer, no matter how hungry you are. Directors don't like it when an actress eats. It brings up all sorts of questions, honey.”

“Gosh, it’s hot today. Isn’t?” I keep smiling, determined to get some reaction from the PA, hopefully positive, before I sit down and disappear into a sea of bimbos. “Cute top. Where’d you get it?”

“Contempo’s.” She looks at me suspiciously but puts my headshot near the top of the pile.

“I love that store!”

Once I make it, I’m never setting foot in there again. It’s my go-to place for outfits when I have a date with wannabe producer, personal assistants to some director and someone I’m desperate enough to go out with because I know at least I’ll get a decent meal out of it. Still, it’s usually worth the \$19.99 to wear something new and sparkly on a date even if it’ll be shedding sequins by the end of the night and the date isn’t going to lead to a job or introduction to a real somebody.

But like my mom back home says, “Honey, it’s not the wrapping that counts. It’s what’s underneath.” And underneath these cheap and trendy knockoffs is a girl dying to get into something designer. Someday I’ll be able to afford the real thing.

*Soon*, I remind myself, *not someday*.

“Yeah, they have some cute stuff there, uh...Kate.” She smiles at me. In this town a real smile is as rare as a natural blonde. Now I can go sit down knowing I made a good impression on her.

“OK, I’m just going to get out of your way and let you get back to work.” Always leave them wanting more. It worked in high school when the boys called me a tease, but they always called me.

I slide into an empty seat, cross my legs and pull out a book I'll pretend to read until it's safe to check my make-up and study the script. If the PA (usually they're English majors from some fancy college) gets the idea I like books like, uh, *Pride and Prejudice*, she'll put in a good word for me. In this business something small as sharing a fake bond with the PA can make a huge difference. It's how I landed my first job—a reoccurring role as a the receptionist on a half hour comedy that took place in a dentist office. All I had to do was hand each "patient" a clip board, pretend to talk on the phone and keep the top buttons of my shirt open. Sure I had no lines, but I made \$1,500 a show, or \$750 a boob as my roommate Anya put it.

Since it got cancelled I've been shuffling between cattle calls like this and doing more and more promo work at conventions, bars and events where they need a pretty girl to make their giveaways all the more appealing to the grubby masses. It's far from glamorous, but I have rent to pay and cheap dresses to buy for dates and auditions that won't go anywhere.

We all look up as another blondish-hopeful clicks in her Nine West heels and stops in front of the PA. She waits for a second to make sure we're all looking and then announces, "Hi! I'm Poppy. That is such a cute shirt!"

I roll my eyes. Amateurish and desperate. Los Angeles can be a pretty insincere city and people will compliment you on the stupidest things. I once had a woman gush about the way my hair naturally parted on the left side. I kid you not. She went on for a full five minutes about this and I'll did was offer her a complimentary spritz of perfume I was promoting for a department store event. She didn't buy a bottle, refused the free tester and I started parting my hair on the right.

"So cute! I love it!" Poppy doesn't know when to quit.

The PA merely nods and shoves her headshot somewhere in the middle of the pile. I go back to my book, making sure to keep the cover up and in the PA's sightline. For a moment we share a look and I hide a fake giggle behind it.

This is my third this week and its only Wednesday. I just got passed on for a feminine product spot. Instead of telling me I didn't get it because I was lousy at reading the line, "Hey, it's just my period!" Corrine said, "It's not you, honey, it's the line. They'd have a problem with it if Catherine freaking Deneuve herself read it."

It's her job to accentuate the positive. Still, what's so positive about an empty gas tank and \$9 in the bank?

The PA stands up. We all freeze. She clears her throat. We lean forward.

"Uh, is Karen here?" she asks.

"Karen with a C?" asks a woman with way too much eyeliner on.

"Karen with a K," the PA says. Caren with a C slumps back into her chair.

"I guess that's me!"

We all check her out as she walks by. She's petite, something that might be a huge plus for her since actors are always on the short side. She's pretty, but not so pretty that she'll be a threat to the divas already on the show. But, and this makes us all smile, she's about five years too old for the part. Believe me, we can tell.

Then it hits me. One of these days I'll be in the same place she is. Sometimes I think it would be easier if I just got married and gave it all up.

I close my book—I've been bringing it to auditions for the last six months and I haven't gotten past the first chapter—and pull out my make-up case.

I pull out a cotton-square saturated with make-up remover from the Baggie I keep in my case and start skimming off the layers of foundation on my face until I can just make out the freckles on the bridge of my nose. It takes two wipes, but it's worth it. Next I work on my eyes, making sure not to disturb the carefully applied mascara Anya, an aspiring make-up artiste, carefully applied this morning. (I've been a little short of cash and can't afford to get them dyed and they're the most pathetic shade of blonde a person can imagine underneath my mascara.) I scrub away the lipstick, leaving a slight stain and smooth on a layer of Cherry ChapStick, tap on a little color on my cheeks and sweep my hair into a college girl pony tail.

When I'm done I look in the mirror critically. My eyes look big, very blue and innocent. My lips slightly flushed and my darker roots actually look pretty good with my hair up and off my face. If this isn't a soap opera nanny look, I don't know what is.

I stow everything away and pick up my book again just as the PA comes back from escorting Caren with a C to her reading which means she was dismissed with a "we're going in a different direction" before she could start emoting. Caren keeps walking and she's out the door before any of us have a chance to shoot her our best fake sympathetic looks.

Sensing this is a good time to do some competition reconnaissance Poppy (yeah, like that's her real name) switches seats and plops down in the one next to mine.

"Hi! I'm Poppy!" She extends a hand and I shake it just to see if her palm is sweaty. It's not but neither is mine. "Poppy Reed and I swear Poppy is my real name!"

"Hi. Kate." I smile making sure to keep my voice down. I'm not here to make friends, but I don't want to make enemies either.

"Are you here for the nanny part?" Poppy asks.

"Yeah." I manage not to roll my eyes. One eye roll per audition, that's my quota.

"I just love, love, love *Love and Lies*. It's like my favorite soap!" Poppy says this over my head, projecting her enthusiasm toward the PA who is looking through the stack of headshots, but, as far as we can tell, not rearranging the order there in.

"Yeah, it's a great show. Good writing." When in doubt order the chicken dish, sit near an exit and compliment something general. Rules to live by, Corrine says.

"I told my agent I'd give my right arm to land this job. Can you imagine working with Colt Austin, I mean Ryan Darrow?" Poppy clutches at her fake boobs like she's on the verge of fainting. "He's so delicious."

"It'd be great." Is Colt or Ryan his soap name? I don't have a TV and even if I did, I wouldn't have time to watch it. Just because I'm a sporadically employed actress and former Miss. Junior Tucson doesn't mean I spend my time watching soaps.

"I'm so nervous!" Poppy says, but her hands are as steady as a sniper's. She's a pro at this, just as much as I am, but she wants to come off as fresh and set me off my game. "How many people do you think we'll have to audition in front of?"

"Oh, the usual." I pull out my script to go over the lines even though I know them by heart, but I need brush Poppy off without seeming rude in front of the PA.

“Do you think *he’ll* be there?” Poppy asks, not getting the hint I want her to go away and leave me alone.

“Maybe.”

Most likely we’ll be reading with some producer or writer, not Colt/Ryan unless this part is juicer than they’ve lead our agents to believe. If they’re looking for a love interest for Colt/Ryan, chances are he’ll be there and if he likes what he sees, he’ll signal the casting director to proceed with the kissing scene.

“I know you!” Poppy makes to slap her forehead before she realizes it’s not such a good idea. “The minute I saw you I said to myself, ‘Poppy, that girl looks familiar!’”

I smile at her and expect her to mention the local ad I did for a mid-sized chain of appliance stores. At one point my face, and ass, was plastered on billboards from here to El Segundo.

“You’re a waitress at Harvey’s!” Poppy crows. “Katie! Right? You waited on me and my date. We went there strictly for laughs and to see if it’s as skuzzy as people say it is.” She goes to cover her mouth, staying well away from her carefully applied lipstick. “I’m so sorry! Not that you’re, you know. Me and my big mouth!”

All eyes, even the PA’s zoom in on me. I could lie, I should lie, but I don’t.

“I’m not a waitress.” My smile frozen on my lips, I cross my legs so they’re angled away from her. “Sometimes I hostess. The manager is a friend of mine.”

I swore I’d never waitress. My mom was, is, a waitress and she always says the worst mistake she made in life was tying on that apron. When I left Tucson I promised myself I

wouldn't let that happen to me and it would just kill me for anyone back home to find out it's just what's happened of Katie Bishop voted most likely to succeed, homecoming and prom queen of Howenstine High class of 1987.

"I heard the money is pretty good at Harvey's. Customers are very generous if they like the *service*." She says it like it's something dirty. "Is that true, Katie?"

"I don't know. I don't deal much with customers after I seat them."

Harvey's is a restaurant, a high class Hooters but without the fun. They hire good looking girls to take orders, sell up on wine and desserts, but we never touch or even see the kitchen. After we chat up the table, take the orders and pass them on to the people who'll deal with the food, the girls go back to a sitting room to rest our feet in the requested 3-inch heels, freshen our hair and makeup, until it's time to go chat up the table again.

"Don't they make you sit with them at the table like, what are they called? Geishas?" Poppy leans in, whispering the word like it's something she thinks I don't want to get around. "I heard you can make really good money there you're willing to..."

She trails off dramatically; acting classes have not been wasted on her. Everyone is looking at me like I've just tipped over my bag and it's full of K-Y, condoms and handcuffs. Harvey's has been in the news because some of the hostesses we're not only pushing the night's specials, but also special services. Yeah, I've been propositioned and know a couple girls who only showed up to arranged to meet customers after their shift, but I kept my panties on. I was there strictly for the job as advertised. But it doesn't matter; I'm a whore by association. Too bad for me Poppy and her big fat mouth had a dinner out there and has a good memory.

“I really don’t know what you’re talking about.” I shift away from Poppy, but don’t get up. If I do she wins and if she wins I might as well get into my car, put \$9 worth of gas in it and see how close to Tucson it’ll get me.

“Yes, you do.” Poppy smells blood in the water and she’s going in for the kill. “You know exactly what I—”

“Kate? You can go in now.” The PA takes pity on me and brings Poppy’s public shaming to an end.

“Good luck, Katie!” Poppy calls out like she just hadn’t had a dagger an inch from my back a second ago. I don’t bother to turn around to acknowledge her.

Feeling like I need the shower, I follow the PA into a conference room.

“This is Kate Bishop.” The PA gives me a quick thumbs-up and then disappears back to her post.

“Hi.” I shake hands with everyone, making sure to introduce myself and repeat their names and then take my place on the metal stool in front of the tripod with a video camera perched on top that’s connected to a monitor.

“OK, Kate. Looks like you got the script. Do you need any background?” Mike, the casting director asks. He’s slim, balding and not the type of guy whose going to hold my hand.

“I think I’m OK.” I fold the script up and tuck it under me just in case I need to pretend to reference it.

He leans forward and presses the record button on the camera. “Shoot.”

"I love kids. My dream, when I was little girl, was to be a nurse...But I never had much of head for numbers." I say this in a sing song voice, letting my Southern accent peek through.

"I guess you heard why I need a nanny for my baby, Leslie?" one of the producers reads in a monotone voice that wouldn't even inspire a sloth to blink.

"The agency said it was...a family tragedy?" I incline my head to the camera, like I'm about to share a secret with it. "I've...never been one to...gossip..."

"You can stop right there, Kate." Mike whispers something to the others. A phone next to a stack of face down headshots rings. Conversation stops. Mike clears his throat and picks it up. "Yeah? OK...OK...OK."

I stay seated. There's no way I'm offering to leave the room until I'm asked to.

"Kate?" Mike shuffles some papers pulling out another page of the script.

"Yes?" I say this with a smile, but careful not to seem too confident.

"We're going to have you read with Ryan. Do you need a minute to read the scene?"

"I'm good to go if he is." A touch of sassy humor to let them know I'm wise to the game.

"Great!" This from one of the rotund female producers. She likes me. I must remind her of daughter. Lucky me.

We sit for a few minutes and then the door opens and in steps Ryan. A ripple of excitement and anxiety moves through the small room like a fast moving virus.

"Hi, Kate. I'm Ryan Darrow." He extends a hand for me to shake and I shake it. His eyes don't leave mine and if we were in a bar or on a date, we'd be pretty close to getting a room. At least this is what Ryan is thinking. I'm thinking I just booked a job.

“Hi! It’s a treat to meet you. Thanks for reading with me.” Always compliment the talent and let them know you appreciate the small favors they dispense on the common people.

“Ryan?” Mike, not sounding like the alpha dog he came off as a minute ago, wipes his palms against his khakis nervously.

“Let’s do this thing,” Ryan says licking his lips.

I quickly retrieve the script, pretend to scan it and nod that I’m ready. Ryan takes me into his arms and I melt into him, titling my head so I’m showing my better angle to the camera.

“I can’t sleep at night, Leslie,” Ryan/Colt says thickly. His breath smells like spearmint and cigarettes.

“I know what...you mean...Colt.” I run my hand lightly across his shoulder like I’m touching a precious object.

“You’re in my dreams, Leslie. In my blood.” Ryan/Colt brings me up hard against him and mashes my boobs (they’re real and I can tell by the look on his face he’s surprised) against his chest.

“I never meant...to keep you up at night...Colt.” I let my voice get breathy, like Colt (Ryan?) is making it hard for me to put two words together.

“You’ve been keeping up alright...” Colt brings his mouth down hard on mine and Ryan slips me the tongue.

After a few moments someone clears their throat and Ryan lets me go, but keeps a hand on my waist.

“Was that OK?” I ask Ryan more than anyone.

“Perfect.” Ryan raises an eyebrow at Mike and then checks his pager which has been vibrating this whole time. “My agent. I gotta deal with this, Kate. If you’re free after this I’d love to give you a tour of the studio and grab a coffee or something.”

“That would be great.” I smile at Ryan and only for Ryan.

He steps out, giving me one last wave and not bothering to say goodbye to anyone else. When the door closes I bring my focus back on Mike and the producers.

“I think that went well,” Mike says shuffling papers to get to my headshot. “What’s your availability, Kate?”

“I’ll have to check with my agent.” My soon to be ex-agent.

“Of course! You should!” The chubby lady producer says. She’ll be a good friend to have on set. I’ll have to make sure to get her name from the PA to send her a thank you note.

I’m about to ask her where she got her earrings when the PA pokes her head into the room, a big smile on her face. She knows what this means and I’m happy she’s happy for me.

“You can tell everyone we’re done for the day,” Mike tells her without bothering to look up.

I give the PA a few seconds to make her way back to her desk and then say, “I’m going to pop into the ladies room. Be right back!”

I hurry down the hall and force myself to count to ten before rounding the corner to the holding pen. I smile at the leftover blonds and make my way back to where I was sitting. Poppy is shoving her stuff into her bag, looking all shades of pissed off.

“I guess you got this one in the bag, Katie.” Poppy her voice is as hard and tired as the

way she looks underneath all her make-up. “Did you offer to serve everyone drinks? Tell them all about your *expertise* with desserts and conversation?”

I don’t say anything and retrieve my book from the chair where I left it.

“I’m sure the *skills* you picked up at Harvey’s will come in handy in your new job, Katie,” Poppy says loudly not knowing the meaning of a graceful exit. “I’m sure everyone will appreciate the level of *service* you bring to *Love and Lies*.”

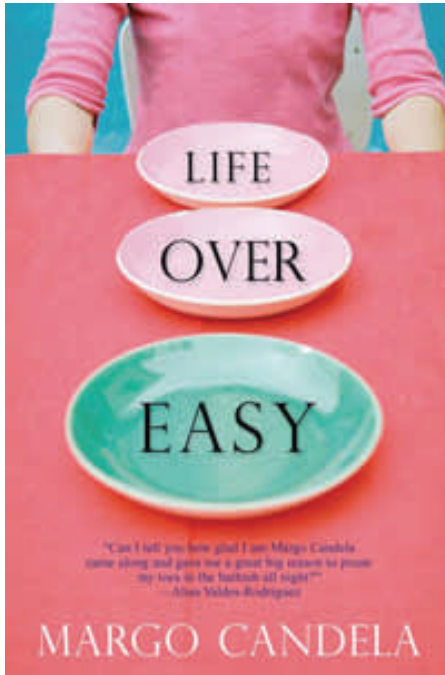
“Ms. Bishop,” the PA says with an edge to her voice, “Mr. Darrow wants to know if you’re ready to meet everyone?”

The few other girls, slow to get going to the next cattle call hoping that my success is just a misunderstanding between the producer and the PA, shift around waiting to see how I’ll handle Poppy. I only have one chance to do this and do it right.

“Poppy?” I hand her *Pride & Prejudice*. I won’t be needing it anymore.

“What!” she snaps, staring at the book as if I’ve just handed her something she’s not quite sure what to make of. When I don’t say anything she looks up at me. “What?”

“Don’t call me Katie.”



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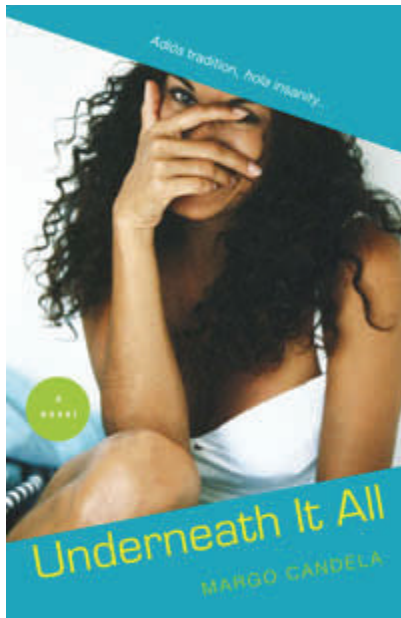
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