

That part of Joan Van Ark
by Wendy Hopkins

I saw Joan Van Ark up-close once and after that I decided to live with my flaws.

I've never liked my boobs. They are lopsided double A's and whenever I have had occasion to stuff them, they always look a LOT better on my body. I thought maybe one day I'd get a boob job and then Joan Van Ark auditioned for me.

She was reading for an independent film I was producing. The character was at least twenty years too young for her and we'd said exactly that to our "small-fish" Casting Director when she told us that Joan Van Ark's "big-fish" Manager was interested in having Joan read for us. We soon learned that in Hollywood a "small-fish" does not say NO to a "big-fish". So at precisely 10:45 a.m. on a sunny Tuesday in October there was Joan Van Ark in a low cut shirt, trying to look twenty years younger.

As soon as she was in the door she offered to, "have a chemical peel". She said it would "take ten years off" and then she touched her un-peeled face as if to apologize.

As a performer myself, I take pride in "being there" for actors when they audition, but I wasn't there for Joan. It was the chemical peel thing. She might as well have handed me a pencil and insisted I circle her flaws. I love that game.

Nose. Yes, it gets a circle. And it should probably get TWO circles for being THAT nose; the nose we see on celebrities all the time: too thin, with permanently flared pea-sized nostrils. I am positive this nose is a punch-line at plastic surgery conventions.

The eyes, cheeks and lips get circled. Maybe the chin, I'll have to come back to it. The boobs? Oh yes, they get one perfectly-shaped perky circle each.

And then I see it — the space just north of Joan's boobs and south of her clavicle. I suppose there is no surgery or scrub or peel for this area and so HERE is the real Joan: weathered and tanned like a Floridian grandmother who has had quite a life. I like this Joan and want to talk to her over a smoke and a glass of red. I am sure this part of Joan has some great stories.

The other parts are scary and insecure but this part is calm and poised. This part gardens and has kids. This part happily lies on the couch, watching TV at night and eating chips and dip. This part of Joan likes to dance.

I would consider writing a part for this part of Joan Van Ark.

As Joan finishes her read, I can't help wondering what she would look like had she not been scrubbed and cut and stitched and peeled. I'll bet she would be beautiful. I'll bet she would have told her manager she was twenty years too old for this part but she'd like to read for the part of the Evangelist. And when her manager pointed out that that part was for a MAN she'd say something like, "Oh shut up Hal, that part could easily be played by an old broad like me." And I like to think we would have seen it her way.

But as Joan talks to the director I realize it's too late for her. She's leaning over the table, laughing girlishly, her cleavage directly in his line of sight. I fear Joan's surgical youth has gone to her head.

I cross my arms over my chest and feel my lopsided double A's under my shirt. Like ugly fraternal twins they've happily spent their lives together in the shadow of their more beautiful sister, wit. It would be unfair to drag them into the spotlight now.

Joan kisses the director goodbye and waves to me like we're best girlfriends. I look at her resume picture and see now that I should have circled her chin.