

LANGUAGE LEVEL
ADVANCED

Track 15

Speaker:
Rachel Roberts
(Standard British accent)

The Girl Who Walked Home Alone

Non aveva un bel carattere Bette Davis, ma era grintosa, caparbia e il suo talento l'ha resa un'icona intramontabile di Hollywood. Questa biografia, pubblicata in occasione del centenario della nascita, uscirà a breve anche in italiano. Ve ne diamo un'anteprima in queste pagine.

The Early Years

It was said in my family," Bette Davis told me, "that one of my ancestors was a Salem witch.

"Well, I certainly hope so! It would explain everything.

"I'm descended from the Pilgrims. The first Davises came to America in 1634. That was my father's side of the family, and they were Puritans. A Puritan worried about getting caught doing something pleasurable. It wasn't a sin if nobody knew.

"My mother's side were English and French. The Keyes family moved here from England in 1688 and married the Favors, who were French Huguenots who'd arrived the same year. Originally, their name was Le Fièvre, the Fever, which may help to explain me. If there was a witch in my family, she was undoubtedly among them. When I heard about that witch, I thought, 'I have a lot to live up to. Or down to.'

"In any event, I was at least born like a witch: A bolt of lightning hit a tree in front of the house the moment I was born. Mother told me I happened be-

I primi anni

Nella mia famiglia si diceva", mi raccontò Bette Davis, "che una delle mie antenate fosse una strega di Salem.

"Beh, lo spero proprio! Questo spiegherebbe tutto.

"Discendo dai Padri Pellegrini. I primi Davis, gli avi di mio padre, giunsero in America nel 1634 ed erano puritani. La loro unica preoccupazione era non farsi sorprendere mentre si dedicavano a qualcosa di piacevole. Non era peccato se nessuno lo veniva a sapere.

"Gli avi di mia madre, invece, erano di origine anglo-francese. La famiglia Keyes si trasferì dall'Inghilterra nel nuovo continente nel 1688 e si imparentò con i Favor, ugonotti francesi arrivati quello stesso anno. In origine il loro cognome era Le Fièvre, ovvero 'la

febbre', il che potrebbe servire a rendere conto di una discendente come me. Se c'è mai stata una strega nella mia famiglia, era senza dubbio tra loro. Quando ho sentito parlare di quella strega, ho pensato: 'Ho molte aspettative da soddisfare. O da deludere'.

"In ogni caso, venni quanto meno al mondo come una strega: un fulmine colpì un albero davanti a casa nell'istante in cui nascevo. Mia madre mi diceva che sono capitata tra il bagliore di un lampo e il fragore di un tuono."

One of my ancestors was a witch.

tween a flash of lightning a clap of thunder." There are some who dispute this story, claiming that there wasn't a storm on that day. "What do they know? There are always some people around who want to bring you down, who want to deprive you of your storms.

"And I believe I remember that storm.

"You'd think with such a gloriously dramatic entrance I would've been welcome. Not so. Daddy wasn't expecting a child so soon. I was born in the first year of their marriage, and they hadn't planned on a family so quickly. As it turned out, my father hadn't really planned on a family at all. When Mother broke the news, he blamed her for being 'inefficient' and suggested she 'do' something about it, 'it' being me. He was still going to school, and babies would interfere with his academic routine. He regarded the 'it' that was me as being entirely mother's doing. Her fault."

Ruth Elizabeth Davis was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, on Sunday, April 5, 1908. Her parents, Harlow Morrell Davis and Ruth Favor had been married exactly nine months. Harlow was about to enter Harvard Law School, and Ruthie, as she was called, has shown some interest in the theater, but was prepared to be a housewife and mother. On October 25, 1909, shortly after they had moved to Winchester, Massachusetts, a second child was born, Barbara Harriet Davis.

C'è chi mette in dubbio questa storia, sostenendo che quel giorno non ci fosse nessun temporale. "Cosa ne sanno loro? C'è sempre gente che vuole sminuirti, che vuole privarti dei tuoi tuoni e dei tuoi lampi.

"E io credo di ricordare quel temporale.

"Verrebbe da pensare che con un ingresso così meravigliosamente teatrale sarei stata la benvenuta. E invece, non fu così. Mio padre non si aspettava di avere un figlio così presto. Allietai, per così dire, il primo anno di matrimonio dei miei genitori che non avevano programmato di metter su famiglia così in fretta. In seguito



Bette Davis Eyes

LANGUAGE LEVEL
ADVANCED

Track 16

Speaker:
Chuck Rolando (Standard
American accent)

The closing scene of 1942's *Now, Voyager* inspired Jackie DeShannon to co-write and originally perform the haunting¹ "Bette Davis Eyes." One film review referred to Bette Davis' "huge eyes widening further² at the end of each sentence, watering³ with the spirals of cigarette smoke." The song became a huge hit for Kim Carnes, winning two Grammy Awards in 1981.

The song paints a sophisticated woman with golden hair like fellow 1930s Hollywood star Jean Harlow's. Her words are unpredictable⁴ (*her lips sweet surprise*), and it is easy to fall for her charm (*she'll turn her music on you, you won't have to think twice*). Bette Davis was very innocent as a girl (*pure as New York snow*) – in fact at 17 she expected Henry Fonda to marry her after a kiss on the cheek⁵ – but a different picture soon emerges. She has fun at others' expense (*she'll tease you, she'll unease you⁶*), although she believes they enjoy it (*all the better just to please you*). Davis was not afraid to speak her mind⁷ (*she's precocious*) and could embarrass even the most experienced man (*she'll make a pro – professional – blush⁸*), dismissing others⁹ (*stand off*) with a sigh¹⁰ similar to Greta Garbo's (Garbo was famously quoted¹¹ as saying "I want to be alone").

The third verse refers to the star's sexual appetite – one description of Davis was as "a temperamental star for whom sex was an artistic necessity." After many failed relationships she had a reputation for playing with men (*like dice¹²*), who

Nel 1981 gli occhi inconfondibili di Bette Davis vennero celebrati in una bellissima canzone cantata da Kim Carnes. Protagonista, una donna affascinante e pericolosa...

will invariably lose (*you come up blue*). Her eyes see through people (*she'll expose you¹³*) as she freezes them out (*she snows you*) with occasional kind gestures similar to giving a dog crumbs¹⁴ from a table. Not a very kind woman (*she's ferocious*), her unapproachability¹⁵ gives the impression *she is a spy*.

Bette Davis loved the song, saying in a 1982 interview "I think the writers are damned clever¹⁶. I wrote them and said, 'How did you know me so well?'" The letter also thanked Kim Carnes for making her "a part of modern times" and joked that her grandson now thought she was "cool." Davis and Carnes became firm friends (despite the actress telling the singer she sounded like she had "just swallowed a safety pin!¹⁷"), and Carnes performed the song for Davis at a tribute shortly before her death in 1989.

This recording features 15 seconds of the song "Bette Davis Eyes," written by Donna Weiss and Jackie DeShannon (1974) and recorded by Kim Carnes (1981).

To appreciate this article fully, we suggest you type "Bette Davis Eyes lyrics" into an internet search engine, and refer to them as you read.

English Through Music...

Fergal Kavanagh, the author of this article, runs the website www.tuneintoenglish.com. The Students' Area features activities for learning English through pop music.



"When Mother and Father got married in 1907, they were both only twenty-two and no more ready for marriage than they had been when they first met – at the age of seven. According to Mother, I was conceived on their honeymoon night – the Fourth of July. Even there, I came in with a bang.

"There was a water shortage at the hotel, and Mother couldn't take the proper precautions, whatever they were in those days. Father went into an absolute rage, raising hell with everybody in the hotel, including Mother. So I was born exactly nine months to the day after the wedding. Nobody could ever say they had to get married!

"So now you know I was born in 1908, which makes me a woman of 'a certain age' – a very certain age. But I've never been one of those women who won't admit she's forty till she's past seventy." Although her birthday was April 5, Bette told me that she liked to celebrate the day of her accidental conception, that Fourth of July, 1907.

"My father never did forgive my mother for her 'carelessness.' Mother should have known what she was getting into when her future mother-in-law warned her that she was making a terrible mistake she would live to regret. 'He will make your life miserable, my dear. You can be certain.' My mother was young and romantic, and didn't listen. It was only later that she remembered the words.

"At the wedding, when some well-wishers threw rice at them, he turned on them and snarled, 'God damn you – I'll get you for this!' I've never understood what he meant by that. No one did. I suppose he didn't. He was just expressing his irritability.

"My father – a very brilliant, disagreeable man. I could not recall one moment of affection between my parents during the

venne fuori che mio padre, in realtà, non aveva programmato un bel niente. Quando mia madre gli diede la notizia, lui la accusò di essere 'un'incapace' e le suggerì di 'fare qualcosa'. Era ancora uno studente e i figli avrebbero interferito con la sua vita accademica. Considerava 'quella cosa', cioè me, tutta opera di mia madre. Colpa sua."

Ruth Elizabeth Davis nacque a Lowell, in Massachusetts, domenica 5 aprile 1908. I suoi genitori, Harlow Morrell Davis e Ruth Favor, erano sposati giusto da nove mesi. Harlow stava per iscriversi alla Harvard Law School e Ruthie, così la chiamavano, aveva mostrato un certo interesse per il teatro, ma era disposta a fare la casalinga e la madre. Il 25 ottobre 1909, poco dopo il trasferimento a Winchester, sempre in Massachusetts, nacque la seconda figlia, Barbara Harriet Davis.

"Nel 1907, quando i miei genitori si sposarono, avevano entrambi solo ventidue anni e non erano certo più pronti al matrimonio di quanto lo fossero quando si erano conosciuti, all'età di sette anni. Secondo mia madre, fui concepita durante la prima notte di nozze, il 4 luglio. E anche quella volta arrivai con un botto.

"In albergo mancava l'acqua e mia madre non poté prendere le precauzioni del caso, quali che fossero a quei tempi. Mio padre impazzì di rabbia e attaccò briga con tutti quelli che gli capitarono a tiro, compresa mia madre. Così, sono nata giusto nove mesi e un giorno dopo le nozze. Nessuno ha mai potuto dire che il loro fosse stato un matrimonio riparatore!

"Così adesso sa che sono nata nel 1908, il che mi rende una donna di 'una certa età', davvero di una certa età. Ma non sono mai stata una di quelle donne che rifiutano di ammettere di avere quarant'anni fin dopo i settanta."

Anche se il suo compleanno cadeva il 5 di aprile, Bette Davis mi disse che preferiva festeggiare il giorno della suo imprevisto concepimento, quel 4 luglio del 1907.

"Mio padre non perdonò mai mia madre per la sua 'disattenzione'. Lei avrebbe dovuto sapere in che guaio si stava cacciando quando la futura suocera la avvertì che commetteva un terribile errore a sposare suo figlio e che lo avrebbe rimpianto per tutta la vita. 'Renderà la tua vita un inferno, mia

He will make your life miserable, my dear. You can be certain.

early years of my life, when Father was still around.

"When my sister, Bobby, was born, it was undoubtedly an additional blow to my father. He regarded it as adding insult to injury. In his eyes, it was another blunder by my mother. Perhaps if I'd been a son, my father would have felt differently. If Bobby had been a boy he might have felt differently about two sons.

"I was Ruthie's favorite, and she put much more of her attention into me than into Bobby. I didn't really notice at the time, having been rather self-centered, even at a very early age, so it only seemed natural. I don't like to say I was selfish; perhaps I was self-absorbed, having a sense of self. As for Ruthie, there was only so much of her to go around between Bobby and me, and not much left for herself.

"I admit that Bobby's arrival on the scene wasn't anything I felt I'd been consulted about, and I felt not only should I have been, but if I had been, I most certainly would have said to skip it. I definitely did not see Bobby as a necessary addition to our little family, though once she was there, I got rather used to her.

"My first memory is that of taking my baby sister out of her crib and putting her up on a chair. I was eighteen months old at the time and I thought Bobby was my new doll. When my mother saw what I'd done, she put Bobby back in the crib, but she didn't show great alarm. I said, 'I don't want Dolly there!'

"Mother said, not sharply but firmly, 'That isn't where Bobby belongs.' That was the problem. None of us ever found out where Bobby really belonged – especially Bobby.

Bette Davis
The Girl Who Walked Home Alone
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Di prossima pubblicazione presso Edizioni Frassinelli S.r.l.

cara. Puoi starne certa.' Mia madre era giovane e romantica e non le diede ascolto. Solo più tardi avrebbe ricordato quelle parole.

"Il giorno delle nozze, quando alcuni invitati gettarono il riso agli sposi, papà se la prese con loro e ringhiò: 'Maledetti, ve la farò pagare!' Non ho mai capito cosa intendesse dire. Nessuno l'ha mai capito. Nemmeno lui, credo. Stava solo sfogando la sua irritazione.

"Mio padre era un uomo molto brillante e altrettanto sgradevole. Non riesco a ricordare un solo momento di affetto tra i miei genitori durante i miei primi anni di vita, quando papà viveva ancora con noi.

"Quando nacque mia sorella Bobby, per mio padre fu senza dubbio un ulteriore colpo: fu come aggiungere al danno la beffa. Ai suoi occhi si trattava di un altro sbaglio di mia madre. Se io fossi stata un maschio, forse mio padre non si sarebbe comportato così. Se lo fosse stata anche Bobby, avrebbe avuto una reazione diversa con due figli maschi.

"Io ero la preferita di Ruthie e lei prestava molta più attenzione a me che a Bobby. All'epoca non lo notavo, perché ero già piuttosto egocentrica; mi sembrava solo una cosa naturale. Non dico che fossi egoista; forse ero tutta presa da me stessa, data la mia forte personalità. Quanto a Ruthie, aveva tanto da fare tra me e Bobby che le restava ben poco per sé.

"Confesso che l'entrata in scena di Bobby mi colse impreparata: ero convinta che avrebbero dovuto consultarmi e che, se l'avessero fatto, avrei detto loro di lasciar perdere. Non consideravo Bobby un'aggiunta necessaria alla nostra famiglia, questo è certo, anche se una volta arrivata mi ci abituai.

"Il primo ricordo che ho è del giorno in cui sollevai la mia sorellina dalla culla per poi adagiarla su una sedia. Avevo diciotto mesi e pensavo che Bobby fosse la mia nuova bambola. Quando mia madre vide quello che avevo fatto rimise Bobby nella culla, ma non si mostrò troppo allarmata. Io dissi: 'Non voglio lì la bambolina!'

"In modo fermo, ma non cattivo, mia madre disse: 'Quello non è il posto di Bobby'. Era quello il problema. Nessuno di noi scoprì mai quale fosse il posto di Bobby. Soprattutto Bobby.

Perhaps
I was
self-absorbed,
having a sense
of **self.**