



Legends of Hollywood: The Life of Joan Fontaine

Charles River Editors

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"You know, I've had a helluva life. Not just the acting part. I've flown in an international balloon race. I've piloted my own plane. I've ridden to the hounds. I've done a lot of exciting things." - Joan Fontaine

In 1939, Olivia de Havilland had her most memorable role as Melanie Hamilton in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), perhaps the most famous movie in American history, but Hollywood legend has it that she only got the role because her own younger sister, Joan Fontaine, was asked to audition for the part and recommended Olivia instead so that she could audition for Scarlett O'Hara. Although Fontaine and de Havilland would make history by becoming the only sisters to both win an Academy Award for Best Actress, that anecdote was just one of the various stories about the siblings that has shed light on their notoriously contentious and complicated relationship. As Fontaine once put it, "I married first, won the Oscar before Olivia did, and if I die first, she'll undoubtedly be livid because I beat her to it!" De Havilland herself once said, "Joan is very bright and sharp and can be cutting."

Of course, one of the reasons people have remained interested in the sisters is that both of them had such long acting careers, and Fontaine became best remembered both for a career that spanned 60 years and several high profile marriages. With typical humor, Fontaine joked about the fact she had so many husbands, commenting in jest, "If you keep marrying as I do, you learn everybody's hobby." But that attention has only served to obscure her very serious professional career, which saw her win the Oscar for Best Actress for her role in Alfred Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941).

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