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Dramatic Publishing

TEA FOR THREE

Lady Bird, Pat & Betty

**“Good stories ... subtle ... even
silence is steeped in emotion.”**

—*The New York Times*



Drama/Comedy

by Eric H. Weinberger and Elaine Bromka

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“A glimpse of the personalities of the presidents, through the eyes and hearts of the women who knew the private men, before they entered their all-consuming public lives.”

—*Record-Review*

TEA FOR THREE

Lady Bird, Pat & Betty

Drama/Comedy by Eric H. Weinberger and Elaine Bromka. Cast: 1 to 3w. What is it like for a woman when her husband becomes the president of the United States—and she is thrust into the spotlight? This witty, sly and deeply moving script explores the hopes and fears of Lady Bird Johnson, Pat Nixon and Betty Ford. In three scenes taking place in the family quarters of the White House, each of the women confides to the audience. Secrets are spilled about their husbands’ rise to power, their romances with the men and their paths as wives in the White House. Lady Bird Johnson defends her husband’s quirks but finally admits, “Politics is his oxygen.” Pat Nixon recalls happier times before exploding in anger about Watergate. Betty Ford admits to being quite lost about life after the White House. Each of the three portraits becomes intimate as the women wrestle with what Pat Nixon called “the hardest unpaid job in the world.” “A beautiful script, full of humor and heartbreak. The production paints realistic—and often unthought-of—images of the First Ladies.” (*austinonstage.com*) *One int. set. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: TU7.*

Cover artwork: Chris Morris of *camorris.com*. Cover design: Molly Germanotta.

ISBN: 978-1-61959-001-4



9 781619 590014 >
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Dramatic Publishing

Your Source for Plays and Musicals Since 1885

311 Washington Street
Woodstock, IL 60098
800-448-7469

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Lady Bird, Pat & Betty

By

ERIC H. WEINBERGER
and
ELAINE BROMKA



Dramatic Publishing Company

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(TEA FOR THREE: LADY BIRD, PAT & BETTY)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-001-4

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TEA FOR THREE: Lady Bird, Pat & Betty was originally presented by 12 Miles West Theatre Company, Montclair, N.J., in their OOPS: Original One-Person Shows Festival, January 2004.

Lady Bird, Pat, Betty Elaine Bromka
Artistic Director/Director Lenny Bart
Costume Design Bunny Mateosian
Wig Design Robert F. McLaughlin
Lighting Design Lenny Bart
Sound Design Matt Heffernan
Stage Manager Eileen Watkins

The play was subsequently produced and developed by the Chester Theatre Company, Chester, Mass., in July 2004.

Lady Bird, Pat, Betty Elaine Bromka
Artistic Director/Director Byam Stevens
Set Design Michel Ostaszewski
Lighting Design Lara Dubin
Sound Design Kristyn Smith
Stage Manager Neelam Vaswani

The play's New York premiere was presented off-Broadway by Amas Musical Theatre, May-June 2013.

Lady Bird, Pat, Betty Elaine Bromka
Artistic Producer Donna Trinkoff
Director Byam Stevens
Production Stage Manager Laura Lindsay
Set Coordinator Matt Kaprielian
Lighting Design Meghan Santelli
Sound Design Rory Breshears
Costume Design Bunny Mateosian, Patricia Carucci
Wig Design Robert E. McLaughlin

TEA FOR THREE

Lady Bird, Pat & Betty

CHARACTERS

Lady Bird Johnson
Pat Nixon
Betty Ford



Kimball Theatre, Williamsburg, Va., featuring Elaine Bromka. Photo: Tom Bambara.

TEA FOR THREE

Lady Bird, Pat & Betty

Scene 1: Lady Bird

(The scene takes place around 4 p.m. in the middle of November of 1968. LADY BIRD is in one of the rooms of the family quarters. There is a large window in the back of the room with ornate curtains drawn back decoratively. There are two chairs by a coffee table set with a tea service and a plate of chocolates DRC. A chair is down of a side table R, and a desk and chair are upstage. LADY BIRD is arranging some flowers next to a telephone on the side table.)

LADY BIRD (*turning to audience*). You know, I wish I were funny. I really do. I admire funny people. Liz, my poor press secretary, is always trying to pepper my speeches with jokes. She'll say, "Lady Bird, trust me, try these!" Unfortunately, they never seem to work. Oh, and she gave me such a cute one the other day ... (*Laughs.*) Wait, this is good ... A man walks into a bar. No—A man and a monkey walk into a bar—I'm sorry, a Republican and a monkey walk into a bar—yes, and the Republican says ... (*Hits a dead end. Ingratiatingly.*) Well, anyway, a number of people keep coming into the bar and—hold on a second—

(Recaps to herself double-time.)

A Republican and a monkey walk into a bar—no, a drunk at the *end* of the bar ... (*Brightens suddenly.*) Oh! I know the bartender says, "The nuts are complimentary."

(Stops in shock.) I'm so sorry. I believe I just gave away the punch line. *(Pauses.)* Well, now Lyndon knows how to tell a joke. Yes, indeed, he does. Some of them are a little "off-color." *(Pause.)* Most of them, actually ...

(Phone rings.)

Pardon me. *(Into phone.)* Hello? ... Yes, Mr. West. Oh, everything looks lovely. Would you let me know as soon as she arrives? ... Thank you.

(She depresses the button and quickly dials a number.)

(Confidentially.) Lyndon ... How you feeling, darlin'? *(Pause.)* Well, I know. You were up a whole bunch of times last night. Can you catch yourself a nap? *(Pause.)* Just a little catnap? It'll do you good— *(Quickly jumps in again.)* All right ... All right, dear. Bye-bye ...

(She stands immobile for a moment and then collects herself and goes over to the coffee table.)

Tea. Yes. Oh, Lord, yes. Two a day? Three a day? In the past five years, I have drunk oceans of tea! Mrs. Kennedy used to refer to these as the tea poisonings. *(Smiles.)* I do savor them, though. I've had such extraordinary visitors at this table ... Carl Sandburg, John Steinbeck, Alice Roosevelt Longworth ... Now she was funny!

(She stares at the chocolates longingly.)

Oh dear, those chocolates are calling to me! *(Picks up a chocolate.)* "Where'd you get that dress, Bird?! Makes you look like a stuffed turkey." Lyndon said that to me this morning. "Change the damn thing!"

BREAK: NEXT EXCERPT

Oh! I got the sweetest note today ...

(Takes letter off tea tray.)

“Dear Mrs. Lady Bird,

My Nana wants me to tell you that she likes the yellow flowers that look like faces. I like the jungle gym you put near my house. But it should be higher and harder. Then I wouldn’t have to share it with my little brother. He’s a stinker.

Love,
Kevin”

(Holds up accompanying drawing and points out the figure in it for the audience.)

Ah, yes ... I believe we have the little stinker right here. The offending fumes are wafting off him there. *(Refolds it.)*

I kept this to give Lyndon a lift. He needs one now ... with them chanting out there day and night— “Hey! Hey, LBJ! How many kids have you killed today?”

BREAK: NEXT EXCERPT

I know he was hoping for some sudden groundswell of support. But the groundswell never came ... the country is too deeply divided. So, in March, he decided not to run.

You know, not long ago, I had one of my Women's Luncheons, right here in the White House, to come up with strategies to fight street crime. Eartha Kitt was one of the guests. In the middle of dessert, she shot up and shouted across the room: "You want to know why there's crime in the streets, Mrs. Johnson? You want to know why those boys are smoking pot and dealing it and hitting people over the head? They've got nothing to live for. *(Pointing.)* Your husband is snatching them from their mamas and sending them off to slaughter! I've had a baby come out of my guts," she says, "And I don't want you sending my baby off to that war!"

(Pause.)

So much anguish—all across the land ... in every family ... *our* family. Both our girls' husbands are over there in that nightmare. When Lyndon told the girls he wouldn't be running again, they were shattered. Asked him how he could just abandon our boys like that—all our boys. But what are we to do? *What are we to do?* God help me—I'm

so *glad* he's not running again. Yes, I am so *happy*. I prayed for it. Prayed for it for years. His heart can't take another term. Do you know, I've gone out and bought myself a black dress? It's hanging in my closet.

Once already, I nearly lost him. He was just 46 years old. And when he was lying there in that hospital bed with only a 50/50 chance of that heart pulling through, he said, "Stay with me, Bird. Stay with me." So I left the girls and moved into his hospital room and sat in that chair next to his bed day and night for five weeks—because every time he opened his eyes, I wanted him to see I was there and he was safe and he was loved ... Well, now I want him to stay with me. I want—I want us to sit on the porch at the ranch and watch the sunset, I want us to enjoy our children and grandchildren, talk to each other and care for each other and—oh—oh—oh, Bird, *wake up!* What am I talking about? He will never sit and watch the sunset. Politics is his oxygen. That's why he's drinking again and smoking and eating everything he shouldn't. He needs to be grabbing the lapels, twisting the arms, counting the votes ... The man wants to be loved so badly ...

(The phone rings. She stands immobile. It rings again. She answers it.)

Yes? *(Pause.)* Fine. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. West.

(She hangs up.)

Mrs. Nixon is coming to tea. Such a nice woman. And capable ... *(Momentarily lost in thought and then snaps back.)* Yes. I want to give her the tour. I want to make her feel at home. Mrs. Kennedy did that for me, just days after

her husband was killed. Can you imagine that? Spent hours with me. Made notes of everything she thought I'd need to know. Time for me to do that for Mrs. Nixon now. Time for her to start *her* great adventure ...

(The phone rings. She picks it up quickly.)

Yes? *(Snaps to attention.)* ... Yes, dear! ... Pat is on her way up ... I did change my outfit ... The fuchsia one with the black braid—the one you like? ... At the press conference? ... Course, I'll be there ... I'll sit wherever you like ... Lyndon, listen to me—you'll be fine. Lyndon—Darlin' ... Darlin' ... listen to me ... just—listen to me ...

(The lights fade to black.)

Interval.

Scene 2: Pat

(It is 9 p.m. in the middle of June, 1974. PAT Nixon is in her bedroom. A single chair is by the coffee table. A tray of food is on the side table. A phone is on the desk. She stands in front of the desk with a cigarette. She opens her lighter and then sees us. Pause. She abruptly takes the cigarette from her mouth and shuts the lighter. She smiles guardedly.)

PAT *(referring to the cigarette)*. I don't really need this. *(Pause.)* I just like to keep it near me, like a little pal ...

(Pause.)

So ...

(Pause.)

“How do you feel you're of most help to your husband, Mrs. Nixon?” I must have answered that a million times. I always say the same thing: “I don't nag him.” I try to phrase it different ways: *(To imaginary reporter.)* “Hmmm, I guess I don't nag him.” ... *(To second reporter.)* “Oh, that's an interesting question. I'd say I don't nag him.”

(A pause.)

The other thing reporters always ask is: “What's your favorite part of being First Lady?” That's easy. The travel. I love the travel. Dick used to call me his “Irish Gypsy.” Soon as I was out of school, I was on the move. Making up for lost time. Never went anywhere as a kid. Artesia, California—that was it. But even then, I'd read about and dream about far-away places. Well now, between being First and Second Lady, I think I've seen all those places! Eighty countries—500,000 miles! Lotta—lotta stamps in my passport ...

(A pause.)

My last trip was a couple months ago—to Venezuela, for the swearing-in of their new president. Everyone was so lovely. *(Thinks.)* Back in '58, when I went there with Dick, they weren't so lovely. Communist resistance was fierce back then. We had just stepped off the plane and we were listening to the Star Spangled Banner. I feel something wet on the side of my face. Spit. People are spitting on us from above—big gobs of cigar juice raining down us ... I'm wearing a new red suit. We don't move till both national anthems are over. Theirs is very long ... Then, as we get into our cars for the trip into town, this horde of protesters suddenly pours onto the street from everywhere—with rocks and sticks and bats. *(Mimes holding a rock and pushing the car over.)* They try to flip our cars over and smash in the windows. Dick says when he looked back at me from his car, I seemed to be having a perfectly relaxed conversation with our hostess. I was just trying to calm her down. *(Pause.)* I didn't actually feel nervous at that moment. Later, in the embassy, I started shaking and I couldn't stop.

(Pause.)

When we got back to Washington, I called everyone who'd been on that trip and we formed The Rock and Roll Club *(Mimes the rock and pushing the car over again.)* Rock ... and roll? Yes, we'd meet for lunch each year on the anniversary of that day. I think it's good to celebrate survival. *(Pause.)* Anyway, I'm glad I was invited back to Venezuela and I'm glad I went.

(Pause. Smiles guardedly.)

So, I don't nag my husband and I love to travel.

(Looks around the room uncomfortably. Sees her dinner. Refers to it but doesn't move.)

Oh—I guess I should eat my dinner. Before it gets cold. I don't want them to have to reheat it. I like getting a tray in here. Silly to eat in the dining room all by myself. Dick's too busy to sit down to dinner. I understand. He gets a tray in his own room so he can work while he eats ... He's under so much pressure. I don't know how he stands it. I told him I'm worried about him. But he doesn't want to talk about it. *(Pause.)* At least not to me.

(She crosses to the tray, takes the covered plate and rolled napkin from it over to the coffee table, carefully sets the napkin ring and utensils down, spreads her napkin on her lap, pauses momentarily and then removes the cover from the food.)

(Diligently.) Mmmm. Looks lovely ... steak au poivre, Roquefort on baby greens, baked potato with sour cream. We certainly have come up in the world. *(Laughs.)* Oh! For our honeymoon! That was roughing it. To save money, we'd loaded up our car with all these canned goods. But during the wedding luncheon, Mike and Chris Keenan snuck out to the car and ripped off all the labels! So, there we are in Mexico the next morning—we go to open a can for breakfast and we have no idea where to start. We pick one, get the lid off and—surprise! Okra! Yum! ... You know what? It was OK. We had fun—*(Confidentially.)* and we saved a lot of money.

(She takes a tiny bite of a radish. Regards the plate.)

Lots of food here. I think either Dick or the girls told the kitchen to give me bigger servings. They're always worrying

that I don't eat enough. And the press is always talking about how gaunt I am ... I've been this way since I was a girl. I always helped my mom with the cooking. Took it all over at 13 when she died from the cancer. Every dawn—two dozen scrambled eggs smothered in ketchup for Dad and Bill and Tom and the farmhands ... *(Confidentially.)* The smell alone could put you off food for a long time ...

(She regards the food.)

I can't.

(She abruptly puts the cover back on.)

I just can't.

(She carries the plate back to the side table.)

Tea ... I just ... just want some tea.

(Pours herself a cup.)

Tea always soothes my stomach.

(She takes a sip. Then another. Looks up at desk.)

Oh—I like to do my mail at night.

(Goes to the desk, puts down her tea and gets the stack of letters from a basket.)

Actually, it's a relief when we don't have a state dinner or some other function because I can get more done. We're up to 500 letters a day now. *(Conspiratorially.)* When it hits six, I'm asking for a raise! Dick's aides don't think I should be spending so much time on my mail. Even Dick can't

understand it. But I think I should know what (*Looking at one of the letters.*) Mrs. Cecil James III from Norfolk, Virginia, has to say, and if (*Looking at another.*) Mr. Otis Johnson from Kansas City, Missouri, takes the time to write the First Lady, I think he deserves a personal note, not just some form letter. And these letters cover everything—from (*Reading.*) “Where did you get that patent leather belt you wore to the ship christening?” to (*Reading another.*) “I’m a 15-year-old boy with no friends ... and no one to talk to.”

(She studies the letter for a moment and then crosses up and places it in the center of the desk.)

(Putting the rest of the letters back into the basket.) It usually only takes me four or five hours to get through these. I handled all of Dick’s correspondence when we were starting out ... (*Looks at letter in the center of the desk.*) No matter how long it takes, I want people to know I’m here and I’m listening. A letter, a touch, a hug—I think they mean a lot more than giving a speech. I hate speechmaking. I’d rather go back to scrubbing floors! Actually, I was a quite a good floor scrubber in my day. Put my brothers and myself through college doing that. But I don’t do speeches. (*Sips her tea.*) And I’ve always been uncomfortable with interviews. They all want to dig into my past. (*Puts teacup down.*) Why? That’s private, that’s past! (*Pause.*) Thank goodness, I don’t have to do any more television interviews. We’ve all agreed—that’s it! Barbara Walters was my last one.

She had invited me onto her show to talk about my trip to Africa and I thought people might enjoy that; so, I brought along all the gifts I had been given for a little show and

tell. She didn't ask about my trip to Africa. She asked me about Vietnam and abortion and feminism and Agnew and everything else I don't discuss publicly. She only got around to Africa in the closing moments of the show. Boy, is she aggressive! But I understand. She's in a man's world. Probably had to work like a dog to get to where she is ... *(Brightens.)* So many brilliant women out there. I wanted Dick to name a woman to the Supreme Court. He didn't, though. He says politics is a man's game—and he has to listen to the men who are the “pros.” He didn't have any “pros” when we were starting out. It was just the two of us. Then it became Haldeman ... Erlichman ... *(Stares intently out to audience.)*

(She goes to her mail. She picks up another letter.)

(Neutrally.) Watergate. *(She looks at a second letter and a third.)* Watergate. Watergate.

(Abruptly drops the stack of letters back into the basket. She instinctively picks up the cigarette and lighter again but catches herself and pulls the cigarette from her mouth.)

No. I'm not going to do that. *(Smells the cigarette before putting it down.)* Anyway, after this term, it'll just be the two of us again. Private citizens ...

(She breathes a sigh of relief. Picks up her tea.)

No more campaigns! Whew! Nine in 26 years! They're all a blur now. Well, no, one stop stands out—Ely, Nevada. We were just leaving there, when this old man came up to me and said he was a friend of my dad. I couldn't believe it! My dad had died of TB when I was 17—so many years before.

It was strange meeting a friend of his ... nice. The old man pointed to a mountain off in the distance and said: “That’s where you were born.” He even remembered the day—March 16th. He and my dad were working in the copper mines that night and didn’t get out till the next morning—the 17th—St. Patrick’s Day. So, when my dad saw me, he called me his *(With Irish brogue.)* “St. Paddy’s Day Babe in the Morn.” *(Smiles.)* Babe ... he always used to call me that. He was very loving ... when he wasn’t drinking.

(The phone rings. She doesn’t move. It continues to ring four times. Abruptly, she goes to answer it.)

(Pause.) Yes? *(Suddenly relieved.)* ... Billy! Oh, thanks, no, I’m staying in tonight ... so you’re free to take Connie out for a night on the town ... Aw! You can’t be too tired! Billy! How about taking her dancing? I bet she’d love that ... Wouldn’t hurt to buy her some flowers, too. I know you can afford it on that enormous secret service salary of yours ... OK! I want to hear everything tomorrow. Well, maybe not everything—just—just have fun. Have fun, kiddo ... Bye.

(She hangs up.)

One of my guys. He’s dating this wonderful girl. He’s got to fight for her! The first day I met Dick—we were auditioning for the Whittier Community Players—he comes right over and asks for a date. I say no, I’m too busy, but he circles right back around later that night and asks again: “How about that date?” I just laughed, and he said, *(Pointing, imitating Nixon.)* “Don’t laugh. I’m going to marry you one day.” He actually pointed his finger—an unusual courting gesture. I thought he was crazy. Besides, I had no desire to get married. I loved my independence: been earning my

own living for years—janitor, bank teller, movie extra, salesgirl, hospital administrator, high-school teacher. Oh! I was advisor to the Whittier High Pep Committee. “Onward and Upward!” That was our motto. “Onward and Upward!” And I had quite a few boyfriends.

But from that first day we met, Dick fought to win me over. He’d show up on my doorstep unannounced, follow me around all day, even drive me to dates with other boys and wait in the car all night to drive me home again! He always said he was “no Romeo,” but he was romantic in his way. He’d write me long, poetic letters—bundles of letters—that began: “Dearheart” ... I’ve kept them ... And he’d take me on long drives ... to nowhere ... or to beautiful beaches where we lay for hours—not saying anything, just reading or looking out over the water ... He told me I had the finest ideals of anyone he had ever known. That we were destined to achieve great things together. *(Pause.)* It took about two years—but eventually, I came to feel, well, I felt—

(Stops and abruptly moves away to get her tea.)

Actually, we’re a lot alike, Dick and I—we’re both doggedly organized, we’re hard workers, and we detest scenes. *(Brightly.)* Oh! I hope Billy takes his girl dancing. I used to love to go dancing. Dick and I went to all the hot spots when we were young—danced till the band stopped playing—the Lambeth Walk, the tango—Dick was quite a good dancer! Once we were on vacation in Hawaii, and he won a hula contest! I know, hard to believe, but he did! You should have seen him!

(She laughs.)

It's nice to hold someone close ... and get lost in the music ...
(Lost momentarily in thought. Snaps out of it.)

(She goes over to her desk and picks up a clipboard.)

BREAK: NEXT EXCERPT

... I do miss exercise. I crave exercise. A few times a week, Julie and I go out late at night, to the worst part of town, to the streets where no one's out at night, and the secret service follows us and we walk and we walk and we walk until we can't anymore. But not—not tonight. *(Silent. Then brightens suddenly.)* Actually, *(Starting to walk methodically around the room, making sharp turns at the corners.)* if you walk the perimeter of this room, allowing for furniture, 91 times, that's a mile. For a change of scenery, all you have to do is *(Turning in the opposite direction.)* reverse direction and go the other way. You see? Very workable ...

(She walks in silence for a moment.)

(As she walks.) Dick told me Churchill once said that political battle was as exciting as war, and just as dangerous: but that in war, you can only be killed once. *(Stops abruptly.)* You know what I think? I think the Watergate break-in was a set-up. I do. I wouldn't put anything past them. People have been out to get Dick since the beginning and they will not stop until they take him down. *(Resumes walking, then doubles back abruptly again.)* Why do they

hate him so much?! He's done such good for this country. I can't understand it. No, I understand. It's politics. Politics is ugly—a dirty, ugly business and—I LOATHE it! There, I've said it! I LOATHE IT! I've given up everything I ever loved for politics. My two beautiful girls—always, always having to leave them, when they were so little, to campaign. And our pamphlets for Dick's first congressional race—I spent my entire inheritance, the \$3000 from my parents' farm, on those pamphlets. They were perfect. They were beautiful. A few days after they arrived, our campaign headquarters was broken into and they were stolen. All of them! Gone! Did anyone investigate *that* break-in?! Was a special prosecutor appointed?! Did the media devour it?! And when we lost to Kennedy, did anyone investigate the voter fraud in Chicago and Texas?! That election was ours! They stole it from us! I—(*Cuts off abruptly. Turns away momentarily.*)

(*Turning back.*) My dad taught me—you hold your emotions in. You don't make a public display of yourself. Only two times, I've cried in public and both times I hated myself for it. Two times—at my mother's funeral and when Dick conceded to Kennedy. I begged him not to concede, I begged him, but he didn't listen! And now, I hear from Julie that he may resign. Quit? Quit?! No! No! I told him: “You've got to fight! You destroy yourself if you just crawl away like that! You have to fight till the end!” But he didn't say anything. He doesn't—talk—to me—he doesn't even look—I should have gotten involved from the beginning, but I didn't want to nag him. Why didn't they tell him to burn the damn tapes?!

I—never—wanted—any—of—this! He didn't even ask me before he announced he was running for office again. Said he had no choice—said there's this great stream of history, and

once you get in, you can't get out ... Well, I could! I could leave tomorrow. Pack all night. No—wouldn't need to pack. Wouldn't need to take anything. Don't want anything. Just ... leave—*tonight*—and go home ... to Artesia! And tomorrow, tomorrow I'll go to the beach—Yes!—And I'll lie down on the beach and I'll cover my body—my whole body—with sand ... and it will feel so good to be covered like that ... with the weight of the sand ... and the warmth of the sun ...

(A pause.)

Except ...

(She continues to stand immobile.)

I, uh, I happen to love him ...

(Pause.)

And I need to do my mail. Would you excuse me?

(She goes over to the letters and runs her fingers across them. Sits down. She turns on the radio. A Watergate news story comes on: "Haldeman ... Ehrlichman ..." is heard. She quickly changes the dial until she comes to a station playing some gentle instrumental music, such as Irving Berlin's "Marie". Closes her eyes. Sways ever so slightly to the music.)

Volume of music increases and distorts to a point of harshness. She stares out immobile. Sudden blackout.)

Interval.

Scene 3: Betty

(The scene takes place in BETTY's dressing room/study. It is nearly 4 p.m. in the middle of November, 1976. BETTY is in a dressing gown and stockings. At R a dress and blazer are laid out over a chair and a pair of pumps is on the floor. A telephone is on the upstage desk. Sitting at a coffee table, BETTY is reading a magazine. Her feet are up.)

I've got to get dressed. Rosalynn Carter's coming to tea ... *(Deadpan.)* I can't wait! *(Laughs.)* No, she seems like a nice person, but I want to give her a tour of the White House like I want to jump off the Washington Monument! We lost! We've got to get out of here. So, let's go already! Give me that chaise longue in Palm Springs! This lame duck stuff—it's like taking a band-aid off really slowwwwwly.

It's nice for Mrs. Carter. Gives her 10 weeks to pack. I had 10 hours ... although I should have seen the signs. Actually, I did! On the news, they showed these Watergate protesters in front of the White House with signs that said: "Pick Out Your Curtains, Betty!" I was so embarrassed about that. The next day, I see Pat at a luncheon and start to apologize, but she goes: "Betty—don't worry about it. I never watch the news" ...

When Jerry got the word he'd be taking over, we lay there all night holding hands and praying. I felt awful for the Nixons and the country, but thrilled for Jerry. And proud! He deserved it. He'd worked his you-know-what-off for 26 years! He was hardly ever home. As a Congressman, he'd spend half the year going back and forth to Michigan. And when he became Minority Leader—forget it! He was on the

road up to 285 days a year! I was back here in Washington doing all the congressional wife stuff plus taking care of the four kids and the dogs and the cats and the gerbils and the alligator and I don't even remember what the hell else! I worked my tail off too!

(Shifts uncomfortably in her seat.)

Speaking of tails. *(Stands up and regards the chair.)* You know, I wish Pat had kept things the way they were. Jackie had the most wonderful plush sofas and chairs. Then Pat replaces them with these authentic period pieces. I mean, they look nice—they're historical and all—but they're so damn uncomfortable, you want to scream every time you sit down!

(Picks up her cocktail to refresh it at the side table.)

Yeah, those early years in Washington were rough. I mean I loved my husband and I loved my kids and I had Clara—angel housekeeper!—but it was too much, *(Pouring from the decanter.)* too much for me. One day, I just went bonkers! I couldn't stop crying.

(She takes a sip.)

Jerry was in the middle of the Chesapeake, yachting with Lyndon on the Sequoia. Clara called him and said: "I think you better get home!" I was a wreck. Thank God, I found Dr. Menninger. He got me back on track. Taught me I had to take care of Betty's needs too and stop being everyone else's doormat. I mean I had grown really resentful. I thought: "Yeah, Jerry's all over the country getting all this praise and applause, but who's making that possible?! Me! Me!" *(To an audience member.)* Am I right? Yeah, you know!

(Regards her glass.) I wonder if Mrs. Carter would go for cocktails instead of tea? Cocktails help in this job. You've got to slow down, take the edge off a little or it'll kill you.

(She takes another sip of her drink.)

I heard that the Carters want to do away with a lot of the Washington formalities.

(Shrugs.)

That's how business gets done in this town. And following the rules of etiquette doesn't mean you can't have fun. We've had fun! We've had a ball! Our parties were the hottest ticket in town! I always like people to feel at home and loosened up—oh, so I had this idea! Instead of having the same old boring floral centerpieces at every event, I had sculptures put on the tables—different ones for each occasion. So, when Senator So and So is seated next to the wife of Ambassador Whoseamuhwuzzie and he has no idea what to talk about, he can just point to the sculpture and say: "What the hell is that?!" Worked like a charm! And wow! Did we have great entertainment! ... What's that song—*(Sings as she dances.)* "I Could Have Danced All Night"? Well, I did!

(Does a balletic move and winces. Regards the clothing on the chair.)

I should get dressed. Everyone's always hyperventilating about getting me to appointments on time.

(Half-heartedly pulls shoes out.)

My mom was always after me, too ... How she ever raised three kids on her own! ... And she did, really, with Dad

on the road all the time. Traveling salesmen ... they're hardly ever home. But Mom never complained. She was incredible. Especially after Dad's—after the accident. *(Pause.)* Imagine going out to the garage one morning and finding your husband lying dead under the car—carbon monoxide poisoning ... After the funeral service, I overheard my aunts say he had been an alcoholic. I was shocked! Here I was 16 and I had no idea.

(She puts her drink down on the coffee table.)

Up until then, I'd had a very happy childhood. Little Betty Bloomer from Grand Rapids, Michigan: real small town heart-of-America upbringing. Ooooh! You should have seen pictures of me as a baby—what a fatso! At the lake in the summer, when I was maybe three, I would go around begging for food. Mom finally hung a sign around my neck:

BREAK: NEXT EXCERPT

(She does a little dance over to the phone.)

Yeeeeesssss? ... OK, I'll be right there.

(She hangs up.)

Oh shoot! *(She da-da-da-dums any rapid fire tune as she runs over to the chair.)*

(During the course of the next speech, she puts on her dress and high heels.)

(Sits, holding up one shoe.) Heels ... Killers. Don't you hate 'em? But they make my legs look nice!

(She stands and takes the dress off the chair.)

It's going to be a whole new life in Palm Springs. We're going to have a ball. New people, new place—

(Having stepped into the dress with one leg, she regards the skirt pooling around her knees for a long moment and then confides.)

That second leg is always the harder one ... !

(Steps in. Grins triumphantly.)

No more kids at home ... We're going to be free—to do whatever we like! Well, actually, Jerry's already got speaking engagements lined up ... lots of them. He's going to be traveling again ... ohhhhhhhhh boy! And me? Well, I plan to ... well ... I haven't firmed up my own plans yet ...

(Looks around the room.)

I'm going to miss this place. When Pat and I walked arm in arm to the helicopter after the resignation, she pointed to the red carpet the staff had rolled out and said, "You'll get sick of these after a while." Well, I haven't! Not at all! I'll take a red carpet any day of the week! *(Pause.)* I LOVE THIS JOB. I LOVE IT! I've been able to make a difference ... I don't know what I'm going to do now. ... *(Flippantly.)* What am I going to do ... ? What am I going to do?! *(Freezes.)* What am I ...

(She pulls herself together.)

Whoops! Whoops! Whoops! Sorry! Yeah, don't worry about me. This old gal's been around a long time ... *right.*

(She crosses to the chair to collect the blazer. Regards the whole room slowly, brushing her hand along several pieces of furniture. Stands still a moment and then takes a deep breath.)

OK, Mrs. Carter, you're on!

(She flips the jacket over one shoulder. Exits with panache.)

The End.