Scene 1 – Lady Bird

The scene takes place around 4PM 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 is a coffee table set with a tea service and a plate of chocolates downstage, center, with a chair behind it. There is a wing chair and a telephone table with a telephone on top of if in one part of the room, a small desk and chair in another part of the room. Lady Bird is arranging some flowers at rise.

LADY BIRD
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 -- no, 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.

LADY BIRD
A Republican and a monkey walk into a bar and --no, a drunk at the end of the bar ….(Brightens suddenly) Oh! Well, I know the bartender says, “The nuts are complimentary.”... I’m so sorry. I believe I just gave away the punch line....Oh dear. (Pauses) Well, now Lyndon knows how to tell a joke. Yes, indeed, he does. Some of them are a little “off-color”. Most of them, actually....

Phone rings.

LADY BIRD
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.

LADY BIRD (confidentially)
Lyndon....How you feeling, darlin”??....Well, I know. You were up a whole bunch of times last night. Can you catch yourself a nap?.....Just a little catnap? It’ll do you good......All right....All right, dear. Bye-bye....

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

LADY BIRD
Tea. Yes. Oh, Lord, yes. Two a day? Three a day? No matter. In the past five years, I have drunk oceans of tea!.... Mrs. Kennedy used to call these 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 for a moment.*

**LADY BIRD**
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!”

I did. It’s easier to take off the dress than the pounds. A stuffed turkey?! I thought that dress was quite becoming. It’s not unlike what that -- what a lady was wearing recently -- a lady he was so taken by….I always try to learn from the ladies he finds appealing, but sometimes…I don’t seem to get it quite right. Lyndon is very particular. If he doesn’t like my hair or my lipstick or my clothes, I do hear about it, even if there are others in the room. Doesn’t matter who else is there….And it’s not just me. No! He wants all the women around him looking their best. Once, he gave Helen Thomas of UPI his comb and told her to go fix her hair. She didn’t know what hit her, but she fixed it! But, you see, he cares. And you have to love that in a man….(Takes the chocolate over to the desk.)

I’ve never been very concerned about clothes-- but in this job you have to be. And I must confess, when we have a state dinner and I put on my yellow chiffon and float down the stairs on Lyndon’s arm and swirl about the dance floor in the East Room, I feel…well, rather…beautiful!….We’ve had such glittering parties here! The most glorious performers! Carol Channing with those delicious chorus boys singing “Hello Lyndon!” Who ever would have thought the little girl from Karnack, Texas would become the hostess of this most incredible house?!….Not the girls back in high school…

“You gonna wear that ugly dress to the dance, Bird?”

“That bookworm? She’s not going to the dance. Didn’t you hear what the school newspaper printed as her life’s ambition? ‘Old maid’!!”

“You gonna be an old maid, Bird, like your Aunt Effie?”

*A pause.*

**LADY BIRD**
Aunt Effie…. After Mama died, Daddy didn’t know what to do with a five-year-old girl. He was a very busy man -- owned the biggest store in town -- so he sent me to stay with Effie. Put me on a train to Alabama. Put me on a train -- by myself -- with a nametag around my neck! Well, she was waiting for me with open arms. After the summer, she came back to Karnack to care for me. She taught me to appreciate nature and beauty. I used to spend hours exploring the woods and walking ’round Caddo Lake -- that magical, mystical place. Effie was a gift…. I didn’t want the sheltered life she had, though.
wanted to “be” something! I would read – oh, so many books - about exotic lands and I wanted to get out and explore them. Thank the Lord, Daddy let me go away to college in Austin.

After graduation, I was planning to go teach in some far-flung place -- Alaska or Hawaii - but one day, it was September of ’34, I was visiting my friend, Gene, in her office, when this man blew in -- this 6-foot-3-inch, handsome young man with the most remarkable ears...and my plans changed. Gene had arranged a date for him with another girl, but he saw me and whispered in my ear that I should meet him for breakfast the next morning at the Driskill Hotel Coffee Shop. He knew who my Daddy was, I think.

Well, I had no intention of having breakfast with this Mr. Johnson, but the next morning, I happen to be walking by the Driskill and I see him through the window waving his arms like a wild man. So in I go – just to say hello. And I stay. Well, over grits, he tells me every fact that exists about himself; over coffee, asks a hundred questions about me, and over the check, asks me to marry him! I thought he was joking, but he was dead serious! Said he was going back to Washington, where he worked for a Congressman, but that I should think it over and let him know.

Now, when Lyndon wants something, he can be very persistent. He phoned or wrote me every single day from Washington and, after about two months, he shows up on Daddy’s doorstep -- just shows up! -- and gives me an ultimatum: I am to marry him at once or it’s over! If I say, “No,” it’ll be “a failure of nerve and heart.” Then Daddy pulls me aside: “Honey, some of the best deals are made in haste. This Johnson’s a good deal. Marry the man!”….They had a lot in common, those two. Commanding, ambitious…enamored of the ladies...Oh, Lord. I was so young and I had grave doubts about politicians, but… I think I was scared to lose him. I had this queer sort of moth-to-flame feeling. I was the moth. Well, we rushed out, got a wedding band from Sears, and that very night, we committed-- matrimony!

I had wanted adventure. Well, I got it! For 36 years, Lyndon has given me the greatest adventure imaginable....And I hope I have given him a haven, a place of rest for that restless soul of his. I understand Mrs. Kennedy once remarked: “Lady Bird would crawl down Pennsylvania Avenue over shards of glass if Lyndon asked her to.” I think that’s going a bit far. (Pause) It would depend upon the size of the shards....Yes, I brought him his daily coffee and newspaper in bed, and shined his shoes and put his wallet and his hanky and his pen into the proper pockets each morning because he asked me to, and it gave me pleasure. And yes, I did use the money Mama left me to finance his first congressional campaign. Best investment I ever made! Lyndon has always been my identity. That’s a controversial notion nowadays, isn’t it? But as I said to my girls, my Linda Bird and Luci, this need for women to have their own identity belongs to their generation, not mine. I chose this life. I chose to love that scratchy man....

Besides, I put my foot down when I have to. When Lyndon was in Congress, I’d drive 1600 miles from Austin to Washington and back again with linens and pots and pans and everything else. Back and forth for seven years. He would always fly ahead in a private
plane, but I would drag those boxes from one tiny rental to another. I thought what a luxury it would be to have two sets of sheets and two frying pans, one in each place, just welcoming you back. I kept pleading, “Lyndon, darlin’, can’t we get ourselves a house?” but he kept stalling until finally, I just blew up. “I have nothing!” I said. “No home, no children - the only thing I have to look forward to is the next damned election!” Well, that man went right out and bought us a house.…

Over the centuries, women have been the prodders. You just have to know when to prod. And he certainly prods me. Early on, he would give me assignments: memorize all the county seats in Texas; write personal notes to 2,000 of our closest associates.…. When he was called to the Pacific in World War II, he told me he wanted me to run his congressional office! I didn’t think I could do it, but he said, “Damn it, Bird, ‘course you can! You run all those radio stations. God’s sakes, you got yourself an empire there! Come on now, you can do this!” And you know what? I did! Best lesson I ever learned! Gave me such respect for what Lyndon has to do day in, day out. That man is tireless! I always knew he could reach the top -- but not…not the way we did.…

That day in Dallas...I remember screaming, “What’s happening?! What’s happening?!” We thought it was firecrackers. But then…I saw Mrs. Kennedy lying on top of the president, shielding his body….Later, in the hospital, she was standing all by herself in this little hallway. I went to put my arms around her and I looked down at her pink suit -- at her skirt and her stockings. That immaculate woman was caked in blood. I asked if I could help her change her clothes. She said, “No, thank you. I want the world to see what they’ve done to my husband.”…. A pause.

LADY BIRD
Back in Washington, as we get off the plane with the coffin, everything is so still. Lyndon calls for a microphone right there on the airfield and assures the nation we will carry on. His words are powerful and comforting. I stand as close to him as I can -- to give him all my love and support…and yet I knew at that moment that, always, when people saw us, they’d wish they were seeing them…Jack and Jackie. Always…Strange. I haven’t been haunted by him since we’ve been here, but I have by her. I don’t know why. For years, I’ve felt her shadow following me -- through the rooms and up the stairs.…

It was a long, hard adjustment for the country. We were different. Lyndon with his down-home ways. I probably should have reined him in a bit more, but he’s not the easiest -- oh, oh, after his gall bladder operation! I told him: “Lyndon, dear, I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to be lifting up your shirt and showing your incision to people. Some of them already think we’re…unrefined. Just show it to me, darlin’, okay?” Uh! The press had a heyday with that one. Lyndon’s stomach was hangin’ out on the front page of every newspaper in the country.

Why don’t they devote as much attention to his accomplishments?! That man has passed
more legislation than any other president! Ever! And it took a lot of courage for a Southerner to champion the Civil Rights Bill! After its passage, there were so many death threats against him, the Secret Service wouldn’t let him back down South to campaign. So I went instead. Got on board “The Lady Bird Special”. Did a whistle-stop tour of 8 states in four days. Had two hundred reporters on our train! Gave 47 speeches! Me! Claudia Alta Taylor -- who’d been so terrified of public speaking as a girl, I prayed I’d get smallpox so I wouldn’t have to give the commencement speech!

A pause.

LADY BIRD
There were places on that tour where they hissed. They booed. They shoved placards in my face: “Your husband is a Nigger lover”…“Blackbird Go Home”…“Fly Away Lady Bird!” But, do you know, I wouldn’t have traded that tour for anything. I got to speak to my fellow Southerners from my heart. Changed some minds, too. Carried four of those states in the election!…Liz! Liz loved every minute of it. Wasn’t even bothered by the bomb threat. She told me later: “Lady Bird, you wanna know my favorite part? The further South we got, the thicker your drawl got. By the time we hit Georgia, the Eastern reporters couldn’t make out what the hell you were sayin’.” (Smiles) Well...At our last stop in New Orleans, Lyndon was waiting for me with a big kiss….

I’ve become an old hand at speechmaking now. Traveled the length and breadth of this country for Beautification and Headstart -- two programs dearest to my heart. Children -- children are our hope! If we can reach the littlest ones, the poorest, and give them an environment to thrive in, we invest in our future. And if we preserve and restore this land, its natural beauty can heal us…especially in these troubling times….Oh! I got the sweetest note today….

Takes letter off tea tray.

LADY BIRD
“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 to the figure in it.

LADY BIRD
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...with them chanting out there day and night -- “Hey! Hey, LBJ! How many kids have you killed today?”
They don’t understand. Lyndon didn’t start this horrible war! He inherited it and he’s trying everything in his power to find an honorable peace. Vietnam is killing him too! He doesn’t sleep thinking about those kids! Every night, I hear him slipping out of bed in the darkness to go downstairs and check the latest casualty count. For months, we agonized. Two, three, four A.M. we’d go over and over whether he should even run again. I know he was hoping for a 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 said, “And I don’t want you sending my baby off to that war!”

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—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. And when he was lying there in his 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 by 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’ll never sit and watch the sunset. Politics is his oxygen. That’s why he’s started 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.

LADY BIRD
Yes? Yes, Mr. West……Fine, very good. Thank you.

She hangs up.

LADY BIRD
Mrs. Nixon is coming to tea. Such a nice woman. And capable….(momentarily lost in thought, then snaps back.) Yes. I want to give her the tour. 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 needed 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._

**LADY BIRD**
Yes……Yes, dear…… Pat is on her way up……I did change my outfit. ………That fuchsia one with the black braid -- the one you like ……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._

_End of Scene 1._

_Interval._
Scene 2 – Pat

*It is 9PM in the middle of June, 1974. Pat Nixon is in her bedroom. A tray of food is on the side table. A phone is on the desk. She stands with a cigarette. She opens her lighter, then sees us. Pause. She abruptly changes her mind and shuts it again.*

**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.*

PAT
So….

*Pause.*

PAT
“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: “Hmmm, I guess I don’t nag him”…”Oh, that’s a good question. I’d say I don’t nag him.”

*A pause.*

PAT
The other thing reporters always ask: “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.*

PAT
My last trip was a couple months ago -- Venezuela, for the swearing-in of their new president. Everyone was so lovely. 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. 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. I didn’t actually feel nervous at that
moment. Later, in the embassy, I started shaking and I couldn’t stop.

*Pause.*

**PAT**
When we got back to Washington, I called everyone who’d been on that trip and we formed The Rock and Roll Club (*Demonstrates why.*) Rock…and roll? 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.*

**PAT**
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.*

**PAT**
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. At least not to me.

*She crosses to the tray and removes the cover from the food.*

**PAT (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! Lunch? Another surprise! Turnips! Yum…! You know what? It was okay. We had fun -- and we saved a lot of money.

*She takes a tiny bite of a carrot stick. Regards the plate.*

**PAT**
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 thirteen 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 is enough to put you off food for a long time…
She regards the food.

PAT
I can’t.

She puts the cover back on and carries the plate to the side table.

PAT
Tea….I just…just want some tea.

Pours herself a cup.

PAT
Tea always soothes my stomach.

She takes a sip. Then another. Goes to the desk and gets the folder with the mail.

PAT
I like to do my mail at night. 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. When it hits 6, 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 feel I should know what (looking at one of the letters) Mrs. Cecil James III from Norfolk, VA has to say, and if (looks 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 (reads another): “I’m a fifteen-year-old boy with no friends…and no one to talk to.”

She studies the letter for a moment.

PAT
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….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. And I’ve always been uncomfortable with interviews. They all want to dig into my past. Why? That’s private, that’s past! Thank goodness, I don’t have to do any more television interviews. We’ve all agreed -- that’s it! Barbara Walters was my last.

She 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, but 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….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….

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

PAT (neutrally)
Watergate. (She looks at a second letter, and a third.) Watergate. Watergate.

Flips these letters over. She picks up the cigarette again, but hesitates and puts it down.

PAT
No. I’m not going to. 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.

PAT
No more campaigns! Whew! 9 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! Dad had died of TB when I was seventeen -- 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.

PAT
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 either. I know you can afford it on that enormous secret service salary of yours ..........Okay! I want to hear everything tomorrow. Well, maybe n--. Anyway, just have fun. Have fun, kiddo….Bye.

She hangs up.
PAT
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 came right over and asked for a date. I said no, I was too busy, but he circled right back around later that night and asked again: “How about that date?” I just laughed and he said (pointing): “Don’t laugh. I’m going to marry you one day.” He 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. 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! Dick 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….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 at 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. It took about two years -- but eventually, I came to feel, well, I felt --

Stopped and abruptly moves away to get her tea.

PAT
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 very good! Once when we were on vacation in Hawaii, he won a hula contest! I know, hard to believe, but he did! You should have seen him!

She laughs.

PAT
It’s nice to hold someone close…and get lost in the music….

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

PAT (looking at a schedule)
Let’s see -- Saturday -- full schedule tomorrow: Meeting with the Volunteers Corps….

She looks up from the clipboard.

PAT
We haven’t danced together in years. Well, once for a few moments at Tricia’s wedding -- for the photographers. Back when Dick became Vice-President, he decided that
dancing was...“inappropriate.”

_Returns to the clipboard._

**PAT**

Tea with the wife of the new Portuguese Ambassador, meeting with Clem....Oh! Clem Conger – genius curator! We’ve been making magic refurbishing this place. You know, Mrs. Johnson invited me over for tea and a tour a few weeks before we moved in. She is such a gracious person, but the house was in terrible shape! She must have been afraid to touch anything Mrs. Kennedy had done. Anyway, with thousands of people coming through here each week, the place takes constant upkeep. Clem and I have replaced rugs, curtains, wallpaper...and we found beautiful early nineteenth century pieces to make each room authentic. I want everything to be perfect. Oh! And it was my idea to illuminate the exterior of the house, to surprise Dick. There he was, flying home one night -- the whole house was suddenly “aglow” with a spotlight on the American flag overhead! He got so excited! Had that helicopter circle the house four times before landing!

_She smiles._

**PAT**

You know, if Billy marries Connie, I’m going to dance at their wedding. We’re like family -- my secret service guys and I. Happens when you travel so much. (_Laughs_) They make fun of me because I’m never late. They say they can set their watches by me! Well, you have to stick to the schedule. You can’t keep people waiting. (_Smiles_) Anyway, we’ve had good times together....But no more trips, for the moment. This Watergate mess has taken over and I can’t -- I don’t want to go out anymore. Reporters shoving their microphones in my face, protesters screaming....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 until we can’t anymore. But not-- not tonight. (_Silent, then brightening suddenly_) Actually, if you walk the perimeter of this room, allowing for furniture, ninety-one times, that’s a mile. For a change of scenery, all you have to do is reverse direction and go the other way. You see? Very workable....

_She walks. A pause._

**PAT**

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. 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 won’t give up until they take him down. Why do they hate him so much?! He’s done such good for the country. I can’t understand it. No, I can. 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 that?!! 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)

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, Julie is telling me 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 answer me.
He won’t talk to me. He won’t even look at me! What….I should have gotten involved
from the start, 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 just -- 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…the weight of the sand…the warmth of the sun….

A pause.

PAT
Except…

She continues to stand immobile.

PAT
I, ah, I happen to love him….

Pause.

PAT
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 to a station playing “Marie” by Irving Berlin. Closes her
eyes.. Sways ever so slightly to the gentle music.

(instrumental music only, although the lyrics are: “Marie, the dawn is breaking. Marie, you’ll soon be waking… The kiss, so very tender… The words ‘Will you surrender To me, Marie.’”)

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

End of Scene 2.

Interval.
Scene 3 – Betty

*The scene takes place in Betty’s dressing room/study. It is nearly 4PM in the middle of November, 1976. Betty is in a dressing gown and stockings. Off to the side, a dress is laid out over a chair and a pair of pumps is on the floor. The telephone is on an upstage desk. Sitting at a coffee table, Betty is reading a magazine. Her feet are up.*

**BETTY**

I’ve got to get dressed. Rosalynn Carter’s coming to tea.…*(Sardonic)* 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 slowwwwwwly.

It’s nice for Mrs. Carter. Gives her ten weeks to pack. I had ten 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 apologizing, 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 awake the whole 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. 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.*

**BETTY**

Speaking of tails. *(Looks at 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 all these authentic period pieces. I mean, they look nice and 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.*

**BETTY**

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 and 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 praise and applause, but who’s making that possible?! Me!.….Me!”

I wonder if Mrs. Carter would go for cocktails instead of tea. Mm no, not sure she’s the type. 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.*

**BETTY**

I heard that the Carters want to do away with a lot of the Washington formalities. Seems to me 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 Whoseamuhwizzie and 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 – “I Could Have Danced All Night”? Well, I did!……..

*Does a balletic move and winces.*

**BETTY**

I should get dressed. I’m always late. Terrible. Everyone around here is always hyperventilating about getting me to appointments on time.

*Half-heartedly, pulls shoes out.*

**BETTY**

My mom was always after me too….How she ever brought up three kids on her own…! And she did, really, with Dad on the road all the time. Traveling salesmen…they’re never home. Mom never complained, though. She was incredible. Especially after Dad -- after the accident. Imagine going out to the garage one day 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 sixteen and I had no idea.

*She puts her drink down.*

**BETTY**

Up until then, I’d had a very happy childhood. Little Betty Bloomer from Grand Rapids,
Michigan: real heart of America, small town 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: “Please do not feed this child!” And I was a great nudist! Used to fly from the bedroom to the bathroom and back au naturel. Mom put a stop to that when my brothers’ friends started hanging around to see the show!….Oh, and I invented this game in the bathroom with Mary Adelaide Jones. You make the shower water as hot as possible and then you stick your fanny under for as long as possible and whoever fanny gets the reddest is the winner. Fun, huh? Oh yeah! I had lots of fun as a kid. I had a ball!

*Picks up a magazine from the coffee table and takes it to the desk.*

**BETTY**
Lost the baby fat, thank the Lord, when I started taking dance lessons. Dance became my absolute passion. Studied every kind I could. I dreamed of having this dazzling career as a professional dancer in New York. Mom finally let me go there when I was twenty. The city was fabulous! My first apartment -- with Natalie Harris! I start studying with my idol, the magnificent Martha Graham. I worked hard…but not hard enough. I liked the boys. Liked to go out and have a good time. One day, Miss Graham sits me down and says if I want a career, she wants to see less socializing and more work. So I try even harder….Eventually, got into her second company. Didn’t make her main one….Natalie did.

*Sits.*

**BETTY**
Meanwhile, back in Grand Rapids, all my old high school friends were getting married and having babies and I realized I wanted that too. So, I moved back home. My dazzling New York career fizzled out. But I did form my own dance troupe back home, and to make a little money, I modeled at this department store. Herpolsheimer’s. Everyone called it “Herps” for short. Sounds like a sexual disease, right? *(laughs.)* I went on to become their fashion coordinator. Great job. Got to go on buying trips and got discounts on clothes which was fabulous because I love clothes! And I dated a lot back then. Got serious with one guy, Bill Warren -- a traveling salesman. What is it with me and these traveling men?! Mom did not think it was a match made in heaven, but I married Bill. He was fun, good-looking and blonde and I had a thing for fun, good-looking and blonde! Oooh! Could that boy party! Well, of course, Mom was right. I should have known he wouldn’t settle down. So, I’m just about to file for divorce when he goes into this diabetic coma! A two-year nightmare! I helped nurse him back to health. When he was back on his feet again -- thank God – then I went ahead with the divorce. Well, I’m waiting for *that* to go through when I get a call from my friend Peg Newman, who says the most eligible bachelor in Grand Rapids wants to ask me out on a date.

Now, I needed a date like a hole in the head, but suddenly, this very shy-sounding Jerry Ford gets on the phone himself and asks me to go out for one drink. I say, “Okay.” *(Takes glass over to refresh it.)* Jerry had everything going for him -- Navy Lieutenant
during the war, successful law practice, nice family, and good-looking and blonde! Well, I fell for good-looking, blonde, sweet Jerry Ford -- hook, line and sinker. And luckily, the feeling was mutual. He said he wanted to marry me. (As an aside) He didn’t actually say he loved me -- he was too shy for that -- but I knew he was the guy for me -- he was solid, and stable -- a loving son, too…. Well, we got engaged and the next thing I know, he says he wants to run for Congress! And boy did he run! Campaigned like a maniac. Nearly missed our wedding! There it is -- it’s 4 o’clock. Everyone’s in place, the organ’s playing, I’m ready to march down the aisle-- no Jerry! I’m thinking: “O.K.! I’ll just marry the best man!” Suddenly, the door flies open and in rushes Jerry wearing this elegant tux, but I look down and I see these muddy brown shoes! He forgot to change them after a morning of campaigning in farm country! His mother wanted to kill him. Not my mom, though. She was crazy about Jerry. I’m so glad she lived to see me marry him. She died a few months later….That call you most dread. “Come quick! Mom’s had a cerebral hemorrhage.” I’m in Washington. She’s in Florida. I run to the airport and get the first plane out. We’re just about to take off. We’re at the end of the runway when the plane suddenly stops. And stays there. Mechanical difficulties….Never made it. Never got to say good-bye…. (Silent) I wish I were half the woman she was.

_Looks at glass._

**BETTY**

Aaaannnnnyway, two months after the wedding, we moved to Washington and we’ve been here ever since. Oooh, I was so green when we first got here. And scared stiff. But early on, we’re invited to this party for new Congressional members and this sweet woman with the most radiant smile comes up, she takes me by the arm and says: (Imitating): “Lyndon, come on over here and meet this nice young couple from Michigan. They’ve just arrived.” What a doll she is! Well, that broke the ice and we became part of the gang. Lots of parties since. Party! Party! Party! Dinners, receptions, fund-raisers -- sometimes a couple a night. Lots of creamed chicken. (Flexes fingers suddenly.) Ow! Arthritis.

_She reaches into her handbag and takes out pills._

**BETTY**

Couldn’t make it through the day without these. Hopefully, the drier Palm Springs air will help. We were planning to retire there three years ago and finally get to spend some time together when, out of the blue, Jerry got the call. Dick asking him to take over for Agnew. V.P.! (Laughs) Jerry! Jerry says: “Excuse me, Mr. President, you’re calling on my private line. Could you hang up and call back on the main line? I want Betty to hear this.” (Holding a few pills in her palm.) He’s so sweet…(Washing down the pills with the drink, she flinches when she tips her head back to swallow.) Oooh! On top of the stupid arthritis, I’ve had this damn pinched nerve in my neck -- for years now. I used to be afraid to go out because I never knew when the pain might start. So my doctor said: “Don’t let it start. Keep your pills with you and take one every four hours.” (Shakes the pill bottle.) Eureka!…I’m sort of a physical wreck -- arthritis, pinched nerve, one breast. Yeah. That was really depressing. But Jerry -- bless him -- has always been right there for me. We’ll see a cute gal and I’ll say: “Whoa. Look at her figure!” and he’ll say: “Oh,
you’re much prettier than she is!” …He tells me he loves me now too… I sure have impeccable timing. Diagnosed with breast cancer and in surgery one month after we moved into the White House! You know, I do believe when it’s time for us to go, we go… but I still prayed God to spare me. And I guess my number wasn’t up because He did.

I believe He had a plan. I believe He wanted me to help other women with this lousy disease -- so I did. I spoke out about my experience and told women everywhere to go get tested and apparently, thousands upon thousands have. Miss Never Quite Good Enough had an impact on the world! I suddenly realized I had this incredible platform and it’d be crazy not to use it. So I did. I spoke out about disabled children, elder abuse, the Arts, the Equal Rights Amendment. Spoke all over the country about that one. You know, before every speech, I’m always so nervous, I feel like I’m going to retch, but the ERA is worth retching for, in my opinion. I can’t believe Mrs. Reagan won’t support the amendment. How can any woman who has ever worked not support it?!

Anyway, you can’t shut this one up! And that started back when Jerry became Vice-President. I was suddenly bombarded with all these interview requests. The first one was Barbara Walters. Now we agreed we were not going to talk about anything political but no sooner do the cameras start to roll than -- bam! -- she asks me how I feel about the Supreme Court’s ruling on abortion. Boy! Well, I couldn’t very well just sit there, so I said I happened to agree with the Supreme Court -- thought it was time we got abortion out of the backwoods and into the hospitals where it belongs. Well…wow! Did I get mail! And visitors! You know, anti-abortion groups have gathered right outside the White House here holding up pictures of unborn fetuses and yelling: “Shame! Shame!” The first time I had to walk by them, I didn’t know what to do; so I just smiled and waved. You know, some of them put down their signs and asked for my autograph? I’ve been smiling and waving ever since!

But I’ve riled a lot of people with my opinions. When Morley Safer on “60 Minutes” asked me what I’d do if I found out my 18-year-old daughter were having an affair, I said I wouldn’t be surprised. She was a normal kid. I said I’d sit down and have a talk with her and find out about the boy. Oh, people went nuts! I got 35,000 letters! When I said I like to sleep with my husband as often as possible, they went ballistic! I mean, come on! I’m the First Lady, not the Virgin Mary! Besides, some vital victories have been won that way…pillow talk. If I get Jerry when he’s tired enough, he’ll say yes to anything! He joked that my premarital sex remarks cost him 20 million votes, but he has never, ever tried to shut me up. I was mortified that I hurt him politically, but a funny thing started happening. My popularity went up! People said they liked my honesty. Today, my popular support is at 71%! I like being popular! I do! Who wouldn’t? Wouldn’t you? (pause)

I wish Jerry had my numbers … (pause) damnit! It was so close! If we’d had a few more weeks…you know why we lost? The Nixon pardon. We lost ‘cause Jerry’s got a heart as big as this country.

The phone rings.
BETTY
I know! I know! She’s here.

She picks up the phone.

BETTY
Yeeeesssss?……….Okay, I’ll be right there.

She hangs up.

BETTY
Oh shoot!

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

BETTY
(Holding up one shoe) Heels…ugh! Killers. Don’t you hate ‘em? But they make my legs look nice….Okay!

She takes the dress off the chair.

BETTY
It’s going to be a whole new life in Palm Springs. We’re going to have a ball. New people --

Having stepped into the dress with one leg, she regards the skirt pooling around her knees for a long moment, when confides:

That second leg is always harder …!

Steps in.

There!

New place, no more kids at home….We’re going to be free – to do whatever we want! Well, actually, Jerry’s already got invitations for 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.

BETTY
I’m going to miss this place. When Pat and I walked arm and 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 going to do…?

She pulls herself together.

BETTY
Whoops! Whoops! Whoops! Sorry! Don’t worry. I’m okay. Yeah, this old gal’s been around a long time….Sure! Right.

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

BETTY
Okay, Mrs. Carter, you’re on!

She flips the jacket over one shoulder. Exits.

The End.