



# BETTY FORD

*"I was an ordinary woman who was called on stage at an extraordinary time."*

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**INT. HOTEL SUITE, CLEVELAND, OHIO - DAY**

**October 1975.**

**BETTY FORD**, 57, checks herself in the mirror. She smoothes down the cream silk shirt she's wearing over a white skirt. She takes off her neck-brace and replaces it with a white scarf.

*Fame! Makes a man take things over.*

The rooms are plush, but cold and unfriendly. The funky beats of David Bowie's *Fame* are jangling out of a radio.

*Fame! Lets him loose, hard to swallow.*

Betty dances a little to the Bowie and winces. She touches the source of her intense pain - her shoulder. A pinched nerve. She gives it a moment... But it's not subsiding.

*Fame! Puts you there where things are hollow.*

She fumbles a few pills out of a pouch and knocks them back with two fingers of vodka.

She snaps off the radio and in silence takes a last look in the mirror, patting her perfectly coiffured hair.

We close in on Betty's eyes as she practices her smile in the mirror.

**INT. REHABILITATION CLINIC, NAVAL HOSPITAL - DAY**

**1978 - THREE YEARS LATER.** Betty's eyes again - now lined, tired, grey. Trembling mouth set in a line of anxiety. She tries to muster up a smile, but can't.

She's sitting before an austere uniformed NAVAL DOCTOR. He looks at the paperwork in front of him.

To Betty's eyes, the surroundings are grey and dreary. To Betty's ears, every sound is loud and cruel. Her hands shake. She jumps as he speaks.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
Narcotics.

BETTY  
On prescription. For my shoulder.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
Valium?

Betty nods and he makes a mark on the paperwork.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
Librium?

Betty nods.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
Miltown?

BETTY  
Yes.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
Codeine, Dervocet?

BETTY  
Both. Yes.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
Ambien?

BETTY  
All of them. Just put them all.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
You've listed no illegal drugs?

BETTY  
No.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
We'll still need to test for that.

Betty nods. The doctor moves on to a new list.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
Alcohols.

BETTY  
What?

NAVAL DOCTOR  
Vodka?

BETTY  
That's not why they've put  
me here.

NAVAL DOCTOR  
They?

BETTY  
My family.

NAVAL DOCTOR

We need to know. If we're going to  
help you.

BETTY

I have a problem with drugs -  
prescription drugs.

NAVAL DOCTOR

Betty.

BETTY

Mrs Ford.

NAVAL DOCTOR

Betty... Vodka?

Betty takes a shuddering breath - this hurts.

**LATER**

Betty follows a uniformed NURSE down a institutional corridor.

She pauses for a moment to look at a poster on the wall that  
lays out the *Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous*.

Betty's eyes focus in on the word - *Alcoholics*.

NURSE

Come along, Betty.

Betty is led into a sparsely-furnished bedroom. One of the two  
beds already has a bag and coat laid on it. Betty looks at it  
anxiously.

The nurse gestures her to the other bed by the window. Betty  
looks out at the militant rows of flowers in the garden.

NURSE

You'll need to read this  
through carefully.

Betty takes a dossier from her - *Code of Conduct - Long Beach  
Navel Hospital Rehabilitation Clinic*.

NURSE

Your name will be added to the  
chores schedule in the main hall.  
We'll call you for supper at five.

As the nurse goes out, another woman comes in - **LINDA** is  
younger than Betty, skinny and tired.

The two women smile awkwardly. Linda gestures to the bed --

LINDA

I took this one, is that ok?

BETTY

I like to look out at the garden.  
It reminds me of home.

Linda lies on her bed and faces the wall.

Betty looks at her - wondering whether to try a conversation.  
She doesn't and instead just sits, wringing her hands.

**INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - DAY**

Betty sits in a circle with twenty or so others as the GROUP THERAPIST mediates. She and Linda are two of only four women.

GROUP THERAPIST

Linda?

Betty glances up at Linda who is hunched into herself on her chair. Linda shakes her head.

The therapist catches Betty's eye. He smiles and nods to her.

Betty clutches her shaking hands and clears her throat. It feels as though all the eyes in the room are burning into her.

BETTY

... My name is... Betty.

Silence.

Those who were preoccupied have now realized who is sitting amongst them. Betty falters... A WOMAN smiles at her --

WOMAN

Hello, Betty.

The others catch up --

GROUP

Hello, Betty.

Betty smiles at the woman - grateful.

BETTY

My name is Betty and I'm...

Betty's face, as she struggles to think what to say.

BETTY

I'm a... I'm the...

## INT. HOTEL SUITE, CLEVELAND, OHIO - DAY

It's 1975 again - we're back in Betty's hotel room from the first scene.

Betty's reflection in the mirror finds a smile she's happy with. The pill kicks in, and as it does her face softens, the world around her becomes warmer and more colorful.

She heads for the door --

As she strides down the corridor, Bowie starts up again, the sound much fuller now.

*Fame, it's not your brain, it's just the flame  
That burns your chance to keep you insane.*

The hotel staff stand to attention as she approaches. She smiles at each of them - warm, friendly, personable.

She feels like she's floating.

Her social secretary **NANCY HOWE** - warm, a little anxious - intercepts her path and hurries alongside. Extracts a seating plan from a file. Betty glances over it.

BETTY

That looks fine, thanks Nancy.

NANCY HOWE

I'm sorry, I had to put Kissinger  
next to Mason...

BETTY

If you had to, you had to. As long  
as I'm with Queen Alia.

NANCY HOWE

What shall we put on the menu?

BETTY

I think a cold platter. Salmon,  
roast beef, a nice artichoke  
salad, maybe? A round of cheese  
and a selection of mousse to  
finish it off.

NANCY HOWE

(scribbling it down)

Okay.

BETTY

Make sure someone's checked their Highnesses have no dietary requirements. And can you have something ready for me to change into? We won't have long to prepare. The pale green Frankie Welch dress, you know the one?

Nancy bristles as Betty's fierce fast-talking press secretary **SHEILA WEIDENFELD** interrupts them.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

I'll take you to the stage. There's a chair at the base of the flag pole. Sit on it until you're introduced. Afterwards, exit to the left and I will be there to guide you to the press room.

Betty, still hurrying along flanked by her two secretaries, pats her hair.

BETTY

Will they have cameras, Sheila?

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Yes.

BETTY

Do I look ok?

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Fine.

BETTY

Fine?

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Great.

BETTY

Great. We can't stay long, we have to get back to the White House for dinner with the Husseins.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

I'll let them know in advance, they have ten minutes only.

BETTY

Ten minutes.

Betty's husband **PRESIDENT GERALD R. FORD**, 62, is waiting for her with his entourage. Betty stops to kiss him.

BETTY

You didn't have to come all the way here.

GERALD

I couldn't miss it.

He's a huge oak tree of a man and for a moment, enveloped in his branches, Betty allows herself to look terrified. Gerald whispers in her ear --

GERALD

I believe in you.

Betty squeezes his arm, then follows Sheila --

To find herself beside a stage - incredibly bright lights ahead of her. She looks back at Gerald --

**GERALD'S ENTOURAGE**

are moving around him anxiously, including Assistant Chief of Staff **DICK CHENEY**.

DICK CHENEY

They didn't let us vet the speech.

GERALD

Because they know you'd try to stop her.

**BETTY**

takes a deep breath and steps out onto stage. The Bowie cuts out and she sways for a moment - the combination of pills and booze making her woozy - then pulls herself together.

Staying out of the spotlight, she makes her way to the flag pole, and sits. She looks out at the audience - thousands of expectant women. The lights are now blinding, hurting her eyes.

She breathes deeply. Shifts in her seat to try and ease her shoulder.

She notices the row of press photographers at the front of the audience. Then she tunes into the WOMAN at the podium beside her, just in time --

WOMAN

... the First Lady of the United States, Betty Ford!

The crowd erupt in applause and Betty slowly gets to her feet to shake hands with the woman. She moves behind the podium which is covered in white flowers and adorned with the venus symbol and three microphones.

Cameras are flashing. Blinding. The audience are still clapping. So loud. She smiles at them. Smiles again. They keep on clapping.

BETTY

Thank you...

(falteringly as they  
quieten down)

Thank you so very much... It's...  
A great privilege... and a great  
delight to be here and have this  
opportunity to say a few words to  
all of you wonderful people...

She looks down at her notes - they're blurred - she squints and they come into focus. She starts to speak more formally --

BETTY

I am here because I believe the  
best way to celebrate  
International Women's Year is to  
examine the very real problems  
women face today, not the progress  
of yesterday.

While many new opportunities are  
open to women, too many are  
available only to the lucky few.  
Many barriers continue to block  
the paths of most women, even on  
the most basic issue of equal pay  
for equal work.

Gerald and his advisors are watching from the side of the stage, Cheney wincing at the applause.

DICK CHENEY

The party is going to be furious.

Gerald ignores him. Watches his wife with great admiration.

BETTY

And the contributions of women as  
wives and mothers continue to be  
underrated. This year is not the  
time to cheer the visible few, but  
to work for the invisible many,  
whose lives are still restricted  
by custom and code.

A child cries out in the audience, and she looks towards it as if wondering whether she should respond. But she glances back at her notes and carries on --

BETTY

Many of these restrictions spring directly from those emotional ideas about what women can do and should do.

She's talking slowly, deliberately. Sometimes her mouth moves, and then reconsiders, tries again. She looks as though she's picking her way through a fog.

BETTY

These definitions of behavior and ability inhibit men and women alike, but the limits on women have been formalized into law, and structured into social custom. For that reason, the first important steps are to undo the laws that  
(she slurs slightly, but pulls it back together)  
*hem women in* and lock them out of the mainstream of opportunities.

The audience are lapping up her words. The women are excited, emotional, relieved, that finally someone so close to the highest office in the land - the First Lady - is saying what they need the world to hear.

BETTY

But my own support of the Equal Rights Amendment has shown what happens when a definition of proper behavior collides with the right of an individual to personal opinions.

(the audience laugh, and she allows herself to enjoy it)  
I do not believe that being First Lady should prevent me from expressing my ideas.

(the audience cheers)  
I spoke out on this important issue, because of my deep personal convictions. Why should my husband's job, or yours, prevent us from being ourselves? Being un... being ladylike does not require silence.

BETTY

The Equal Rights Amendment when ratified will not be an instant solution to women's problems. It will not alter the fabric of the constitution or force women away from their families. But, by making us legally equal within all areas of society, it will help knock down those restrictions that have locked women in to the old stereotypes of behavior and opportunity. It will help open up more options for women.

(she relishes this  
next thought)

But it is only a beginning.

SMASH CUT TO:

BETTY

-- fills the screen in a funky 70s color and font.

**INT. A LIVELY DANCE HALL - EVENING**

**1947.** A young hand with perfectly polished nails accepts a gin sling. A 29-year-old BETTY FORD takes a sip. Delicious.

She smiles up at her date - 34-year-old GERALD FORD - a large quarterback, completely besotted with his mischievous date.

Betty knocks back her drink and holds out her hand.

BETTY

Shall we?

There is no way Gerald is saying no. The couple glide onto the dance floor, attracting looks of both admiration and jealousy.

Betty's gown swirls around her as she shows off her moves. Her eyes twinkle and her perfectly coiffured hair doesn't budge.

Like the rest of the room, Gerald smiles down at her, captivated. Betty changes his hold on her body.

BETTY

I thought it's the gentleman who's supposed to lead.

GERALD

So did I.

GERALD

(changing the hold back)  
But I get the feeling you're a  
little better at it than me.

BETTY

Well, I did dance with Martha  
Graham, you know?

GERALD

That right?

He smiles. EVERYONE knows this about Betty.

She runs her hands over his muscular shoulder --

BETTY

It's a shame you don't still  
play ball.

GERALD

And why's that?

BETTY

We all used to say that Jerry Ford  
was going to go all the way.

GERALD

I had my shot. Made other choices.

BETTY

Work...

GERALD

Work.

BETTY

Sensible.

GERALD

And stable.

BETTY

But not necessarily exciting...

Gerald smiles. It is clear he is used to and charmed by Betty's provocations.

GERALD

I happen to think a man who cares  
about his responsibilities is  
pretty exciting.

BETTY

Touché.

Betty and Gerald are interrupted by another couple - BILL and GINNIE. Bill pumps Gerald's hand.

BILL

Jerry! Not often we see you at one of these.

GERALD

Well, I guess I had an incentive... Betty - Bill and Ginnie Lewis. Bill and I were at Michigan together.

BETTY

Pleasure. Betty Bloomer.  
(smiling at Ginnie)  
We've met before.

GINNIE

And I believe you were Betty Warren when we were last in each other's company...

Awkward silence. The men shuffle. Ginnie smiles - butter wouldn't melt.

BETTY

Warren was my married name.  
Bloomer my maiden. Such a luxury to get to choose. Good to see you both. Time for some air.

Ginnie huffs. Bill looks admiring.

OUTSIDE

Betty and Gerald walk. He lights her slim cigarette.

GERALD

He's actually very nice.

BETTY

I'm sure.

GERALD

Running for congress as a matter of fact.

BETTY

Well, that's spoilt it.

BETTY

(off Gerald's raised eyebrow)  
I don't like politics.

GERALD

You don't strike me as apathetic.

BETTY

I'm not. And I have great respect  
for people who want to live a life  
of service.

GERALD

But?

BETTY

But I just spent several years  
caring for a very ill husband. And  
this country isn't very kind to  
women who want... or have to work.  
It dampens the political spirit  
somewhat.

GERALD

That rather scuppers my  
plans then.

BETTY

What plans?

GERALD

I'm going to stand for the House  
of Representatives. And I had sort  
of hoped you may be the one  
standing by my side.

Betty takes a drag and puts out her cigarette. She leans on  
some railings looking back at him.

BETTY

I'm a divorcée.

GERALD

(shrugging)  
What you gonna do?

BETTY

Easy for you to say.

GERALD

Seriously, Betty. By my side. Not  
behind me.

BETTY

You're too handsome for a  
politician.

GERALD

And you're too smart for one. But  
I'm prepared to take the risk. If  
you are?

Betty considers this. She takes a step closer to him, looks up  
into his eyes and smiles.

**INT. THE FORD HOME, ALEXANDRIA SUBURBS - MIDDAY**

**1957 - TEN YEARS LATER.** Betty jiggles a CRYING BABY DAUGHTER in  
her arms as her THREE YOUNG BOYS scream and holler, chasing  
each other around the house. She's overwhelmed by the chaos.

BETTY

Shhh. Shhh. It's ok... Boys! Will  
you please just stop!

At her raised voice, the baby starts crying louder.

Betty puts her daughter in a play pen and steps into the  
kitchen larder. She closes the door behind her and rests her  
head against it. She starts to cry agonized, depressed tears.

She jumps as one of the kids bangs on the door --

YOUNG SON (O.S)

Mommy! There's smoke in  
the kitchen.

Betty rushes out - their lunch is burning in the cooker. The  
boys stand around concerned. The baby wails in the living room.

BETTY

Go and see to your sister.

The eldest boy scampers off. Betty pulls a smoking pot roast  
out, burning her hand. She throws the food into the sink and  
runs her hand under the faucet.

The youngest boy starts to cough. Betty tries to open the  
window. It's stuck. She wrenches it hard, and howls in pain.

She clutches her shoulder in agony and drops to the floor.

## INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gerald and a DOCTOR stand at the bedroom doorway, looking in on Betty who's lying sedated in traction on the bed.

The doctor hands Gerald a bottle of pills.

DOCTOR

This is for the inflammation  
surrounding the pinched nerve.

(another bottle)

These are for the pain.

And these...

(third bottle)

Are muscle relaxants.

Gerald looks overwhelmed.

GERALD

Seems like a lot.

DOCTOR

You'd be surprised how much these  
housewives can handle. She can  
take the codeine and valium  
together - up to three times a  
day. Then the anti-inflammatory at  
night and in the morning. I'll  
write you a repeat prescription  
now. Saves time.

Betty tries to shift in the bed. She groans in her sleep.

## INT. THE FORD HOME - EVENING

**March 1973 - SIXTEEN YEARS LATER.** Betty sweeps down the narrow  
stairs in a glamorous ball gown. She is now 55 and SECOND LADY  
of the United States.

Gerald is waiting, dapper in his black tie, holding a charity  
ball invite embossed with the White House insignia.

As Betty pulls on a pair of long white gloves, she winces at  
the pain from her shoulder.

BETTY

One minute.

She opens a kitchen cupboard, takes a bottle from a stash of  
prescribed medicines and swallows a Valium.

GERALD

Ready?

BETTY  
Not too late tonight, Jerry.

Gerald ushers her out the door into the residential street.

GERALD  
Pat relies on you being there.  
You're a conversation starter.

Betty sighs. As a SECRET SERVICE AGENT opens her limo door, she looks at the vice presidential flags flying from the hood --

BETTY  
Why don't I get my own flags?

She winks at the agent.

GERALD  
They're not mine. Position not person, Betts.

BETTY  
But it's the person who makes that position, Jerry.

As she gets in the car, Gerald and the agent exchange an amused smile.

**INT. BALLROOM, WHITE HOUSE - LATER**

A jazz band plays. Betty sits at a table scattered with the remnants of dessert. Neatly coiffured women in ball gowns chat around the table as men circulate and smoke.

Betty looks over to Gerald who is deep in conversation with Secretary of State, HENRY KISSINGER.

Betty frowns at Gerald's worried face. She waves at a waiter for another glass of wine and zones back into the conversation at the table.

Across from her, the First Lady - PAT NIXON - is holding court.

PAT  
Dick is obviously deeply concerned. But as I said to him just last night - Dick, until some time has passed, none of us know what the impact will be. It's distressing - absolutely - but we can't lose our heads at such an important time.

CLAIRE next to her - shakes her head.

CLAIRe

I tell you, Jane Roe marks the end  
of sexual morality in our country.

MAJORIE joins in.

MAJORIE

I lie awake every night when  
Patricia is out with Mike.  
Terrifying to think this could be  
one of our daughters.

Betty drains her glass.

BETTY

Or us.

The women laugh.

CLAIRe

I think we're a little past that,  
don't you?

PAT

The age or the action?

MARJORIE

Both.

BETTY

Speak for yourself, Marjorie.

PAT

She's teasing. Betty, you're a  
monster... Betty and I have a  
difference of opinion on the  
matter.

CLAIRe

You mean you support this  
decision, Betty?

BETTY

I simply believe the right to a  
woman's body should remain in her  
own hands. Not...

(to Pat)

with all due respect, in those of  
our husbands.

MAJORIE

That's not a popular opinion.

Betty holds up her hands and gives a broad smile.

PAT

Dick isn't unsympathetic. In cases  
- genuine - cases of... rape.

MAJORIE

God forbid.

PAT

Exactly. Or

(whispering)

interracial relationships.

(Betty shakes her head and  
waves for another drink)

All I think, is it's a personal  
thing. I mean, abortion on demand,  
wholesale? I'm sorry, but I simply  
don't agree.

BETTY

Neither do I... I think it should  
be free.

The women are shocked.

MAJORIE

Betty! You're a liberal...

The women are interrupted by BOB HOPE swooping down on Betty.

BOB HOPE

Excuse me ladies, but whilst her  
husband is otherwise engaged, I'm  
going to cash in my chips and take  
this young lady for a spin.

The women titter in delight. Betty takes Bob's hand and whisks  
him to the dance floor.

BETTY

As ever, your timing is  
impeccable.

BOB HOPE

Betty, you're too much fun for the  
stiffs, you know that?

BETTY

They're well meaning enough and I  
like Pat. Most of the time.

Across the room, Gerald watches Betty laugh with Bob as  
they dance.

HENRY KISSINGER

All I'm saying Jerry, is that it's  
better to be prepared.

GERALD

He's not guilty, Henry.

HENRY KISSINGER

Hey, look. Did he? Didn't he? Many  
did far worse and I am sure many a  
president to come will too. But he  
may have been caught, and I just  
think it's best to be smart and  
prepare for the call, is all.

GERALD

I promised Betty we'd retire...  
She's exhausted.

HENRY KISSINGER

You must be the only politician  
who'd willingly swap the Oval  
Office for the golf course. You  
know how many in here would kill  
to be in your position right now?

GERALD

That's what I'm afraid of.

HENRY KISSINGER

Listen...

GERALD

Later, Henry. Not the time  
or place.

Gerald leaves Henry, and cuts in on Betty and Bob.

GERALD

You mind, Bob?

BOB HOPE

That's my cue anyhow.

He kisses Betty's hand and goes to the stage.

Gerald and Betty dance - she's fairly drunk.

GERALD

Time to go?

BETTY

I want to stay for Bob.

GERALD

I thought you didn't want a  
late night?

BETTY

I'm having fun now.

A COMPERE on stage--

COMPERE

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my  
pleasure to introduce the man  
you've all been waiting for - Mr  
Bob Hope!

Bob takes the microphone.

BOB HOPE

Thank you, thank you. Hey - you  
ever heard the one about the bus  
full of politicians? Not one of  
them could get a seat...

A drumroll for the joke and laughter. Betty's drunk face grins  
broadly as the crowd laugh around her.

**INT. THE FORD HOME, ALEXANDRIA SUBURBS - EVENING**

**August 8th 1974 - FIVE MONTHS LATER.**

Betty's bustling about in the kitchen. Gerald shifts nervously  
as he watches her pull a steaming lasagne from the oven.

BETTY

Make yourself useful, Jerry - help  
me put this on the table.

But instead Gerald checks his watch, distracted.

BETTY

Jerry - the mat?

GERALD

Sorry, of course.

He hurries over and helps her safely set the lasagne down.

GERALD

That smells fantastic, mother.

BETTY

Can you call Susan down?

Gerald heads to the stairs to call up --

GERALD

Susan? Susan!

SUSAN (O.S.)

Coming!

Betty starts putting out the salad, but Gerald takes it from her and leads her out to intercept their seventeen-year-old daughter **SUSAN** --

BETTY

Is everything alright?

GERALD

Can I bring you into the living room for a moment?

He snaps on the TV. **PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON**'s face appears in startling closeup --

RICHARD NIXON (ON SCREEN)

...our entire focus should be on the great issues of peace abroad and prosperity without inflation at home.

Susan turns away, bored already. But then she freezes as Nixon continues --

RICHARD NIXON (ON SCREEN)

Therefore, I shall resign the presidency effective at noon tomorrow. Vice President Ford will be sworn in as president at that hour in this office.

Betty stares at her husband, his face lit by the flickering screen. She sits down, the blood drained from her face.

RICHARD NIXON (ON SCREEN)

As I recall the high hopes for America with which we began this second term --

Gerald switches it off.

BETTY

He actually did it.

GERALD

It seems that way.

They all look at each other for a long moment...

BETTY  
What do we do?

Then the phone rings. And keeps on ringing.

BETTY  
Well.

Betty takes a moment, hovering over the handset, to get into the right gear for this. She picks it up, listens, gives it to Gerald, and then turns to her daughter --

BETTY  
We need to pick out a dress.

In the background, Gerald is making a statement on the phone --

GERALD  
I think the president has made one of the greatest personal sacrifices for the country, and on behalf of all us Americans...

There's a knock at the front door and Nancy Howe hurries in, followed by several burly secret service men.

BETTY  
Oh, just come on in then, why don't you?

SUSAN  
Do I really need to be there?

BETTY  
I'm afraid we all do.

Gerald hands her the phone --

GERALD  
They need to speak to you.

BETTY (INTO PHONE)  
Hello?... My children? They're all over the place...

**INT. BEDROOM, STEVEN FORD'S HOUSE, WASHINGTON - NIGHT**

**STEVEN FORD** jolts out of sleep - woken by a sustained thumping on the front door.

**EXT. STREET, BOSTON - NIGHT**

A U-Haul truck pulls onto a driveway. **MIKE and GAYLE FORD** climb out. They stretch and rub their tired eyes.

A pair of headlights come on across the street and two secret service men approach. After a brief explanation, Gayle's shoulders droop and Mike is handed a set of plane tickets.

**EXT. YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK - EARLY MORNING**

**JACK FORD** is in a ranger uniform riding a horse. His steed bucks as a helicopter lands nearby. A secret service man hops out and, after a brief explanation, takes the horse while Jack climbs into the chopper.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - MORNING**

Betty is waiting at the large internal doors to the executive mansion. A dozen **STAFFERS** are standing stiffly around, waiting for an **AIDE** who is listening to someone on the phone. Finally, he puts the receiver down and opens the doors for Betty.

Betty steps into an impressive hall. As the doors close behind her, she feels very small.

She can hear high-heels clicking on the floor. Pat Nixon emerges from a bedroom and approaches Betty.

Pat wavers, then collapses into a chair, sobbing.

Betty hurries down the long corridor to her.

BETTY  
Oh Pat, I'm so sorry.

Betty crouches to hug Pat warmly.

BETTY  
I don't need a tour. Why don't we just have some tea?

Pat nods and wipes her eyes.

**YELLOW OVAL ROOM**

Betty and Pat sit on very upright uncomfortable chairs. Betty looks around - the room is fastidiously decorated in stuffy formal style - lots of stripes and dark wooden arms and legs. She notices two Greek goddesses holding up a bowl.

BETTY

Look at us - taking tea while our  
husbands do the politics. How  
louche.

Pat allows herself a smile.

PAT NIXON

We just have to pray that they get  
it right, don't we?

BETTY

I've got a knot in my stomach...  
Shall we have a proper drink?

PAT

Good idea.

They put their tea aside and Betty follows Pat through into a kitchen where Pat sets about fixing them strong margaritas.

PAT NIXON

I suppose it will be a relief, to  
have a change of pace.

BETTY

A few months ago, I would have put  
money on us getting to California  
before you. I've found a house.

PAT NIXON

Where?

BETTY

Rancho Mirage, just outside Palm  
Springs. I'm picking out the  
wallpaper in my head.

PAT NIXON

Speaking of which, promise me as  
soon as you get in here, you'll  
change the wallpaper in the dining  
room? You'll see why.

Betty takes a slug of her drink. Pat stares into the bottom of her own glass.

BETTY

You didn't deserve this, Pat.

Pat puts her drink down and covers her face with shaky hands.

BETTY

Hey? Come on.

Pat sniffs and wipes her eyes.

PAT

It's just, I've worked so hard for him. I've given him every piece of me. And he's thrown it away. Without even thinking of me. He's barely even looked at me.

Betty reaches across the counter and takes her hand.

PAT

I don't know who I am. What I thought I knew has turned to dust inside my head.

She withdraws her hand and takes a large gulp of her drink.

PAT

This is strong...

Betty stares at her - scared for her own future. She picks up her drink and the two women knock them back.

**INT. THE EAST ROOM, WHITE HOUSE - MIDDAY**

Betty and Gerald walk down the long room. Two hundred people have gathered, all clapping. Betty sees some of the crowd smiling, some wiping wet swollen eyes.

Betty smiles and steels herself to keep going. Beside her, Gerald is nervously looking ahead, grim-faced.

As they reach the podium, a military aide takes Betty's arm, guides her to behind the lectern and hands her a bible. Gerald stands to the left of the lectern, and CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN BURGER faces him.

She looks up at all the emotional faces, the clapping hands, and convinces herself to smile.

She shifts stiffly as her husband puts his left hand on her bible.

CHIEF JUSTICE WARREN BURGER

Mr Vice President, are you prepared to take the oath of office of the President of the United States?

Gerald awkwardly raises his right hand. Then he falters, realizing he's too early.

GERALD

I am, sir.

Betty is now sitting in a golden chair at the side of the stage, watching Gerald making his speech from the podium --

GERALD

My dear friends, my fellow Americans...

Betty glances at the news cameras recording her every move, and we watch as she runs through a series of micro-expressions, until she finally fixes on one she hopes looks natural.

GERALD (O.S.)

I assume the presidency under extraordinary circumstances never before experienced by Americans. This is an hour of history that troubles our minds and hurts our hearts...

Betty gazes up at her husband, enjoying the comforting tone of his voice, and the words fade out as the booze from earlier washes over her. Until she becomes aware that her eyes are flagging and she jolts herself awake. Gerald's still talking --

GERALD

You have not chosen me by secret ballot, neither have I gained office by any secret promises.

Betty notices her four children in the audience and locks eyes with Susan. Susan, seeing that her mother looks like a cat caught in headlights, winks at her. Betty smiles at this, and directs it encouragingly at her husband.

GERALD

I have not campaigned either for the presidency or the vice presidency. I have not subscribed to any partisan platform. I am indebted to no man, and only to one woman - my dear wife -

And Betty is suddenly very aware again that she's being watched by millions of people. She shifts, smiles self-consciously, as Gerald's voice quivers.

GERALD

- as I begin this very difficult job. I have not sought this enormous responsibility, but I will not shirk it.

**INT. PRESIDENTIAL LIMOUSINE - EVENING**

Betty and Gerald are sitting quietly, holding hands. Shell-shocked.

Their limousine slows as it pulls up to Crown View Drive. Betty looks out - their quiet residential street has been cordoned off by secret service. Two police officers move the barriers aside to let the vehicle roll through.

The limo pulls up outside the Fords' house. Protection officers open the doors and as Gerald and Betty climb out, exhausted, their neighbors emerge to applaud them excitedly.

Betty wants to go and speak to them, but resigns herself to just waving as the couple are ushered towards the house.

**INSIDE**

They stand and look around at their familiar surroundings.

BETTY

I guess the White House is out  
here in Alexandria for a few days.

Their children all appear at the living room door --

SUSAN

Mum? We're hungry.

MIKE

We were going to cook, but we  
didn't know when you'd be back.

Betty mock-rolls her eyes at him and they follow her through to the kitchen where she sets about reheating the lasagne they didn't eat last night.

BETTY

Have you all figured out where  
you're going to sleep?

**INT. BEDROOM - MORNING**

Noise from downstairs wakes Betty. She rolls over - she's alone. She groggily levered herself out of bed and looks out of the window --

Down below, Gerald is swimming laps in the pool. Around the garden perimeter, security men are scouring the hedges.

**INT. KITCHEN - MORNING**

Betty comes down in her housecoat, her face carefully made up. She finds Susan doing her homework on the kitchen table, trying to zone out the drilling and hammering from nearby.

Betty takes in the workmen and security team busy turning their garage into a surveillance room. She enjoys watching a particularly attractive one for a moment, then --

BETTY

Do you want me to make  
you breakfast?

SUSAN

Don't we get a chef now?

BETTY

Not yet, I guess.

She sets about making eggs on the range.

**BEDROOM**

Betty packs piles of linen into boxes.

**HALLWAY**

Betty empties out a cupboard. Stacks of full boxes lined up along the wall.

Betty drops a box and kicks it across the hall, taking out her frustration. She winces - her shoulder hurts.

**LOUNGE**

Betty switches on the TV and mixes herself a martini. Behind her an episode of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* starts up - MARY TYLER MOORE driving, then whirling in the street, throwing her hat in the air.

THEME SONG

*Who can turn the world on with her smile? Who  
can take a nothing day, and suddenly make it all  
seem worthwhile? Well it's you girl, and you  
should know it, With each glance and every  
little movement you show it...*

Betty settles down on the couch to drink her afternoon cocktail with a Valium and watch Mary Tyler Moore go about her business.

**EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

As their cavalcade of limos approaches the White House, Betty looks out at the iconic building that will now be her home.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

Betty and Gerald are being led down a corridor by the elegant grey-haired head usher, REX SCOUTEN.

REX SCOUTEN

And when we pass through these doors, we will be in the Executive Mansion. As you know, this forms the most familiar part of the visage, and connects the East Wing to the West Wing.

BETTY

Who decided to call it the Executive Mansion?

REX SCOUTEN

I think it's always been called that.

BETTY

I can't live in a mansion.

GERALD

I think we can call it whatever we like.

BETTY

It's just our residence, so...

REX SCOUTEN

The Executive Residence it is, then. Welcome home.

They reach the doors, and Rex opens them to reveal their sumptuous new home.

Betty looks at the paintings of previous presidents as photographer DAVID KENNERLY buzzes around capturing the moment.

REX SCOUTEN

Your belongings have been unpacked in your respective rooms.

BETTY

Respective rooms?

REX SCOUTEN

I think they would be a good place  
to start.

Rex breezes down the corridor. Betty follows, glancing into the various rooms as she hurries past.

Rex opens a door to reveal a large gaudily-decorated bedroom --

REX SCOUTEN

This serves as the first lady's  
bedroom, and the president  
sleeps...

He opens a door to reveal a smaller adjoining room, with Gerald's exercise bike and favorite blue leather chair sitting either side of the bed.

REX SCOUTEN

In his room.

BETTY

I can't sleep in a different room  
from Jerry.

REX SCOUTEN

I believe the thinking is that the president is likely to keep quite unsociable hours and you would both be more comfortable this way.

BETTY

Well, I like to have Jerry in  
my bed.

GERALD

Yes. Can we take the bed out of the other room and make it a sitting room? We can put the TV in there. And can we...

(gesturing the decoration)

Change this up a bit?

REX SCOUTEN

Of course, Mr President. These rooms are yours to do as you see fit. The Nixons had quite... particular taste.

Betty raises her eyebrows at Pat's taste as she and Gerald look around, trying to imagine living in this room. Betty sits on the bed. Rex waits, awkwardly.

GERALD

Thank you, Rex. Could we have a few minutes to settle in?

Rex lets himself out, closing the door behind him.

Betty throws herself back on the bed, cackling.

BETTY

I wonder how many presidents have made out in this bed?

GERALD

I can't see Dick chasing Pat around this room.

BETTY

I think it needs to be a priority of your presidency to break that dry spell.

She pulls Gerald down onto the bed with her and they kiss.

**INT. EXECUTIVE RESIDENCE - DAY**

Betty watches as men in suits herd Gerald down the corridor and out. The door closes behind them.

And now Betty is alone in her new home. It's surprisingly quiet.

BETTY

Hello?

No response. She wanders through the huge rooms, feeling lost and small under the high ceilings.

In the dining room, she notices the walls are papered with a historical wallpaper depicting scenes from the Revolutionary War - she shivers as she looks closely at the soldiers dying.

She walks into the kitchen and relaxes, running her hands over the work surfaces.

She hears someone moving around nearby and hurries into a bedroom, where a MAID is making an impressive four-poster bed. The maid looks up in shock at being caught in the act --

BETTY

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle you.

The maid just shakes her head and scurries towards the door.

BETTY

Excuse me, what room is this?

MAID

It's the Lincoln Bedroom,  
Mrs Ford.

BETTY

Thank you...

But the maid has gone. Betty frowns. She sits on the bed. Lincoln's bed.

**INT. BEDROOM, NAVAL HOSPITAL - EARLY MORNING**

**1978.** Betty blearily forces her eyes open as an alarm clock jangles nearby. She pulls the covers over her head. Linda touches her shoulder.

LINDA

Come on now.

Hearing Linda in the shower, Betty drags herself upright and sits on the side of the bed. She looks like hell. She clutches her body to stop herself from shaking.

**BATHROOM**

Betty is being sick into the toilet. An authoritative male voice calls from the corridor --

NAVAL DOCTOR (O.S.)

Muster!

Betty flushes the toilet and wipes her mouth.

**COURTYARD**

Betty stands in a row of patients as an officer does the roll call.

**CORRIDOR**

Betty lacklusterly mops a floor. Another PATIENT, a large seaman, offers her an apple --

PATIENT

You didn't make it to breakfast.  
For the nausea.

Betty puts it in her pocket.

**THERAPY ROOM**

Betty is in a one-on-one with a NAVAL THERAPIST. They stare at each other, her eyes shielded by large sunglasses.

NAVAL THERAPIST

I wonder whether you would take your glasses off, Betty?

BETTY

I'm very sensitive to the light right now.

The therapist draws the blinds over the window.

NAVAL THERAPIST

It's hard to talk to someone if you can't see their eyes. But I'm sure there's no need to tell you that?

BETTY

... No.

She slowly removes the glasses and folds them very carefully.

NAVAL THERAPIST

That's better. I imagine the last few years have been tremendously pressured.

BETTY

You don't expect me to talk about all of that, do you?

NAVAL THERAPIST

Would that be so bad?

BETTY

Of course not. But it would be impossible.

NAVAL THERAPIST

Why?

BETTY

Because, with all due respect, trying to make someone like you understand all that's happened would take far longer than my family can afford to pay for.

NAVAL THERAPIST

Someone like me?

BETTY  
Normal... Ordinary.

NAVAL THERAPIST  
... And you see yourself as  
extraordinary?

BETTY  
You're putting words into  
my mouth.

Betty stares into the distance for a long while. She fights  
herself and makes the decision to invest in this process.

BETTY  
I was an ordinary woman who was  
called on stage at an  
extraordinary time.

Betty's face is tortured. She takes a sharp intake of breath.

NAVAL THERAPIST  
And that required great courage?

BETTY  
Yes.

NAVAL THERAPIST  
And a great deal of struggle?

Betty can't speak. She nods.

NAVAL THERAPIST  
I'm going to open the blinds now.  
Is that ok?

Light floods the room and Betty's face.

**INT. WEST WING - DAY**

**1974.** Betty and Sheila sit in a meeting room in the White House. Cheney is pacing the room, while his own secretary takes furiously fast notes in the corner.

CHENEY  
I just need to know at this stage  
what you are.

BETTY  
What I am?

CHENEY

Interests, hobbies, campaigns to  
support, charities... Children?  
Animals?..

BETTY

Yes.

The secretary scribbles.

CHENEY

Which one?

BETTY

Well, I have children and animals  
so I suppose I have a vested  
interest in both, Mr Cheney.

Sheila suppresses a smile. Betty looks to her.

BETTY

This is moving a little fast. I  
need to apply some thought and  
make choices depending on how I...

CHENEY

With all due respect, Mrs Ford,  
this is an... unusual situation. I  
need to get ahead of this now so  
that we can reassure the American  
people that the new president and  
his wife are committed to engaging  
with the work that was established  
by the previous office.

His dismissive use of the word *wife* has rankled Betty.

BETTY

I want to support women's rights.

Dick's secretary scribbles.

CHENEY

... Ok. We can ease you in. Let's  
take a look at what Mrs Nixon has  
left uncovered and start there.

BETTY

Pat is a friend, but she and I  
hold some difference in views.

The secretary stops scribbling and looks up.

CHENEY

... Are you a liberal, Mrs Ford?

BETTY

I don't know what that word really means these days, Mr Cheney.

CHENEY

You don't?

BETTY

To be honest, I never considered myself all that political.

(she winks at the secretary)  
But now that I'm here, I suppose I'm starting to re-consider that.

CHENEY

Mrs Ford... Betty. Do you mind?

Betty waves him on and he sits in front of her.

CHENEY

Betty, we're in... troubling times. The country needs stability. And your husband should be able to give the people that. They can trust him. But they and he also need to trust you... Right now, we - the Republican Party - can't be seen to be promoting or supporting any causes that may threaten that trust. Do you understand what I mean, Betty?

BETTY

Yes, I understand, Dick. You've explained yourself very clearly.

CHENEY

Good. Good. Well, let me take a look at some specific campaigns that I think will benefit us and I'll get back to you... Thank you for your time.

Betty smiles politely as he heads for the door.

CHENEY

June?

Betty watches as his secretary hustles out after him, then turns to Sheila --

BETTY

Can you get me the lists of Pat's responsibilities and commitments? I don't want to wait for him.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Of course. Do you want me to bring you her ERA contacts?

BETTY

... Just the commitments for now. Thanks Sheila.

Sheila leaves looking disappointed. Betty takes in the large, empty meeting room - it feels incredibly lonely.

#### CORRIDOR

Betty hurries to intercept a BUTLER --

BETTY

May I?

The butler looks confused as she reaches to take his coffee tray. He looks to his MANAGER who has hustled up.

MANAGER

Is there a problem, Mrs Ford?

BETTY

Betty, please. No problem. Just taking my husband some coffee.

She takes the tray with a smile. The manager goes to speak, but too late, as Betty knocks on a door and sweeps into --

#### THE OVAL OFFICE

Gerald is at his desk looking mildly harassed by his chief of staff, **DONALD RUMSFELD**.

Director of communications GERALD WARREN is smoking on the sofa, Kissinger is leaning against the wall, also smoking, and advisor DAVID GURGEN is making notes in an armchair.

All the men look up - confused at Betty's entrance.

BETTY

Coffee, gentlemen.

Dick Cheney sidles into the room - also surprised to see Betty.

She sets the coffee tray on her husband's desk and goes over to a bay window - tries to open it.

BETTY  
Goodness, what a fug.

GERALD  
Mother...

She calls to a security guard stationed outside the window --

BETTY  
Can you get this open please?

The security guard looks baffled, but opens it slightly.

BETTY  
Thank you.

CHENEY  
Did I forget something, Mrs Ford?

BETTY  
What? Oh no. Not at all. Please.  
Carry on.

She starts pouring coffee. The men all look to Gerald, who is trying to cover his amusement.

GERALD  
It's fine.

Betty hands out the coffee cups - making rather a song and dance about it.

KISSINGER  
I'm only expressing what needs to be said, Mr President. It was spoken of as a... motivation for his acceptance of resignation.

BETTY  
(to Rumsfeld)  
Milk?

RUMSFELD  
Oh. No. No, thank you.

WARREN  
Mr President, we have to tread more carefully than ever. If you make a decision to run in '76...

At this Betty looks to Gerald but he avoids her gaze.

WARREN

Following this line is liable to  
derail your popularity with the  
electorate.

KISSINGER

Look, these aren't my suggestions.  
And I'm not forcing one opinion  
over another. The staff members  
who feel this is the most  
appropriate route...

He tails off to look at Betty. Clears his throat. Betty sips at  
her own coffee. He shifts uncomfortably. Rumsfeld steps in --

RUMSFELD

I apologize, Mr President, but  
this is a highly sensitive and...  
(looking at Betty)  
confidential matter.

Gerald sighs. He would rather not have to ask Betty to leave.

GERALD

Mother. Betty... I'm sorry but I'm  
going to have to ask you to leave  
us to this.

Betty is embarrassed - she has made a fool of herself.

BETTY

Oh. Yes, of course... I don't know  
what I was thinking. Gentlemen, my  
apologies.

The men smile awkwardly. She puts down her coffee cup, spilling  
it slightly. Cheney tuts at her clumsiness.

BETTY

I have a lot to be getting on  
with. NBC are wanting to come in  
to see my redecoration plans...

GERALD

That sounds like it will keep you  
well occupied.

Betty looks at him - hurt.

CHENEY

And it's probably for the best.  
The East Wing needs its first  
lady.

There is an awkward pause. Betty doesn't look at Gerald as she leaves.

RUMSFELD  
Thank you for the coffee.

He blushes as the others stare at him.

Betty closes the doors behind her. The flotilla of staff who were waiting on her exit jump back into action guiltily.

Betty catches her breath - humiliated.

She notices the staffers glancing at her and forces a smile. She hears *Rock The Boat* by The Hues Corporation emanating from a radio in an office and strides towards it.

As she looks in, the staffers in the office look up guiltily - busted. But Betty winks at them and turns it up.

She does *The Bump* in the doorway to the staffers' astonishment, before heading off down the corridor.

As she walks away, we see that her face is absolutely stricken.

*Rock The Boat* continues over the following --

**MONTAGE --**

Betty climbs out of a limo and waves to the crowd, beaming.

Betty is in a town hall at a formal dinner, happily chatting. Drinking liberally.

Betty climbs out of her limo, makes her way down a line of female army volunteers, shaking hands, chatting warmly. She borrows one of their hats and the press eagerly snap photos.

Betty greets guests to a White House soirée. The consummate host. She laughs uproariously as Bob Hope entertains the room.

Betty larks about with the HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS - they're teaching her to dribble the basketball in a corridor, Betty squealing with laughter as she loses control of the ball. They all stop guiltily as Rumsfeld erupts furiously through a door.

At another state function, Betty turns from talking to the Japanese Prime Minister to see Gerald chatting with singer VIKKI CARR, who's in a very low-cut dress. Betty frowns as Gerald kisses Vikki on the forehead.

Betty dances happily amongst her guests as PEARL BAILEY performs for them.

Afterwards, Betty and Pearl drink, smoke and laugh together. A drunk Betty falls off her chair. Gerald, fuming, leads her out of the room.

Alone in her room, Betty knocks back pills, more pills, collapses onto the bed in agony. Wakes in the armchair with an empty bottle of gin beside her.

A hungover Betty sweeps through the Yellow Oval Room and balances a cigarette between the fingers of the Greek goddess.

**INT. BATHROOM, EXECUTIVE RESIDENCE - DAY**

*Rock The Boat* stops abruptly as Betty hunches over the sink, silently retching. She jumps at a tap on the door.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD (O.S.)  
Betty? It's time to go down  
to them.

BETTY  
Ok, I'm just... I'm... coming now.

Betty opens the door to reveal Sheila and Nancy --

NANCY HOWE  
We can reschedule this if you  
like. We could do a smaller one  
next week?

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
I don't know...

Nancy shoots her daggers.

BETTY  
They've come all the way over  
here. Give me a moment.

She waves them both out, then heads to the drinks cabinet and knocks back two fingers of vodka.

**EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

Seventy-five reporters are arranged on the lawn. Betty waves to them as she steps up to the bank of microphones.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Does anyone have any questions for  
the first lady?

MALE REPORTER  
Will you be a Jackie or a Pat?

BETTY  
I... Are they the only  
two options?

MALE REPORTER 2  
Or a Marilyn?

BETTY  
Well, I imagine you know what they  
say - you can't teach an old dog  
new tricks. If I try and be anyone  
else, I'll just make a mess of it.  
I can't be changed now... no  
matter how much some of the White  
House advisors hope I can be.

The press chuckle, charmed by her straight-forwardness.

MALE REPORTER 3  
How do you like your new house?

BETTY  
I really don't consider it my  
house, I consider it the house of  
the people of the United States. I  
think it's very beautiful. And I'm  
delighted there's a kitchen on the  
third floor so my husband can make  
his breakfast.

FEMALE REPORTER  
He can cook his own breakfast?

BETTY  
Of course... all he needs is  
a toaster!

Everyone laughs at this.

FEMALE REPORTER 2  
Where does your husband stand on  
equal rights?

BETTY  
Gerald occasionally makes a remark  
when I discuss equal rights, and I  
say I remember well that there was  
a time when we couldn't even vote.  
So certainly I talk to him  
constantly about equal opportunity  
and equal pay.

BETTY

And he's come a long way in his thinking on it.

MALE REPORTER

Does that mean you are going to be lobbying for the ERA?

BETTY

It's a little early...

(glances over at Sheila)

But I hope to be able to encourage everyone to feel liberated.

FEMALE REPORTER 2

And what do you consider a liberated woman?

BETTY

I think, somebody who is really very confident in themselves and likes what they are doing. That's what I would consider a liberated woman, whether what they're doing is being a housewife - I consider bringing up children a responsible job - or a nurse, or even a vice president... yes, I would like to see a female vice president soon.

MALE REPORTER

Are you trying to influence the president to choose a woman?

BETTY

I think it might be a few years before we're ready for that. I know it's coming... But I would like to see my husband put a woman in his cabinet, and I am sitting on his shoulder about that.

As the press erupts in chatter at this, Betty steps past the microphones towards the crowd to shake hands and say hello. She stops in front of the second female reporter.

BETTY

Thank you for your questions.

FEMALE REPORTER 2

Thank you, Mrs Ford.

BETTY

I feel as though I've been asked  
everything except how often I  
sleep with my husband.

REPORTER

What would you have said?

BETTY

As often as possible!

The two women grin at each other, then Betty is escorted away.  
Nearing the White House, she catches up with Sheila --

BETTY

Could you get me those ERA  
contacts? And a better desk? A big  
one. With a nice chair.

Sheila nods, pleased.

**WEST WING**

Consternation from Dick Cheney and the Republicans watching her  
conference on TV --

DICK CHENEY

She is going to be trouble.

**INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

Betty and Sheila are sitting opposite two slickly-suited men -  
DOUG BAILEY and JOHN DEARDOURFF - who're flicking through a  
slide-show. The current slide has the words *EQUAL RIGHTS*  
*AMENDMENT* emblazoned over a map of the states.

JOHN DEARDOURFF

So we just need five more states  
to ratify it, then the amendment  
can be brought before Congress to  
enact.

DOUG BAILEY

The thirty-three who've come  
aboard already were the most  
likely to, so convincing those  
remaining is quite a challenge.

JOHN DEARDOURFF

The general impression is that the  
Republican Party is against  
passage.

DOUG BAILEY

And we get the feeling... we're  
hoping... that you would be  
interested in trying to correct  
that image?

Before Betty can speak, Sheila asks --

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

What's the deadline?

DOUG BAILEY

March '79, but we feel the sooner  
the better.

JOHN DEARDOURFF

We can guide you through the most  
effective course of action - North  
Dakota and Missouri are due to  
vote very soon.

DOUG BAILEY

We can give you a list of the  
ideal people to contact in each  
state to express your support.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

And would Mrs Ford's lobbying in  
any way create a national verses  
states' rights conflict?

DOUG BAILEY

Not at all. We're lobbying for  
state passage of a national  
amendment to the constitution.  
There's no conflict.

Betty stands and reaches out to shake their hands.

BETTY

Thank you, gentlemen. This has  
been very helpful. You know,  
looking forward, I believe that I  
will hold the ERA as a measure of  
how successful I have been as  
first lady.

She heads out, leaving Sheila to deal with the details. The two  
men grin at each other. Sheila also looks very happy about this  
- something to dig her teeth into.

## INT. EAST WING - DAY

Betty is on the phone, as Sheila and Nancy work at desks nearby. Gerald comes in and hovers nearby --

BETTY (INTO PHONE)  
...yes, I understand completely. I think motherhood is swell, but I'm not so sure mothers shouldn't have rights, just like fathers do... No, Senator, I'm not promoting 'a bunch of lesbians', but equal rights for all citizens, yes including lesbians by the way. All I am hoping is that you will use some of your considerable influence to help get the ERA onto the floor of your House of Representatives. I'm certain that once they can all vote on their consciences, Missouri will join the wonderful states who have already ratified. Can I count on your support?... Well, I'm sorry to hear that, but you haven't heard the last of me. I'll speak to you again very soon. Goodbye Senator.

She puts down the phone and looks up at her forlorn husband.

BETTY  
Oh dear.  
GERALD  
No luck for either of us today.

BETTY  
Come here.  
(gives him a big warm hug)  
Let's see how bad it is.

He slumps into a chair. She switches on the TV and flicks the channels to find a news program.

GERALD  
They booed me in Pittsburgh. And JF resigned.

NEWS REPORTER (ON TV)  
Outside the conference centre  
where President Ford was a  
addressing an urban affairs  
convention, we spoke to just a few  
members of the public with very  
strong opinions indeed.

MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC (ON TV)  
He clearly made a deal with Nixon  
- the presidency for a pardon.  
It's a disgrace. He said he was  
going to make a break with these  
dirty backroom tricks.

MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC 2 (ON TV)  
You can't pardon someone who isn't  
guilty. So Nixon's got off scot  
free. That's not justice. It looks  
like one rule for us and one rule  
for the rich and powerful.

BETTY  
(switching it off)  
It'll cool down. It has to.

Gerald unrolls a copy of the New York Times --

GERALD  
It's the reporters too. The Times  
was on my side until now. Look at  
this - a *profoundly unwise,*  
*divisive and unjust act has*  
*apparently destroyed my*  
*credibility as a man of judgment,*  
*candor and competence.*

BETTY  
Well, at least you fooled them  
into thinking you had competence  
in the first place.

Gerald looks at her sharply and heads for the door.

BETTY  
Jerry, I was joking.

GERALD  
You have no idea of the pressure  
I'm under, Betty.

He slams the door, leaving Betty alone.

**INT. PRESIDENTIAL BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Gerald gets into bed. He touches Betty's shoulder, but she's passed out, no response.

**INT. EAST WING - MORNING**

Betty is doing paperwork. Nancy stops by her desk --

NANCY HOWE

I have to go out for a couple  
of hours.

BETTY

Want some company?

NANCY HOWE

You don't need to do that.

BETTY

Well, doctor's clinics give me the  
heebie jeebies. I'll distract you.

**INT. PRIVATE CLINIC - DAY**

Betty and Nancy sit in the waiting room.

BETTY

What is the procedure?

NANCY HOWE

A mammogram.

BETTY

Can anybody have one?

NANCY HOWE

I think so. If you pay...

The RECEPTIONIST calls out.

RECEPTIONIST

Mrs Howe? You can go in now.

Nancy goes in. Betty sidles up to the receptionist.

BETTY

Do you have any leaflets or  
information about these mammograms  
I can look at?

RECEPTIONIST

The doctor doesn't like  
information lying around.

BETTY

Is that right?

RECEPTIONIST

He says it's vulgar.

BETTY

Huh.

RECEPTIONIST

But the nurse can talk you through  
it all. She has a free slot after  
Mrs Howe.

#### **EXAMINATION ROOM**

Betty steps up to the mammogram machine. A NURSE places her breast in the correct position and starts the procedure. Betty winces at the pain.

#### **RECEPTION**

Betty finishes getting dressed and heads to the receptionist.

BETTY

Thank you so much for  
accommodating me.

A DOCTOR comes out of his office, a concerned look on his face.

DOCTOR

Mrs Ford?

#### **INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY**

Betty is in bed. Her upper body is heavily bandaged and she winces as Gerald and the nurses help her sit upright.

GERALD

Are you sure you're ready?

BETTY

I want no cover ups in the Ford  
administration. Imagine. If Nancy  
hadn't of been going, I would  
never have gone.

BETTY  
I've lost a breast - I want to  
make that count, Jerry.

She does up the buttons on her pink housecoat as Sheila goes to open the door.

BETTY  
Wait! Mirror...

She checks her hair - gives it a fluff.

BETTY  
Alright.

Sheila opens the door and waves David Kennerly in.

BETTY  
Hello David.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Wait a minute, please.

BETTY  
Gerald, hold my hand.

Gerald does so. Betty smiles at him. David clicks away.

Sheila hands Betty a large dossier covered in names. Betty looks at her quizzically.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
It's a petition in support of  
faster, more aggressive treatment  
for womens' cancers.

BETTY  
Oh... Very good, Sheila.

Sheila smiles demurely as David continues to photograph them.

**INT. WEST WING - DAY**

Staff gather to watch the news on TV in the bullpen.

NEWS ANCHOR  
Photos have been released today  
from the bedside of First Lady  
Betty Ford's hospital room as she  
continues to recover from a  
mastectomy operation for breast  
cancer.

Cheney hovers at the back of the admiring and largely female crowd of staff.

NEWS ANCHOR

In official statements, the White House have said that Mrs Ford is recovering well and expects to return to full service as soon as she is fit. The President and Mrs Ford are extremely grateful to all the staff at the Bethesda Hospital where the surgery as taken place and for the vigilance of the team who found Mrs Ford's cancer during a routine check.

The TV reveals a photo of Betty throwing an American football to a laughing Gerald.

The White House staff clap - the women with great enthusiasm. Cheney's face sets into a hard line and he leaves the room.

**INT. PRESIDENTIAL BEDROOM - MORNING**

Betty is getting dressed, a morning martini on the go.

She looks down at the scar on her chest, runs her fingers over a section that hasn't quite healed yet. She winces as she puts on her bra and slips her prosthesis in.

She stares at herself in the mirror, trying to see whether the prosthesis is obvious. She downs her martini.

**INT. MAIL ROOM, WHITE HOUSE - MORNING**

Nancy and Sheila breeze in, followed by a slightly dazed Betty. She looks around - ten POST WOMEN are sat at a row of tables opening mail and stacking the contents high. Bags and bags of more mail are piled around.

NANCY HOWE

You've got more than fifty-thousand cards so far.

Betty looks at some, but her eyesight is fuzzy from the drink.

BETTY

Are they good?

One of the post women rifles through the cards...

POST WOMAN

Dearest Mrs Ford, I am writing to thank you. When you came out, my mother told me she herself had been treated. She had to whisper the word, it is so frightening. Well, as a result, I asked the doctor to check me, and I am so very grateful to you, because it saved my life. Yours eternally, Judith Williams.

She looks up to find that tears are rolling down Betty's face.

POST WOMAN

Oh, I'm sorry. Are you...?

BETTY

No, It's okay, I'm just tired. I'm very tired.

She rifles in her handbag. Sheila guides her out.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

We need to be getting on anyway.

NANCY HOWE

Thank you for all your hard work, ladies.

#### CORRIDOR

Betty's found a pill. Nancy looks around --

NANCY HOWE

I don't think we can find any water...

Betty puts the pill in her mouth and forces it down dry.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

We should probably get to the car, or we're going to be late.

They walk through the White House corridors, Nancy supporting Betty.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Checkups have increased nationwide by around 400 percent, and thousands of dollars have been donated to the American Cancer Society.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

I'd like you to do an interview  
for 60 Minutes - get your message  
out that this is the time for  
women to speak up and be honest  
with each other.

BETTY

On TV? I don't want everybody to  
just be looking at my breasts.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

You can only do so much behind the  
scenes. It's direct to the  
American people that you can have  
a real impact.

BETTY

I don't think I want  
the publicity.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Mrs Rockefeller's going in for a  
mammogram at the end of the week.

BETTY

... I'd like to answer Judith  
Williams myself. Could you try and  
get hold of her card for me?

They're outside now, and climbing into a limo.

**EXT. POOL, FORT LAUDERDALE - DAY**

Betty and Sheila are relaxing with cocktails. Rumsfeld saunters  
over to fix himself a drink and notices the huge ERA pin on  
Betty's blouse.

RUMSFELD

So, are you going to equalize  
things up in the White House too?

BETTY

Yes, sir. You'd better watch out!

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

It'll take a hell of a lot to make  
it equal - I've only got three  
people in my department, and I've  
been fighting for months to get my  
own briefing box.

RUMSFELD

The East Wing is actually outside of the White House. And quite frankly, I hope it stays that way. The fewer staff you have, the less damage you can all do over there.

Sheila can see Betty is starting to fume.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

If you could just give me one more staff member, it would go a long way to ensuring we're on top of everything.

BETTY

... Why don't you race us for it?

RUMSFELD

What?

Betty nods to the empty pool.

BETTY

You're both in bathing suits. If Sheila wins, you assign us one of your forty-five staff people.

Rumsfeld looks at Sheila's tiny frame and laughs.

RUMSFELD

Sure... Sure.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Yeah! Really, let's race. I promise if I lose, you will have proven your superiority and I'll never mention it again.

Sheila puts her goggles on and people nearby have noticed the challenge. They start to get excited as the two people move to the pool edge.

BETTY

But if you lose, Don, you have to promise to send someone over... And no deadweight, either.

Rumsfeld nods. Betty stands by the corner and raises her arm --

BETTY

On three... Ready? One, two, three - GO!

They dive in. Rumsfeld's thick body splashing Betty.

The crowd cheers. Betty yells and claps as Sheila pulls ahead.

Gerald emerges to see what all the fuss is about.

Sheila makes a clumsy turn, but she's way ahead of Rumsfeld...

Betty is jumping for joy as Sheila touches the end of the pool just as Rumsfeld is turning at the other end. Hearing the cheers and laughter, he gives up.

Sheila pulls her goggles off in triumph. Betty crouches down to her --

BETTY  
To hell with it - I'll do  
60 Minutes.

Sheila grins.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

Dick Cheney is rushing alongside Sheila as she heads up the stairs to the executive residence --

DICK CHENEY  
You know, there's a general  
feeling that first ladies should  
be seen and not heard...

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Christ, Dick. You really are a  
caveman, you know that?

DICK CHENEY  
And right now more than ever. We  
need to play it safe.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Is that your view, or the view of  
the president?

DICK CHENEY  
... the first lady is not an  
elected position.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Come on, we both know no president  
is elected without a wife. And in  
this case, you've got a wife who  
everyone knows all about. They're  
a package. The real deal.

DICK CHENEY

White House mail... despite the general good wishes towards Betty's health, are running three to one against her ERA lobbying.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Well, then I suggest they vote the Fords out of office.

DICK CHENEY

Could you at least guarantee to me that she won't directly mention the ERA?

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

You people really piss me off. You want her seen and not heard until you need her to say something one of your spotty little Yale speechwriting monkeys has penned to push your own manipulative and highly dubious moral agenda. All for a party who would cut their noses off to spite their sweaty faces...

DICK CHENEY

That is...

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Sweaty - because you all know that it's her who will get you the votes. But you don't like that because those votes come from people you fundamentally don't give a shit about.

DICK CHENEY

You're out of line.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

I'm warning you that if you use her - exhaust her - without letting her speak her mind and pursue her own agendas, you'll be facing a tidal wave of crap. So. Be smart for a moment, will you, and let me get on with my day.

Sheila pushes through the doors and lets them close in Dick's face.

She pauses to take a deep breath, then approaches the presidential suite.

She knocks. She can hear voices inside. A panicked Nancy emerges and closes the door behind her.

NANCY HOWE  
She isn't doing it.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Shit. She can't not do it -  
they're all set. The lights are  
ready, the crew are all waiting.

NANCY HOWE  
You try speaking to her.

Sheila skirts around Nancy and enters Betty's rooms.

Betty is sitting at the dressing table with a HAIRDRESSER working on her hair. She is hysterically crying.

Betty looks around her - shivers - a fog is closing in on her - the room disappearing. She panics and wraps her blanket tighter. Sheila's face looms out of the fog alarmingly.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Betty!

The room comes back into focus. Sheila kneels beside Betty and takes her hand. Betty snatches it back.

BETTY  
I'm not doing it. I can't do it. I  
don't like this at all.

Sheila puts a vodka into her hand.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
They're here. We're supposed to be  
taping it now. They got here at  
six this morning, all the trucks,  
all the technicians. They're all  
waiting down there.

BETTY  
I'm sorry, I just can't...

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
It's Morley Safer, you like him.  
He'll be lovely to you. It'll be  
really wonderful.

BETTY  
I'm not ready.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Your hair's nearly done. You just  
need to shake off this dressing  
gown and put on a frock.

Betty starts crying again.

BETTY

I just can't face it, I don't want  
publicity, them all looking at me.

Sheila heads towards the door.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Alright. I don't know what I'm  
going to say to them, though.

HAIRDRESSER

Mrs Ford? Your hair is ready.

Betty looks her perfectly coiffured hair and pristine make-up  
in the mirror.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Betty? Please? We're working so  
hard for this.

The vodka is taking effect now, and Betty enjoys her glowing  
reflection - who wouldn't want to see this on TV?

BETTY

Okay, I'm going to do it.

#### STAIRCASE

Betty leads the way upwards in a sleek pink dress. She's on a  
sudden high - her surroundings are warmed by bright sunlight.  
She seems to be floating, a huge grin on her face.

She sweeps into the solarium.

BETTY

Mr Safer! It's delightful to meet  
you. I'm a huge fan. Jerry and I  
watch you every week without fail.

Betty's turned on all her charm - she's bright and upbeat now.

MORLEY SAFER

The honor is mine. Please, call  
me Morley.

BETTY  
Shall we go straight into it?

She plonks herself down on the sofa beside him.

MORLEY SAFER  
Absolutely.

A TECHNICIAN rearranges the two microphones between them.

BETTY  
Well, that's a big microphone  
you've got there.

TECHNICIAN  
All the better to hear you with.

Betty laughs. The technician gives a thumbs up. Safer looks to the cameraman, who does likewise, then the producer.

MORLEY SAFER  
...And we're rolling. Thank you  
for agreeing to talk to me at what  
must be a very busy time for you.

Betty nods and tucks her legs up to turn and face him.

MORLEY SAFER  
Washington can be awfully tough on  
a political wife. What are the  
pressures on a woman living in  
this town?

BETTY  
There can be many. It depends on  
the size of the family, and the  
type of husband you have. Whether  
he's a wanderer or a homebody.

Sheila, watching warily from the doorway, starts to relax -  
Betty is upbeat and engaging.

MORLEY SAFER  
Did you ever have any doubts about  
your husband and some of the  
attractions in this city?

BETTY  
I have perfect faith in my  
husband. But I'm always glad to  
see him enjoy looking at a pretty  
girl. When he stops looking, then  
I'll begin to worry.

**INT. VARIOUS AMERICAN HOMES - EVENING**

We see into a variety of the nation's living rooms as the interview is broadcast and the public start to react to it.

BETTY (ON TV)  
And he doesn't really have time  
for outside entertainment -  
because I keep him busy.

The viewers chuckle at this, completely charmed by Betty's candor and cheekiness.

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)  
There was a time in your life here  
when you felt that you needed some  
help.

BETTY (ON TV)  
This is true.

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)  
Some psychiatric help.

BETTY (ON TV)  
Yes.

The nation raises its collective eyebrows.

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)  
Was that, do you think, a function  
of being in Washington or what?

BETTY (ON TV)  
Well, I was advised by the doctor  
who was treating me for my  
shoulder that perhaps a  
psychiatrist could help. And I  
found it very helpful, because  
apparently I was...

**INT. SOLARIUM, WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

Betty pauses for a moment, considering how much to give away.

BETTY  
...I was really giving too much of  
myself and not taking any time out  
for Betty. It was all going to the  
children and my husband. And  
consequently, I was a little  
beaten down.

MORLEY SAFER

It's almost a rule of political life, that the higher a man gets in politics, the less outspoken his wife becomes. She becomes a mouse. It seems it's been just the opposite with Betty Ford. The higher your husband's gotten, the more really controversial things have been said.

BETTY

But my... what I've spoken out on were issues pertaining to women. I'm not getting into political issues that...

MORLEY SAFER

Well, the Equal Rights Amendment is a very hot political issue.

BETTY

And we're going to get to it. I feel that the ERA ought to pass in our bicentennial year. What could be greater to pass than that?

MORLEY SAFER

Without wanting to be rude for a minute, you've talked about liberating women. But surely the most unliberated woman in this... in the world, is the wife of the president of the United States... in terms of the bonds that tie her, forgive me, to his shadow?

BETTY

I don't feel unliberated when I'm sitting here talking to you. You can ask me any question.

MORLEY SAFER

Among the things you have spoken out about are abortion, which is kind of a taboo subject for the wife of the President. It's one of the --

BETTY

If someone asks a question, you have to be honest and say exactly how you feel.

BETTY

And I feel very strongly that it was the best thing in the world when the Supreme Court voted to legalize abortion and, in my words, bring it out of the backwoods and put it into the hospitals where it belonged. I thought it was a great, great decision.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - EVENING

Betty and Gerald are watching the broadcast, with Cheney and Rumsfeld watching behind them.

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)

You've also talked about the young people living together before they're married.

BETTY (ON TV)

Well... they are, aren't they?

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)

Indeed, they are. And what if Susan Ford came to you and said, "Mother, I'm having an affair."

BETTY (ON TV)

(does a double-take  
at him - *really*?)

Well, I wouldn't be surprised. I think she's a perfectly normal human being like all young girls, and I would certainly counsel and advise her on the subject... She's pretty young to start affairs.

At this, Cheney puts his head in his hands --

CHENEY

Oh, please tell me you rowed right back up this stream?

Even Gerald is looking worried. Betty feels Cheney's eyes boring into her hot face.

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)

But nevertheless, old enough...

BETTY (ON TV)

Oh yes, she's a big girl.

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)

I mean, would it surprise you though, given the way you and the president brought these kids up, if that happened?

BETTY (ON TV)

No, I think there's a complete freedom among the young people now. And in some cases I'm not so sure that... perhaps there would be less divorce.

Gerald throws a cushion at Betty. She's shocked as it bounces off her.

GERALD

Damn it, what have you done?  
(turns his wrath on Cheney)  
Didn't you give her the talking points? You're supposed to be keeping on top of this.

BETTY

It's not his fault. I was just saying what I felt. Answering the question honestly.

GERALD

And losing me ten million votes in the progress.

RUMSFELD

Closer to twenty or thirty. This is a fucking disaster.

Betty shrinks down in her seat, tears springing into her eyes as the men storm out.

BETTY (ON TV)

...and I'm convinced in my own mind that I'm completely cured.

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)

And how about your back, that pinched nerve that you did have to take some...

BETTY (ON TV)

Well, that still gives me trouble, but I've had it ten or eleven years and I don't expect, you know... everybody can't be perfect.

BETTY (ON TV)  
You all have to suffer a little to  
appreciate life.

Betty watches all alone as Morley Safer sums up to camera -  
looking straight out of the TV at her --

MORLEY SAFER (ON TV)  
This first lady is not afraid to  
speak out, even on the most  
controversial of issues. She  
handles it all with thoughtfulness  
and a sense of purpose - but even  
more refreshing - with a sense of  
humor. She has a great deal to  
say, and when Betty Ford says it,  
she sparkles.

**INT. PRESIDENTIAL BEDROOM - DAY**

Betty is huddled in her bed. There's a soft knock on the door. Sheila slips in and opens the drapes, but Betty winces at the harsh light.

Sheila closes the drapes and switches on a small lamp instead. She plunks an Alka Seltzer into a glass of water and Betty pushes herself up into a sitting position to accept it.

BETTY  
I don't think I can get up today.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Ok.

Betty finishes the seltzer.

BETTY  
Do you think it will be a problem?

Sheila puts the glass away to give herself a moment to respond. When she does, she is delicate.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Actually, Rumsfeld thinks it's  
best if you lay low for a while.  
The party are in discussions...

BETTY  
(face in hands)  
Oh God.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Hey. Don't panic.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

All of this is perfectly normal.  
It's just the dance we have to do.

BETTY

Jerry left this morning without  
saying goodbye.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

He's never done that before?

BETTY

Not in twenty-five years.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

... I'm sure he's just giving you  
some space.

BETTY

He's angry at me.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Look, I know he's your husband and  
you love him, blah, blah. But  
Betty. Gerald pardoned Dick Nixon  
and he's going to let *your*  
*interview* be the problem?

BETTY

Cheney said...

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Forget what Cheney said. God, this  
place is literally full of Dicks.

Betty gives a glimmer of a smile.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

That's better. Listen, take today  
and tomorrow and then we'll go  
back out there and show them that  
we stick to our guns, ok?

BETTY

Ok.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

So, you do whatever you need to  
get yourself back on your feet.

As Sheila heads out, she sees Betty staggering over to the  
drinks cabinet. Sheila's face sets in a hard line and she shuts  
the door.

**LATER**

A drunk and high Betty dances clumsily around her bedroom. She downs her drink and stands swaying for a moment, lost in --

**A VIBRANT MEMORY**

18-year-old Betty stands in a dance studio amongst an anxious group of young women waiting to audition.

Their nervous whispering falls into an intimidated silence as choreographer **MARTHA GRAHAM** sweeps into the room - her lithe body swathed in black, hair drawn up into a disciplined bun.

She appraises the room. Betty stands straighter as Martha's piercing eyes fall on her and examine her form.

**MARTHA**  
First position.

The women immediately adopt the balletic position. Martha scrutinizes them.

**MARTHA**  
Do something more interesting  
with it.

The women titter - unsure. Betty grins. She adjusts her body into a more striking position.

Martha looks over Betty's body. She gives a tiny nod and moves off down the line of women.

Betty smiles, then catches herself and focusses again.

**LATER**

Betty and the other women wait patiently in the corridor. A dancer emerges from an office and pins a list of names for the *Martha Graham Reserve Ensemble* on a noticeboard.

The women jostle each other to see. Most turn away dismayed. Betty pushes her way through and scans for her name...

She lets out a whoop of delight.

**WHITE HOUSE**

Back in her bedroom, Betty comes to. She drops her glass of drink on the carpet and clutches her drunken head.

**INT. MAIL ROOM, WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

Sheila sifts through a huge pile of post for Betty - she notices words from each letter - disappointed... shame... thought better of you... bad influence...

**INT. WOMEN'S REPUBLICAN CLUB, SAN FRANCISCO - DAY**

Betty is in a row of speakers with a pompous INVIGILATOR.

INVIGILATOR

Mrs Reagan, how would you respond were Patti to come to you and say she's thinking of having an affair?

NANCY REAGAN glances at Betty pointedly, then turns to the audience of the local Republican Party --

NANCY REAGAN

I would not hesitate in forbidding her. I would tell her to wait for the sacred bond of marriage. I want you all to be sure that I am directly opposed to this new morality whirling around among the young people, such as premarital sexual relations. And I think the access the young have to abortion only exacerbates these immoral tendencies.

Betty shoots daggers at her.

An anxious AIDE taps Betty on the shoulder and whispers in her ear. Betty's face turns ashen. She gets up shakily.

BETTY

Excuse me. I'm so sorry... I have to leave.

The invigilator follows her --

INVIGILATOR

What's going on?

AIDE

Someone tried to shoot the president.

INVIGILATOR

Again?

## EXT. TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE, OUTSIDE SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

The limo speeds onto the tarmac and stops beside Air Force One.

As Betty gets out, the president's security detail run over and hustle everybody towards the plane.

SECRET SERVICE OFFICER

As quickly as possible, please,  
Mrs Ford. We need to get this bird  
in the air.

Betty hurries up the stairs and through the plane, past a rowdy group of staffers making themselves cocktails. The press are yelling excitedly at Rumsfeld at the other end of the plane.

Betty barges past Cheney into her husband's office and into Gerald's arms. She clutches him tight.

BETTY

Thank God.

GERALD

I'm ok. Though this time the gun  
actually went off. The bullet  
bounced off the hotel wall beside  
me and hit a taxi-driver in the  
groin.

Betty laughs, clamps her hand over her mouth.

BETTY

Oh, God... I'm sorry. That's  
not funny.

(she sits back in shock)

Thank God she was a poor shot.

She notices Gerald is shaking. She fixes them both a very stiff drink.

GERALD

We're still going on to Detroit,  
but I'm not going to let you join  
the march. It's just too  
dangerous.

BETTY

What? Gerald, that's ridiculous.

GERALD

We can't risk it.

BETTY

But there'll be thousands of  
women there.

GERALD

Exactly!

BETTY

What is that supposed to mean?

GERALD

Cheney doesn't think it's  
coincidence that I've been  
targeted by women, Betty. At a  
time when my wife seems to be  
encouraging them in protest.

Gerald sits down and nurses his drink.

BETTY

How dare you. How dare you dictate  
to me where I can go and what I  
can do. How dare you suggest that  
the very movement that is good and  
necessary for this country - the  
thing that is increasing your  
popularity - is attempting to  
destroy it.

Gerald gets up to walk away from her.

GERALD

There's no talking to you when  
you're like this.

Betty shouts, letting it rip --

BETTY

I am your presidency!..  
(Gerald stares in shock)  
Without me and all the votes I can  
bring, you will be nothing.  
Without what I'm attempting, there  
would be no good in this  
administration.

Gerald comes very close to her. For once in her life, Betty is  
intimidated by his size, but she glares up at him regardless.

GERALD

That may be, Betty. Everything you  
say may well be true.

## GERALD

And you can shout and holler as much as you like, but you'll not be leaving your hotel room to join that march. And if you do, I will have every security man in the building instructed to pick you up and take you back there. Because I am the president.

Gerald stalks out, slamming the door. A furiously shaking Betty throws her glass of whisky after him with a roar.

## INT. HOTEL ROOM, DETROIT - EVENING

Betty winces as she sits on the edge of the bed - her body is aching. She takes a few pills and rolls under the sheets. She shifts around, trying to get into a position where she can bear the pain. She sighs - gives up and takes a couple of Valium.

As it kicks in, a broad grin spreads across her face. The room warms up, and she starts to float relaxingly above the bed. She slips into unconsciousness.

## MORNING

Betty stands in a white dress looking forlornly out of the window --

In the street below, thousands of women, also all dressed in white, are marching in honor of International Women's Year, waving ERA placards.

She sees a group of women waving *WE'RE WITH BETTY* placards.

Frustrated, she leaves her hotel room and finds the entourage in another room. She waves at Sheila to join her.

Sheila comes through into Betty's room.

## BETTY

All these people complaining about 60 Minutes, I want to reply to them in my own words. I don't think *thank you for writing in* is enough - they need to hear what I really meant.

Sheila sits at the desk and pulls out a pad and paper.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Your strength is the personal touch - why not handwrite one perfect letter and hope the recipient will share it with the press? Let it emerge naturally.

BETTY

Oh, Sheila - you're good.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

I know. So, what do you want to say to the public?

But a brain fog has come over Betty --

BETTY

I'm not sure...

**LATER**

Betty and Sheila are drinking, tipsy --

BETTY

Thank you for writing about my appearance on "60 Minutes".

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

The concerns which inspired you to share your views are appreciated.

BETTY

That's good!... I wish it were possible for us to sit down and talk one to another.

**INT. TEXAN KITCHEN - MORNING**

A middle-aged woman, LORENA CHERALIER, is going through her post. She stops at one with the White House seal on it. She carefully tears it open and starts to read --

LORENA CHERALIER

*I consider myself a responsible parent. I know I am a loving one. We have raised our children in a home that believes in and practices the enduring values of morality and personal integrity. As every mother and father knows, these are not easy times to be a parent...*

**INT. ASSOCIATED PRESS OFFICES - DAY**

Several JOURNALISTS are crowded around a xerox of the letter as one reads it out loud --

JOURNALIST

*Our convictions are continually being questioned and tested by the fads and fantasies of the moment. I believe our values to be eternal and I hope I have instilled them in our children. We have come to this sharing of outlooks through communication, not coercion...*

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

Cheney is reading the New York Times to Gerald and Rumsfeld --

DONALD RUMSFELD

*My husband and I have lived 26 years of faithfulness in marriage. I do not believe in premarital relationships, but I realize that many in today's generation do not share my views. However, this must never cause us to withdraw the love, the counseling, and the understanding that they may need now more than ever before... That's quite a recovery.*

DICK CHENEY

It wasn't on my counsel.

GERALD

Of course not. She doesn't need it.

**INT. MAIL ROOM, WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

Betty and Sheila burst in hopefully - the mail girls have sorted out Betty's mail into two piles. One of which is huge. Betty looks at them nervously...

BETTY

Which one is good?

MAIL GIRL

The big one is all good.

Betty and Sheila high five. Betty squeezes the mail girl's shoulder.

## INT. EAST WING - DAY

Betty is happily writing letters when Cheney hurries in.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Mr Cheney?

BETTY  
Hello Dick. Who let you in?

DICK CHENEY  
Good morning, Mrs Ford.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Where's that staffer I won  
off you?

DICK CHENEY  
(ignoring this)  
I hear you've been invited to  
speak at the International Women's  
Conference?

BETTY  
That's right.

DICK CHENEY  
I need to read your speech  
in advance.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Mrs Ford has seventy percent  
approval ratings. She's more  
popular than any president we've  
ever had.

DICK CHENEY  
Even so...

Betty stands and advances on Cheney, forcing him backwards --

BETTY  
Dick, I am perfectly aware that my  
words need to be clear, and my  
intention should not be  
misinterpreted. So let me practice  
now - we will write my words, I  
will not give you veto, I will  
speak my mind. And you will have  
to sit in the audience if you want  
to find out what I'm going to say.  
Do I make myself clear?

DICK CHENEY

I'm not sure the president will be happy about this.

BETTY

Then he can speak to me about it himself.

She holds the door open for Cheney to leave.

**EXT. WHITE HOUSE - DAY**

Betty approaches her waiting limo, a neck-brace visible above her dress's high neck. She notices her two secret service bodyguards HARTWIG and SARDO are looking sheepish --

BETTY

Alright, what's eating you two?

HARTWIG

My girlfriend's a fan of yours.  
And she made this for you --

He holds up a blue satin flag, trimmed with lace and decorated with red, white and blue stars. Surrounding a large pair of stuffed bloomers are the words *DON'T TREAD ON ME - ERA*.

Betty is speechless. She puts her hand on her heart.

SARDO

They're bloomers - for your maiden name.

Hartwig looks very proud as they all get into the car.

**INT. LIMOUSINE - DAY**

As they drive into the outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio, Betty is still admiring the flag.

**INT. BEDROOM, NAVAL HOSPITAL - MORNING**

**1978.** The alarm goes off in Betty's bedroom. She levers herself out of bed. She looks healthier than last time we saw her here.

She puts on the kettle and slips into the bathroom to clean her teeth. She returns to the bedroom as Linda is stirring, pours two cups of tea and sets one on Linda's bedside table.

NAVAL DOCTOR (O.S.)

Muster!

**DINING HALL**

Betty takes toast and a coffee to sit quietly by the window.

**CORRIDOR**

Betty dusts paintings on the wall. She pauses to look at one -- a wild depiction of a ship in a storm.

**BEDROOM**

Betty is changing out of her work clothes. Linda walks in and notices Betty slipping her prosthetic breast into one side of her bra.

LINDA

I'm sorry. Shall I come back?

Betty puts her shirt on.

BETTY

It's fine. I'm used to it.

Linda smiles shyly and starts making her bed. Betty sits and watches this quiet woman.

BETTY

You don't talk... In group sessions. I know it took me a while to engage - properly I mean - but you haven't said one word.

LINDA

... I didn't realize there would be so many.

BETTY

People?

LINDA

Men.

BETTY

Ah. I see.

LINDA

All their important stories. Their fathers. Work. War... I'm just a housewife. Nothing wrong per se. No real worries. But I still drink. All day. Have for years.

Linda continues to straighten her bed. Betty takes a punt --

BETTY

... I started drinking in the mornings after my second child. I was so tired and Gerald worked so much, I told myself I deserved it. A drink before lunch. One with food, one in the afternoon to help me nap when the children did. A glass with neighbors before Gerald was home for his dinner. Dinner. And as many as I could fit in with him in the only hour or two I got to spend with him. He never noticed because he only started when I had already reached my fifth... There is no name put to what women feel, I think. So we just feel shame. I used to stay quiet in front of men. A good American girl.

Betty looks at Linda who is watching her emotionally - pillow clutched in her hands.

For Betty it is a breakthrough - an admission of her alcoholism. She looks out of the window at the garden.

BETTY

Men always say what they want, Linda. Whenever they want. So I learned there is never any point in staying quiet - because they won't make space for you. You have to make your own.

**INT. HOTEL CONFERENCE HALL, CLEVELAND, OHIO - MORNING**

**1975.** We're back with Betty on stage at the International Women's Year Conference - the podium decorated with white flowers and venus symbol, the audience lapping up her words --

BETTY

But it is only a beginning... The debate over the ERA has become too emotional, because of the fears of some - both men and women - about the changes already taking place in America.

Change by its very nature is threatening, but it is also often productive.

BETTY

And the fight of women to become more productive, accepted human beings is important to all people of either sex and whatever nationality.

The long road to equality rests on achievements of women and men in altering how women are treated in every area of everyday life.

Freedom for women to be what they want to be will help complete the circle of freedom America has been striving for. As the barriers against freedom for Americans because of race or religion have fallen, the freedom of all has expanded. The search for human freedom can never be complete without freedom for women.

By the end of this century, I hope this nation will be a place where men and women can freely choose their life's work without restrictions or without ridicule. Let us work to end the laws and remove the labels that limit the imagination and the options of men and women alike.

Success will open hearts and minds to new possibilities for all people. Much has been done, much remains, but we must keep moving on... Thank you, very much.

The audience rise to their feet and applaud. Betty looks out gratefully. Relieved to have got to the end.

**INT. MEETING ROOM, NAVAL HOSPITAL - DAY**

**1978.** Betty and Linda sit in group therapy. It's Betty's turn.

BETTY

My name is Betty and I'm an addict.

GROUP

Hello Betty.

BETTY

And I'm not sure I've been truthful to you or myself.

BETTY

I accepted that I had a problem with pills. And I could justify that, because they were prescribed to me. I convinced myself and you that my drinking was because of my social life. What was expected of me. But truth be told, my drinking has always been a problem and one that got worse when I became a wife... and a mother.

The women in the group look up. Linda edges forward on her seat.

Betty catches the men's attention too. Some shift uncomfortably but a few look at her with renewed interest.

BETTY

I barely saw my husband and, although I love them dearly, being at home with my children all day, with no work, no drive except my family, drove me to the point of nervous collapse. Because it's lonely. And it's the hardest work I've ever done. And because it could also be so agonizingly... boring.

Linda smiles broadly. The other women in the group laugh. Betty smiles.

BETTY

My name is Betty. I'm addicted to pain medication... And I'm an alcoholic.

**INT. AIR FORCE ONE - EVENING**

**1975.** Dr Lukash counts out 25 pills and hands them to Betty.

BETTY

Thanks Doc.

As he leaves, she knocks back a few different pills and settles into a comfortable chair.

Gerald comes in --

GERALD

How are you doing?

BETTY

I'll be better in a moment. I just  
feel so crippled.

GERALD

(not listening)

You did fantastically. Maybe you  
should run for president.

BETTY

I bet Cheney hated it?

He fixes them both a drink.

GERALD

There's something I want to run by  
you. You know I need to announce.

Betty's sunk back into her chair and isn't quite following --

GERALD

... My candidacy for reelection. I  
want to run.

BETTY

Are you asking? Or telling me?

GERALD

I want to make sure you're  
onboard. And because the committee  
wants you with me all the way.

Betty's world gets hazy.

BETTY

By your side. Not behind you.

GERALD

That's right.

BETTY

I promised to get the ERA through,  
and I guess I can't do that unless  
you continue as president.

Gerald squeezes her hand.

GERALD

I knew you'd understand.

Betty closes her eyes momentarily.

BETTY

I don't know if I can do it.

Betty opens her eyes. Gerald has gone. She is alone. Her eyelids become heavy.

She dozes off, and we are washed into a

#### **HAZY CAMPAIGN MONTAGE --**

Betty wafts through the campaign trail in a drug induced bubble.

#### **A WASHINGTON THEATRE**

Betty dances a soft shoe number on stage in a long flowing evening gown, as the Washington pressmen on stage behind her sing to the tune of *Once in Love with Amy* --

##### **PRESSMEN**

*So start the draft for Betty, We'll all go daft for Betty; Go tell the party we all want the dancer, She's the perfect answer - and how! Let Betty have her equal rights now!*

Betty, delighted to be dancing, looks out at her husband who grins back from the audience.

And then he's grinning at her from the opposite seat in their

#### **LIMOUSINE**

Betty chatting on a CB radio as their car rushes through the countryside. She looks out of the window and sees the

#### **SAN ANTONIO RIVERSIDE**

Betty's on a float riding down the river in the Fiesta Parade. An airplane roars overhead...

#### **VARIOUS AIRPORTS**

Air Force One takes off, Air Force One lands, takes off, lands, take off, landing, take off, landing in

#### **INDIANAPOLIS**

Where Betty smashes a champagne bottle over the nose of a new 747 jet plane. She sticks her fingers into the wine running down the plane and tastes it. She grins cheekily.

Cameras click, the press are delighted. As are the press in

#### **NEW YORK**

Because the crowds are ecstatic to see Betty - many of them wearing pins reading *I'M WITH BETTY'S HUSBAND* and *KEEP BETTY IN THE WHITE HOUSE*.

Betty raises her eyebrows as she hears a TV REPORTER speaking to camera --

TV REPORTER

It seems the Republicans have cottoned on to how popular Mrs Ford is with the voters - she owns the middle ground, that huge swathe of voters in a way that no first lady, or even politician ever has before.

**LOS ANGELES**

A pianist and two violinists play *I Could Have Danced All Night* as Betty laughs and dances up the red carpet to the delight of the crowds.

**SIOUX FALLS**

Betty steps into a reception. She pauses in front of the people lined up to greet her --

BETTY

Do you mind if I say hello to my husband first?

She turns and plants a kiss on a poster of Gerald on the wall behind her. To the delight of the crowd, who she is quickly enveloped by.

**SAN DIEGO**

Betty is dancing with a crowd of senior citizens. The octogenarians all want to whirl and twirl her with great enthusiasm. Betty's having a ball, but starts to get flustered as she's passed from OAP to OAP.

The woman in charge stops the music --

WOMAN

Please folks, let's not wear the poor girl out.

Betty catches her breath, and starts to speak in

**OAKLAND**

At a reception, in front of a huge crowd --

BETTY

Thank you all for coming out. I'm so proud to be able to stand in front of you as your president --

The crowd laugh --

CROWD MEMBER

We wish you were!

BETTY

Oh! Actually, you know, I was president of the Senate Wives Club when my husband was only vice president. I used to kid him about it as often as possible!

HOTEL ROOM

Betty is sobbing. She looks up at Sheila --

BETTY

How could I do that? I just can't get over it. All those stupid mistakes I keep making all the time. I really shouldn't be allowed to speak in public like this. I keep thinking of all the things I said wrong. I'm so embarrassed.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

It's fine, you're doing fine. I'd tell you if I thought you'd messed up, wouldn't I?

BETTY

I can't hear this now. Please leave me. Get out!

AIR FORCE ONE

On the plane between engagements, Betty is having hot compresses applied to her back.

STEWARDESS

Mrs Ford, it's time to strap in for landing.

DR LUKASH

That should help a bit. We'll continue on the return flight.

Betty struggles off the massage table and steps unsteadily towards her seat.

**CHICAGO**

Betty steps unsteadily out onto stage at a Lithuanian Festival, her hair piled untidily on her head.

BETTY

Lobos!

She gets a standing ovation from 15,000 Lithuanians for this.

And crowds of working class Americans gather in

**PITTSBURGH**

Where Betty is causing a huge stir by knocking door-to-door to shake hands with the voters.

**AIR FORCE ONE**

Betty struggles up the steps and into the plane, Sheila following behind.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

I really think you could benefit from being a bit more specific when answering questions.

BETTY

I'm more than just a spokesperson for the bloody ERA.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

(a bit confused)

Well, then maybe you can talk around it, your beliefs in people's rights... You could talk about cancer too - something that you --

BETTY

I'm sick of the cancer thing. I hate the thought that every time people look at me they clutch their bosoms.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

But I'm always meeting women who say that by speaking about it, you saved their lives. I really feel that's something valuable we could focus on.

BETTY

I can't...

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

It's important that we're seen to  
be engaging with...

BETTY

I've had enough!

(collapses into her seat)

I can't breathe! They have me just  
jammed with events, it never  
stops. It feels like they're  
choking the life out of me. They  
hated me, Sheila. They hated me,  
and now they're loving me to the  
point where I'm going to collapse.  
I feel abused. I'm so tired.

She looks down at her palms - they're raw from shaking hands.

**INT. PRESIDENTIAL BEDROOM - MORNING**

Betty is in bed, bleary-eyed. Nancy Howe in the chair beside her. Betty groans - the light is blinding.

BETTY

Could you just shut those drapes?  
It's too much.

Nancy does so, and Betty moans in relief.

BETTY

Tell Sheila they have to postpone  
today. I can't do it.

Nancy dials the phone --

NANCY HOWE (INTO PHONE)

Hello Sheila? I'm with Betty,  
she's not too good. Is there any  
possibility... No... I see.

BETTY

She can't make me do something I  
don't want to do! Send her away.  
I'll be better tomorrow.

NANCY HOWE (INTO PHONE)

Sheila, can you stop? I can't have  
everyone shouting at me.

BETTY

I can't be seen like this. Do you  
know how many people watch that  
show? Everybody!

NANCY HOWE (INTO PHONE)  
Just give us an hour or so?

Nancy puts the phone down and heads to the drinks cabinet to pour a glass of water over an Alka-Seltzer. She places the fizzing glass beside Betty's bed.

BETTY  
I don't know why she keeps trying  
to make me do these things.

NANCY HOWE  
I'll give you a bit of peace  
and quiet.

Nancy heads for the door, then turns back --

NANCY HOWE  
I do know, though, how much of an  
admirer you are of Mary's. Do you  
think you'll regret...

BETTY  
Please not you too, Nancy?

NANCY HOWE  
How excited do you think your  
daughter would be if you were on  
the show?

BETTY  
Susan's living in the White House  
- if she's not already excited,  
then I don't know...

Nancy shrugs, goes out and shuts the door.

Betty lies in the dark for a long long moment. Then she sighs and sits up. She pushes the aspirin water off the table onto the floor.

She drags herself into the sitting room. She sits in an armchair and reaches under the cushion where she's stowed a flask. She takes a long drink from it.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE - MORNING**

Betty walks down the stairs, weaving slightly, leaning heavily on the banisters.

In the corridor, Rumsfeld is having his photo taken with **MARY TYLER MOORE** as her producers stand anxiously by.

They all perk up at the sight of Betty coming towards them in a floaty psychedelic dress and a lot of beads. The two women approach each other warily.

BETTY

Mary Tyler Moore. I might well be your biggest fan.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Hello, Mrs President.

BETTY

Hopefully one day that will be someone's actual title.

MARY TYLER MOORE

I do hope so.

BETTY

Thank you for having me on your show...

She stumbles and Mary helps her. They walk, holding each other's arms.

BETTY

Your program got me through many long days.

They smile at each other warmly.

**INT. HAY-ADAMS HOTEL - DAY**

Betty sits on a sofa with a phone and several framed photos of Susan beside her. She's reading her lines as technicians set up the lights. The words are swimming in front of her. She squints to try and still them - no luck.

The show's producer, ED WEINBERGER, approaches --

ED WEINBERGER

How are you doing, Mrs Ford?

BETTY

Yes, I think... There's just one thing.

ED WEINBERGER

Would you like to change one of your lines?

BETTY

It's this...

BETTY

*He's always leaving it - about his pipe - somewhere. Well, he doesn't. I don't want to make him look like a klutz.*

ED WEINBERGER

No, quite right. That's no problem.

(crosses the line out on his script)

So we'll go line by line. We're all ready, when you are?

Betty nods, unsure. Ed steps in and takes the script from her.

ED WEINBERGER

Okay so, roll camera. And sound.

CAMERAMAN

Rolling.

SOUND RECORDIST

Speed.

ED WEINBERGER

And let's mark it?

The CLAPPER LOADER steps up to Betty with a clapper board --

CLAPPER LOADER

Scene one, shot one, take one.

Betty jumps as he snaps the clapper.

ED WEINBERGER

And... action.

Betty stares at the camera like a rabbit in headlights.

ED WEINBERGER

... so, the phone is ringing,  
Mr Ford.

Betty looks towards it, a bit confused.

ED WEINBERGER

Ring ring, ring ring.

Betty picks the phone up.

BETTY

Hello? This is Betty.

ED WEINBERGER

Great. Thank you, Mrs Ford. Now it's important that you say Mary's name - *Hello, Mary?* So the scene flows from the previous line.

(to camera man)  
Keep rolling.

BETTY

The previous line?

ED WEINBERGER

That Mary says in the other room, to Lou.

BETTY

Okay...

ED WEINBERGER

And I need you to say *Betty Ford* - that's what makes the joke work.

BETTY

Hello, this is Betty Ford...

I'm sorry.

(slurs her words)

Hello Mary, I'm Betty Ford. Ugh.

(getting angry with herself)

Hello...

Ed glances over at Mary, who takes a copy of the script and comes to kneel beside Betty.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Mrs Ford?

BETTY

Oh, Mary, please call me Betty.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Betty, don't worry - we can take our time, and we only need to get each line once.

Mary looks into Betty's eyes and can see she's drunk. Mary turns to Ed --

MARY TYLER MOORE

Can you give me a moment?

She hurries out of the room.

BETTY

Where'd you get these pictures of  
Susan? They're not the best.

Mary rushes back in with a glass of clear liquid. She hands it to Betty, who takes a sip. Betty relaxes and takes Mary's hand.

BETTY

Thank you, Mary. Will you read  
each line for me?

MARY TYLER MOORE

Of course. I'll sit real close -  
here. You can just ignore all  
these men and their toys.

BETTY

I'm just talking to you in the  
script anyway?

MARY TYLER MOORE

Yes, let's just make this fun.  
(to Ed)  
Are we still rolling? Good.

Mary moves the glass just out of shot.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Now, it's ringing. Ring ring.

Betty picks the phone up.

MARY TYLER MOORE

And I say *hello*, and you say  
*Hello, Mary? This is Betty Ford.*  
(she winks at Betty)  
Hello?

BETTY

Hello, Mary? This is Betty Ford.

Mary claps happily. Betty beams.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Fantastic! Then I say *Hi Betty,*  
*this is Mary - Queen of Scots.*

Everyone laughs. Betty takes another sip from the glass.

MARY TYLER MOORE

And Betty, when you hear that, you  
need to look at the handset in  
confusion.

BETTY

That's okay.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Hi Betty, this is Mary - Queen  
of Scots.

Betty hammily holds the handset out to look at it in extreme confusion. Mary chuckles. She shoots a look at Ed, who shrugs.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Great, thanks Betty. So the next line is I just wanted you to know that I'm sorry we missed you. So, sort of look off into the distance... Actually...

(she sits on the floor)

Look at me... And I say to you "Well, I have to go now." ...and you say?

BETTY

Well, I just wanted to tell you I'm sorry we missed you.

MARY TYLER MOORE

And then I go into a long tirade about Lou organizing someone to impersonate you and then you say Please tell Lou I'll have the pipe picked up.

BETTY

Please just tell Lou we'll have the pipe picked up.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Now shrug and put the phone down.

Betty does a big shrug and puts down the phone.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Fabulous! I think we got that, Ed?

ED WEINBERGER

That's a wrap, folks.

The crew all applaud. Betty downs the rest of the glass.

Sheila sees this, and nudges Nancy to step in to help Betty off the sofa.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

I'm afraid we have to whisk Mrs Ford away to another engagement.

MARY TYLER MOORE

Oh, that's a shame, it really has been such an honor to meet you, Mrs Ford... Betty.

BETTY

(really slurring now)

Noo... the honor's allll mine.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Thank you so much. We will look forward to seeing the finished product.

Mary watches regretfully as Betty is maneuvered out of the room.

#### EXECUTIVE RESIDENCE

The two women help Betty into the bedroom and onto the bed.

BETTY

That was a lot of fun.

NANCY HOWE

Yes, it was.

BETTY

Next time, we'll go and do it in Hollywood.

NANCY HOWE

For now, let's just sleep it off.

#### INT. SUSAN'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Susan is on the phone with a packed bag at her feet --

SUSAN'S FRIEND (ON PHONE)

The others just don't feel comfortable with your security men all around... Susan, we just feel it's better if you don't come.

Susan puts the phone down, upset.

**CORRIDOR**

Susan hovers outside her parents' bedroom door --

SUSAN  
Mom? . . . Mom?

She opens the door and steps inside. She stands and stares at Betty, who's face down fully-clothed on the bed. Clearly completely zonked out. Sheila appears.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
Susan? What is it honey?

SUSAN  
I just wanted to talk to mom.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD  
She's had a real long day. She needs to rest.

SUSAN  
I live in the same house as my parents, but I never see either of them.  
(storming out)  
You give her too many pills.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE BALLROOM - EVENING**

Betty hovers in the doorway to observe the fundraising dance. Gerald waves to her from the middle of the dance floor.

She hobbles to a table using chair backs as support. She's obviously in pain as she levers herself down into a chair.

A man passes by --

MAN  
Mrs Ford, it's an honor to meet you.

BETTY  
Noo, the honoh izz all mine.

MAN  
I just wanted to say how much my wife and I loved you on The Mary Tyler Moore Show. You were a big hit in our house.

BETTY  
Whell, thanking you.

The man heads off, stoked that he spoke to her.

Betty surreptitiously slips a pill into her mouth and swallows it with some wine.

She sits and watches heartbroken as everyone else dances around her.

The chair next to her is empty, but she starts to talk to it --

BETTY  
I luurve to dance - isss the  
purest pleasure innnn eye life.

The band kicks in with *I Could Have Danced All Night*.

She watches Gerald dancing with a beautiful celebrity. She's clearly jealous. She floats into --

#### **A VIBRANT MEMORY --**

18-year-old Betty rushes down a corridor.

She bursts into a dance studio where a group of young women are warming up. A couple frown at her disapprovingly. Betty is relieved that Martha Graham's not here yet.

#### **LATER**

The dancers are executing a complicated and energetic routine. To the untrained observer they all seem perfect, but to Martha Graham's eagle eyes...

Martha claps her hands and the women all stop.  
Breathing heavily.

Martha stalks between them and pauses beside Betty. Examines her - close up, Betty is flushed and a little hungover.

MARTHA GRAHAM  
Heretic.

She claps her hands, the pianist strikes up and the women begin again. Betty trying extra hard under Martha's close gaze.

Then Martha turns and starts to dance with them. And Betty can breathe again.

#### **LATER**

Betty waves goodbye to some of the other dancers and heads out.

As she passes an office, Martha calls from inside --

MARTHA GRAHAM  
Betty?

Betty hesitantly enters. Martha stands - poised - staring out of the window.

MARTHA GRAHAM  
When we have no form, we lose the ability to be articulate. Training is here to give you that form. But part of the training of a dancer is to meet a situation with courage and complete honesty.

BETTY  
I'm not sure I understand.

MARTHA GRAHAM  
You were drinking last night and didn't sleep.

BETTY  
I...

MARTHA GRAHAM  
That wasn't a question.

BETTY  
I feel fine.

MARTHA GRAHAM  
Do you think I am able to do what I do because I feel merely fine?

BETTY  
... Then I feel good. Great. I can do both.

MARTHA GRAHAM  
No. You cannot... I do not want nuns and priests, Betty. But if you wish to dance, you must devote your life to it. If not, you must find something else that suits you better. It's for you to decide.

Martha turns to smile at her. Betty swallows hard.

**INT. WHITE HOUSE BALLROOM - EVENING**

Back to Betty watching her husband dancing with the beautiful celebrity. Betty emotional at the memory. As a tear starts to escape from the corner of her eye, she pushes herself out of her chair to leave, and clutches her back in intense pain...

The room spins around her and we are spun back into the --

**HAZY CAMPAIGN MONTAGE --**

Betty lies in bed all day, clearly in agony. Dr Lukash puts a pill in her mouth and helps her wash it down.

**AIR FORCE ONE**

Dr Lukash dispenses a handful of different color pills to Betty. And then suddenly she's in a

**TV STUDIO**

watching from the wings, mouthing the words as Gerald debates with JIMMY CARTER. She drinks to steady her nerves.

**OREGON UNIVERSITY CAFETERIA**

Demonstrators climb onto tables to yell at Betty --

**DEMONSTRATORS**

Abortion is murder! We stand for life, for God's life. Betty - you support murder! You liberal scum! Shame on you! Shame on you!

Betty's security detail rush her out.

**HOTEL ROOM**

Betty is knocked out on the bed, still in her clothes.

**MESA, ARIZONA**

Betty cuts a ribbon with 3-foot long scissors to open the reproduction of an adobe schoolhouse. She almost drops the scissors as someone guides her to a soapbox and helps her balance on it.

Betty looks around - the crowd and the reporters come in and out of focus. She tries to speak, but slurs her words --

**BETTY**

Thisss isss a lovely sschoool.

BETTY

Thank you. Hellllo everyone,  
thanksss for being here.

She realizes she ought to be reading her prepared words, and fumbles with her cue cards --

BETTY

From the very firssst settizens of  
thisss proud country...  
(loses her place)  
We need to translate our ideasss  
into relality.

She looks around, confused. Reaches out for Sheila, who helps her down --

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Thank you everyone!

Sheila helps Betty towards her car, the press swarming behind them and sits her down in the

#### **LIMOUSINE**

Betty is getting frustrated with her CB radio - she jabs at the dials. Sheila tries to help --

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Here, let me try?

Betty flaps her hands away.

BETTY

I'm not Betty Ford anymore, I'm  
back again being Mrs Gerald Ford,  
and I'm so trapped.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

Just a few more days.

Betty screws her eyes together --

#### **GRAND RAPIDS**

And now she's lurching towards the voting station, Gerald helping her along. He looks drained and exhausted too, trying to focus ahead, get through this crowd of locals who've turned out for them.

In the privacy of the booth, Betty scrabbles to get her vote through the slot. Her knees buckle and she clutches the box. She slowly turns and opens the curtains, winces as the press cameras flash.

An 18 foot-long mural of Gerald Ford's achievements is unveiled - Betty looks closely and finds herself in the mural, painted in shadow behind Gerald.

The crowd applaud deafeningly. Gerald sheds a few tears, and Betty hides behind him, exhausted and emotional.

**INT. SITTING HALL, EXECUTIVE RESIDENCE - NIGHT**

A bank of TVs, the volume is up on one --

NBC REPORTER (ON TV)  
We're going to take another look  
at our map. At present it's  
largely Democrat to the East and  
in the Deep South where even Texas  
has gone to Carter, and President  
Ford has held all the plains and  
mountain states.

The Ford children, partners and friends are having a party at one end of the room. At the other end, Gerald, Rumsfeld, various senators and advisors, are all looking quite glum.

WALTER CRONKITE (ON TV)  
It has just been announced that  
the Democrats have taken both  
Wisconsin and Hawaii. South  
Dakota, we don't know about yet.  
California and Oregon still  
undecided. But we can clearly see  
where each man's support lies.

Betty, Sheila, Nancy and Pearl Bailey are sat on the floor with a big bowl of punch on the go, chanting at the TV --

CHANTING  
Come on California! Come on Cali!

**INT. OVAL OFFICE - MORNING**

The Ford family are milling about. Gerald is at his desk, looking around at his office. He croaks --

GERALD  
I can't believe I lost to a  
peanut farmer.

JACK FORD  
He didn't win. Nixon lost.

BETTY

But you kids got a father back,  
and I got my husband back.

Susan bursts into tears.

GERALD

I can't read the concession  
speech, not with this voice.

He looks at Betty.

BETTY

No, Gerald. That's not my role.

GERALD

Betty, you're the only other  
person they'll accept it from.

BETTY

So, you lose but I have to be the  
one to stand and take your defeat?

GERALD

Betty!

Betty's family stare at her - shocked. Betty is caught out, but unwilling to apologize. She turns to leave.

BETTY

I need to get my hair done first.

**INT. PRESS BRIEFING ROOM - MIDDAY**

The Ford family step up onto the podium.

Betty closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. Then she starts to speak to the nation --

BETTY

It has been the greatest honor of  
my husband's life to have served  
his fellow Americans during two of  
the most difficult years in our  
history. The president urges all  
Americans to join him in giving  
our united support to President-  
elect Carter as he prepares to  
assume his new responsibilities...

While Betty is smiling her way through the speech, behind her Gerald is staring blankly into space and their children are blinking back tears.

**INT. EXECUTIVE RESIDENCE - DAY**

Betty and Nancy walk slowly through the residence towards the double door entrance. Betty slows, fiddling with her dress.

NANCY HOWE  
Is everything alright?

BETTY  
I just... This dress is all wrong.

NANCY HOWE  
It looks lovely to me.

BETTY  
It's terrible. I can't do it like  
this. Can you just cancel her?

NANCY HOWE  
I'm not sure I can.

But Betty's heading the other way.

**INT. PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE - AFTERNOON**

Betty is sitting surrounded by piles of clothes. She's looking lost and pretty spaced out. Gerald comes in.

GERALD  
Here you are. Why don't you leave  
this for Rex to sort out?

BETTY  
I just want to make sure it's all  
organized. It's such an upheaval.  
Another one. It's really unfair.

GERALD  
My dear, let's try and make it as  
easy and smooth as possible then?

BETTY  
I'm trying to! That's why I'm  
organizing!

GERALD  
Jimmy called me. You can't keep  
cancelling Rosalynn's tour.

BETTY  
But why does she need a tour? She  
doesn't belong here - it's still  
my home until we move out.

GERALD

Yes, it is. But... Well, I said  
tomorrow at 11am. Okay? Thank you,  
mother.

BETTY

Oh for goodness sake, the kids  
have all left home now, will you  
stop calling me mother!

**EXT. WHITE HOUSE STEPS - MORNING**

Betty very reluctantly stands beside Gerald as ROSALYNN and Jimmy Carter climb the steps towards them. They all shake hands and smile rigidly as David Kennerly takes their photos.

**INT. EXECUTIVE RESIDENCE - LATER**

A daunted Rosalynn follows Betty, who sweeps through the rooms.

BETTY

And out there is the Truman  
Balcony. We like to eat out there  
when it's sunny.

ROSALYNN CARTER

Did you bring your own help?

BETTY

No... But some have, in the past.

ROSALYNN CARTER

I might need to, for Amy's sake.

BETTY

I'm sure that's no problem.

Betty stops beside the two Greek goddess statues and a cheeky look washes over her...

BETTY

Do you have a cigarette in  
that handbag?

Rosalynn hands one to Betty, who inserts it into the goddess' fist.

The two women look at each other, and smile - and just like that the tension eases. They walk on, much more friendly now.

BETTY

I'm sure you will love it here, I have very much - once I discovered that I could make it my own.

David Kennerly snaps a photo of them.

**EXT. WHITE HOUSE STEPS - MIDDAY**

Betty waves Rosalynn off. She looks out over the Washington Monument, and the city beyond, then walks with David Kennerly back inside --

BETTY

Leaving Washington is going to be like leaving all our married life behind. Our children were born in this town, Jerry's twenty-eight years of working... Our home. It does feel as though it's all going down the drain.

(she pauses)

I've got an idea.

**CABINET ROOM**

Betty bounds in, excited. She clicks off her shoes and climbs up onto the long grand cabinet table.

She does a graceful little dance and ends up in a pose for David to snap the famous photograph of Betty Ford standing barefoot on the cabinet table, a huge defiant grin on her face.

**INT. THE FORD HOUSE, PALM SPRINGS - TWO WEEKS LATER**

Betty follows Gerald to the front door of their new home, where he hands his suitcase to his chauffeur. He turns to kiss his wife goodbye.

GERALD

You have my itinerary? Call me every night.

BETTY

If it'll help keep you away from the pretty girls.

GERALD

And keep active. Make sure you get out and see people.

Betty nods. She watches Gerald get into his car and waves until the vehicle disappears through the perfectly manicured golf course that is now their home.

She feels the heavy heat of Palm Springs roll over her.

She smiles at her SECURITY DETAIL - two men in sharp suits standing in the sun - then shuts the door.

She stands for a moment, appreciating the breeze from the overhead fan. She looks around at her large empty home with its modernist design and funky 70s decor.

BETTY

Well.

She goes to the sideboard and pours herself a drink.

LATER - she sits on the couch, a lot of empty space beside her. She takes out a jar of pills, rifles through them and picks out a blue one. Washes it back.

LATER - she's watching *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. She's crying.

LATER - she's asleep on the couch, the TV hissing fuzz in front of her.

ANOTHER DAY - she's blearily wandering around in her nightgown.

ANOTHER DAY - she seems to have lost weight. Three women are sitting in the living room with her, chatting away. Betty's just staring out into space.

ANOTHER DAY - in her nightgown again, searching through drawers for something. Gives up. Makes a drink instead.

ANOTHER DAY - Betty trips on some steps and just lies there staring at the carpet.

ANOTHER DAY - another visitor, chatting. Betty's eyes are drooping, and she falls asleep. The visitor sits there awkwardly for a while, then gets up to leave.

**INT. THE FORD HOUSE, PALM SPRINGS - DAY**

An extremely drunk Betty staggers over to answer the door. She eventually gets it open to reveal Sheila on the doorstep.

BETTY

I can't do a speech today, Sheila.

Betty stumbles into the living room, cannoning off furniture.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

No, Betty. I've come for a visit.  
Gerald called me. You haven't been  
answering your private line.

BETTY

I've been terribly busy.

Betty crawls onto the couch and passes out.

Sheila makes her comfortable and looks around. The house is  
chaos, the evidence of Betty's drinking everywhere.

Sheila sits beside Betty and gently strokes her hair.

**A FEW DAYS LATER**

Betty slowly makes her way through to the lounge. She looks the  
worst we've ever seen her. She opens the drinks cabinet and  
looks inside in confusion - it's empty.

The front door opens and Gerald comes in.

BETTY

Jerry, what have you done with...

A whole hoard of people traipse in after Gerald: Sheila, Nancy,  
all the Ford children and Dr Lukash.

Betty lights up as Mike and Gayle come over to embrace her --

BETTY

You've flown out to see me? What a  
lovely surprise!

Behind them, everyone efficiently moves chairs into a  
semicircle around the couch. A planned maneuver.

Betty looks back down at the drinks cabinet --

BETTY

I would offer you a drink, but...

Gerald hands her a glass of seltzer, then gently guides her to  
the couch.

She looks small and lost amongst all the cushions. Her husband  
sits beside her and puts his hand on hers.

GERALD

Betty, we've got something to talk  
to you about, and we want you to  
listen, because we love you.

Betty looks around at all the faces watching her - tense and serious... And then she realizes what's happening.

She flushes, angry and embarrassed. Can't bear to look at her family now. Shoots a glare at Sheila.

SHEILA WEIDENFELD

I am sorry, Betty. But we should have done this much sooner.

SUSAN

Mom, we're here because we love you. And we need to tell you about what's been happening over the years. Things you don't think we've noticed or seen.

**LATER**

Betty turns to Dr Lukash.

BETTY

I don't have a problem. You prescribed me the pills. I take them for my shoulder.

GERALD

It's not just the pills, Betty. There's the drink too.

Betty gets up and stomps through to the kitchen.

BETTY

None of you have any idea what you're talking about! You don't know what it's like to be me. To have to deal with all of you. It's work. It's hard, hard work.

Jack looks hurt and heads for the door.

JACK

This is awful.

SUSAN

Jack. You need to stay.

Betty now starts to plead.

BETTY

Have I not been a good mother?

Her children look at the floor.

BETTY

Have I not been a good mother to  
our children, Gerald?

GERALD

This isn't about that, Betty. Of  
course, you're a good mother.  
You're wonderful.

BETTY

(to her children)

I have this injury because of  
having you all! Because of the  
pressure I put on my body!

SUSAN

Mom, you hurt your shoulder  
opening a window.

BETTY

Because my body was so broken from  
giving birth to you!

Mike puts his head in his hands, crying. Betty looks at her  
family - confused.

BETTY

I did everything I could to work  
with you, Gerald. I worked myself  
into the ground for you. And this  
country. And what? You're telling  
me that because I enjoy a cocktail  
or two. The odd pill to relax me  
that I'm some monster?

SUSAN

Twenty-five.

BETTY

Twenty-five what?

SUSAN

Pills. A day, mom.

Betty is further confused. She looks to Lukash, who nods.  
Gerald goes to her and takes her hand.

GERALD

Betty. We, family and friends,  
have decided that you need help.  
You need to be somewhere they can  
help you. Professionally.

BETTY

No.

GERALD

It's the only way, Betty.

Betty sobs into Gerald's shoulder.

BETTY

Please no, Gerald. Please don't lock me up. I'm not mad. I'm just in pain.

Gerald starts to cry quietly as he rests his chin on her head.

GERALD

I know you're not mad, my love. We're doing this because we know how capable you are. Because this will make you so much clearer and healthier.

Betty's tactic hasn't worked. She pulls away from him - furious again.

BETTY

You're not family. I don't know you people.

She rushes to the front door - it's locked. She disappears into her bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

Susan comforts Gerald. Mike still cries as Gayle wraps her arms around him. The others talk and reassure each other quietly.

SUSAN

Dad? Are there any pills in the bedroom?

Gerald jumps up and rushes after Betty.

#### **BEDROOM**

Betty rests against her bedroom door for moment. She locks it and rummages through her dressing table.

Gerald hammers on the door --

GERALD (O.S)

Betty!

Betty finds two valium and pops them. She sweeps the other surfaces and drawers - nothing.

GERALD (O.S)  
Open the door, Betty!

Betty looks in the mirror. Calms herself. Fixes her hair.

**EXT. GARDEN, NAVAL HOSPITAL - EARLY MORNING**

**1978.** Betty is sitting on a bench admiring the militant rows of flowers.

NAVAL DOCTOR (O.S.)  
Muster!

Betty stands to start the day.

**THERAPY ROOM**

Betty is sitting opposite her therapist.

BETTY  
The problem is that I remember everything I said. And I said some unforgivable things to my children.

NAVAL THERAPIST  
The same children who didn't miss a single family therapy session.

BETTY  
That's true.

NAVAL THERAPIST  
This isn't best practice, but I think in this case, I can say it. I think you're going to be okay.

BETTY  
...I do too.

NAVAL THERAPIST  
And that's a frightening thought, isn't it?

She nods.

**LECTURE HALL**

Betty walks onto stage and collects her one-month sobriety medallion. She does a little tap dance and curtsies to the audience as they applaud her, Susan and Gerald amongst them.

**INT. CAR - DAY**

Betty looks out, enjoying the brilliant blue sky as they drive past Palm Springs through the Rancho Mirage desert.

BETTY

When are the children coming?

GERALD

Tomorrow. We thought you could do with a quiet night before the hordes descend.

BETTY

Pah! I want to see everyone.

GERALD

You need to rest, Betts.

BETTY

I need something to do, Gerald.

She glimpses a large plot of land for sale.

BETTY

Stop the car!

They pull up and Betty gets out. She stares at the dusty empty plot.

**1982 - FOUR YEARS LATER.**

Standing in the same spot, Betty is now staring at the completed *Betty Ford Center* - six white single-story buildings clustered around a central garden. The sun setting behind it.

Betty walks towards it. Through windows, she can see a couple of workers putting bath mats down, straightening paintings. And Gerald making his way down a corridor polishing the light switches with his shirt cuff.

Betty ducks under the red ribbon strung over the entrance.

**LECTURE HALL**

Betty stands in a large empty lecture hall. There is a small stage and a lectern.

GERALD (O.S.)  
Betty?

BETTY  
Just a minute.

She stands at the lectern - looks out at a sea of empty chairs.

The center is finally ready and the significance of it in Betty's journey shows on her face as she looks around.

**INT. LECTURE HALL, BETTY FORD CENTRE - DAY**

**TWO YEARS LATER.** Betty is at the same lectern, but she is now looking out at forty faces - some expectant, hopeful, bleary-eyed, resistant.

BETTY  
Hello everyone.

EVERYONE  
Hello.

BETTY  
I'm Betty Ford, and I'm an alcoholic. A recovering woman alcoholic, and I might say, very grateful.

She turns on a huge bright smile, which seems to lift the room.

BETTY  
I am here speaking to you as a representative of your future selves. I have come to tell you that there is great joy and freedom in being well and waking up each morning feeling good, and knowing that you have that wonderful day ahead.

She notices a familiar face in the audience - Mary Tyler Moore, looking quite disheveled eight years after their first meeting. Betty warmly locks eyes with her for a moment.

BETTY  
I am, and for long periods of my life have been, a working woman.

BETTY

I am a mother. I am a wife - a partner. And, for a while, I was all of those whilst being in one of the most public positions in the world. I'm sure like all of you, I had some very sick days. And some of our sick days are more public than others. I know you've all seen some of mine.

Seeing Betty give such a confident and eloquent speech is having a huge impact upon Mary.

BETTY

This meant that, luckily for me, I was unable to hide my addiction. It is through enormous privilege that I find myself here today. But I am not above you, or above my addiction, I am just further along in my process. We are all suffering from the same disease, and self-discovery can be a difficult painful process, but I want you all to know that I, and the other mentors here, are here to help and support you. You are not alone.

**INT. BETTY FORD CENTRE - DAY**

Betty walks towards her office. Just before she gets there, she peers into a therapy room marked: *Sober Living Guidance*.

She quietly enters the room. The small group who are sitting in a circle turn to stare.

BETTY

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt.

THERAPIST

Are you joining the session?

BETTY

... Yes.

She pulls a chair up to the circle. The therapist continues. Betty sits attentively and listens.

**INT. THE FORD HOUSE, PALM SPRINGS - MORNING**

Betty is drinking a coffee at a window seat when the phone rings. She answers it --

BETTY  
Hello?

ASSISTANT (ON PHONE)  
Mrs Ford, you wanted me to keep  
you updated on Mary Tyler Moore?

BETTY  
Is everything okay?

ASSISTANT (ON PHONE)  
Well, not exactly. She left last  
night. She phoned in this morning  
and seems to be okay. It was an  
argument - quite a heated one by  
all accounts - with one of the  
councillors.

BETTY  
And where is she now?

ASSISTANT (ON PHONE)  
In a hotel nearby.

**INT. HOTEL / BETTY'S HOME OFFICE - MORNING**

Mary Tyler Moore is scrunched beside the bed looking through her clinic journal. The phone rings. She ignores it for a bit, then picks it up.

MARY TYLER MOORE  
Hello?

BETTY  
Hello Mary? This is Betty Ford.

Mary gapes... then pulls herself together.

MARY TYLER MOORE  
Hi Betty, this is Mary - Queen  
of Scots.

Betty laughs, relieved.

BETTY  
What have you been up to?

MARY TYLER MOORE  
I haven't had a drink!

BETTY  
It's okay, I know.

MARY TYLER MOORE  
I did eat a cheeseburger  
last night.

BETTY  
And how was it?

MARY TYLER MOORE  
It never tasted so good.

BETTY  
Why do you think that is?

MARY TYLER MOORE  
Because I broke free.

BETTY  
I don't think you have  
yet, though.  
(silence at the other end)  
Do you?

**INT. BETTY FORD CENTER - DAY**

Betty watches the receptionist sign Mary back in.

**GARDENS**

Betty and Mary wander through the center's desert gardens.

MARY TYLER MOORE  
You make this look so easy, so  
natural. It feels like you've  
found your calling. I envy you  
that. I don't think I ever really  
found anything I felt at home  
doing.

BETTY  
You've always been so graceful  
on screen.

MARY TYLER MOORE  
But it's always taken me a drink  
to get to look like that.

MARY TYLER MOORE

And the drinking gave me a hand tremor, so I took Valium to reduce that, and that quickly went from ten milligrams to fifty...

BETTY

I remember when I was very young, there was an enormous storm and my mother took me in her arms on the front porch and told me how beautiful storms are, and how exciting the sound of rain can be. And to this day, I love to watch storms. I'll go out of my way to watch them, and I love the sound of rain falling on the roof.

(she laughs)

My mother confessed much later that storms scared her to death.

MARY TYLER MOORE

That photograph of you on the White House cabinet table. That had a huge impact on me. Your defiance.

BETTY

This will sound like a cliche, but I truly believe that if you want to get all the air out of a glass, what do you do? There's no way to do it but fill it with something else. And that something else is joy of living, dancing, being creative. Find your joy and focus on that.

MARY

... Well, it sure is pretty here.

BETTY

I like nice views.

MARY

Like Capitol Hill?... Do you miss it?

BETTY

I miss the... parties.

(they both laugh)

You want the truth?

MARY

Always.

BETTY

The memories are all so... patchy.  
Jumbled with pills and booze. I'm  
scared I don't remember the right  
narrative.

MARY TYLER MOORE

You know, I think most women still  
feel that being a female alcoholic  
is a sloppy disgrace, the lowest  
of the low, and an intelligent,  
well-read, dignified woman can't  
possibly be a drunk. But here you  
are - creating a new narrative.  
And filling in your blanks.

Betty looks at her - realizing she's right.

Betty stands and closes her eyes as the sun warms her face. She gently starts moving her right foot in a tap rhythm.

She raises an eyebrow at Mary...

MARY TYLER MOORE

No.

Betty smiles cheekily and begins a slow tap routine. Mary still resists - shaking her head. Betty continues to dance.

Mary sighs - a true show woman, she can't resist any longer. She stands next to Betty and joins in the routine.

The two women dance quietly in unison.

A group of people gather at the door of the main building to watch.

**INT. HARPER AND ROW PUBLISHING HOUSE - DAY**

Betty sits opposite her BOOK EDITOR.

BETTY

I need to write another book.

EDITOR

About the presidency?

BETTY

No. About being drunk.

**INT. BETTY'S OFFICE - DAY**

Betty kicks off her shoes and pours herself a seltzer.

She sits at her desk and stares at a pad of paper in front of her. She taps a pen against it for a moment and then writes at the top of the page - *A Glad Awakening*.

She puts the pen down, leans back in her chair and closes her eyes.

**A VIBRANT MEMORY --**

A young Betty dances in *CHRONICLE*. Martha Graham leads the troupe - their costumes and set starkly monochrome.

The dance is rigorous and ecstatic. Betty and the others leap, swirl, lunge. Betty's heart pounds. Her face pours with sweat.

As the troupe reach and hold their final poses, there is a pause before the audience burst into rapturous applause.

Betty takes her bow amongst the troupe, adoring the attention.

The women run off stage, where there's a whirlwind of kisses and congratulations. Betty stands amidst it all, thrilled. One of the crew hands her a glass of champagne.

From the wings, Betty watches with great admiration as Martha performs a mesmerizing solo dance.

Martha strikes an extraordinary final pose - her body and face rigid with strength and tension.

Betty downs her glass of champagne. She drags her suitcase from under a bench, pulls on her coat and, as applause rises from the auditorium, slips out of a side door.

As the door closes behind her, Betty takes a deep breath and steps away.

*I think I was born to be outspoken.  
Hopefully it's been of benefit to others.*

Betty Ford 1918-2011

*The End.*