

The Apple

Nineteen sixty-three and sixty-four were big years. The Four Tops had their first Motown hit, while the Temptations and the Supremes finally broke through. Berry Gordy was riding high. It didn't look like anything could bring him down until he got the news that shook him to his core: Mary Wells, his first superstar, was leaving. Mary had turned twenty-one and her lawyer argued that the contracts she had signed as a minor were invalid. It was her manager and former husband, Herman Griffin, who was moving her from Motown to 20th Century Fox Records. All this had a huge impact on me because Griffin was in business with Robert West, my manager. The Griffin-West combination, with Mary Wells in their camp, was a sure winner. They were already planning a tour and promising me lots of big gigs.

After my second single flopped, I needed encouragement. By then, Bart Hollowell and I were living together on Trowbridge.

The Teacher

When Mama saw me walk through the door of our home on Trowbridge, she collapsed. She thought she had seen a ghost.

“Betty Jo,” she finally found the strength to say, “you look like death warmed over.”

I was a raggedy mess. I had these thin little pants, a cheap cotton blouse, and a pair of worn-out slippers. My hair was disheveled. At one point I must have had fifty wigs. Now I had none. I knew I needed help.

They say when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. Well, that certainly was the case with me. But given my headstrong personality, I didn’t think I was ready to learn. No matter how badly New York had beaten me up, I came home with my know-it-all attitude undiminished. Fortunately, the teacher knew how to handle me. He was as hardheaded as I was. He taught me