

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN



Amanda Peet and
Christian Slater

Betty Broderick exacts marital fury in second 'Dirty John' series

As the adage says, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned ... and Betty Broderick is a textbook example.

Played by Meredith Baxter in two early-1990s TV-movies, Broderick famously wrought vengeance on her San Diego-lawyer husband Dan after he left her for another woman. What initially seemed like immature vandalism eventually became something much more lethal, and the true story gets a new and very detailed dramatization over the eight episodes of the second season of "Dirty John," which USA Network debuts Tuesday, June 2 (after the first, podcast-inspired "Dirty John" series ran on Bravo).

Amanda Peet ("Brockmire," "Togetherness") and Tiera Skovbye ("Riverdale") portray Betty at different ages, as she supports Dan (Christian Slater, returning to USA after his "Mr. Robot" run) through his medical and legal schooling and the starts of their family and his career. The union disintegrates rather rapidly once he meets Linda Kolkena (Rachel Keller, "Legion"), prompting Betty to strike back – a situation that ultimately results in a double homicide.

Playing Broderick as alternately high-spirited and desperate, and sometimes both at once, Peet says that the project gives "a very complex psychological portrait that allows for the idea that there probably was mental illness, but also that there were incidents in the marriage and the legal system made it very difficult for her to remain healthy."

The Betty Broderick-themed season of "Dirty John" boasts an all-female team of directors, including its writer and executive producer, Alexandra Cunningham. Peet admits that she didn't know much about Broderick before reading Cunningham's teleplay, "and I think that was probably a good thing. It seemed to me to just be an intimate portrait of someone who, after so many years of suffering, sort of snapped."

Depicting that required Peet and Slater to be very much in sync, with the series' timeline going back and forth continually. "I just can't rave about him enough," she says. "Besides being a brilliant actor, he's a class act as a human being, really fun and so considerate. I can't believe he's been a star for this long and is so thoughtful and kind ... no offense to anyone else!"

After writing two stage plays, Peet currently is working with her writer-producer husband David Benioff ("Game of Thrones") on Netflix's forthcoming, Sandra Oh-starring university comedy-drama "The Chair." Peet co-created it and is doing the bulk of its scripts, but she's still grateful to land acting parts including Betty Broderick (who has been denied parole three times, and is next eligible in 2032).

"To have a role like this at age 48 is a gift and an honor," Peet reflects. "And the fact that Alexandra picked me for it still blows my mind."

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