

ACT I

SETTING: *The downtown portion of Main Street in Danville, KY. August, 1956.*

AT RISE: *It is a hot summer day. A crowd of people line the street to watch a parade in progress, a parade that is only heard, not seen. Included among the spectators are eighteen-year-old NELL HARPER, her younger sister PATTYCAKE, Nell's boyfriend TEDDY KING, the Harper's next-door neighbor MYRA SIMPSON and Myra's mother TRUDY who is sitting in a wheelchair, the victim of a recent stroke. We hear the music from a high school marching band playing. The crowd waves and claps. NELL stands on her toes, straining to see down the parade route.*

NELL

Do you see them, Teddy?

TEDDY

Not yet...

NELL

(Impatiently)

Where *are* they...?!

PATTYCAKE

(Watching the band)

Katherine Wofford looks *fat* in that band uniform.

NELL

Hush up, PattyCake!

PATTYCAKE

And look at her trying to play that flute! I bet *I* could play the flute better than that. Look, Nell...

(PATTYCAKE plays an imaginary flute. NELL ignores her.)

Nell – look!

(She continues to play the imaginary flute. NELL pulls PATTYCAKE's arm down, embarrassed.)

NELL

Stop that, Pattycake. You look ridiculous.

(BIRDIE CALDWELL enters. She spies MYRA and TRUDY.)

BIRDIE

Myra? Yoo-hoo! Myra!

(She crosses to MYRA.)

Myra Simpson! I didn't expect to see *you* at a parade. And look! You brought your *adorable* mother with you!

(She leans in close to TRUDY and shouts the following.)

HELLO, MISS TRUDY! HOW ARE YOU TODAY?!

MYRA

She's not deaf, Birdie.

BIRDIE

I thought she had a stroke.

MYRA

She did but she's not deaf. She just has trouble speaking.

BIRDIE

What's the difference...?

(She looks over the parade.)

Oh, Myra, isn't it exciting? Imagine... Elizabeth Taylor, Montgomery Clift and Eva Marie Saint filming a movie right here in our little town! They say *Raintree County* is going to be an even bigger hit than *Gone With the Wind*! I mean – can you *imagine*...?

MYRA

Frankly... no.

BIRDIE

And you *know* every man in town is going to fall head-over-heels for Elizabeth Taylor. Why, it's simply *inevitable*! She's absolutely *gorgeous*!

(She scans the crowd.)

BIRDIE (cont.)

I wonder which man she'll pick...

MYRA

"Pick?"

BIRDIE

You know what I mean.

MYRA

Birdie Caldwell! Elizabeth Taylor is a *married* woman!

BIRDIE

Don't be naïve, Myra. All the gossip magazines say Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher are on the brink of divorce. It's just a matter of time...

(More parade music. More clapping and cheering. NELL continues to peer down the parade route.)

NELL

Are they coming...? Teddy...?

TEDDY

(On tiptoe)
Still don't see them...

(PATTYCAKE points across the street.)

PATTYCAKE

Look! There's Paula Hill!

(She starts waving frantically.)

Paula! Hey, Paula! It's me! PattyCake!

(NELL grabs Pattycake's arm and pulls it down.)

NELL

PattyCake, you're sixteen years old now. Try to behave with a little dignity, okay?

(Suddenly TEDDY points down the parade route.)

TEDDY

There she is! Elizabeth Taylor! I see Elizabeth Taylor!

NELL

(Straining to see)

Where? Where?! *OHMYGOSH!* There she is!

(She starts to wave frantically.)

Miss Taylor! Miss Taylor! Woo-hoo!!

(The crowd noise crescendos to a ROAR! Everyone is waving and cheering. Suddenly we see TRUDY shout something but because of the crowd noise we can't hear it. MYRA looks at her, surprised. TRUDY shouts the same thing again. MYRA, realizing what her mother has said and shocked by it, hastily wheels TRUDY away from the parade. After a moment BIRDIE notices that MYRA has left and looks for her in the crowd. As the lights and sounds of the parade fade the scene shifts to another street in Danville, a quiet neighborhood street on which we see three houses, each with a front porch. The house stage right belongs to ROY and CHARLIE KNOBB, the house center stage belongs to TOM and MARGARET HARPER and the house stage left belongs to MYRA and TRUDY SIMPSON. ROY and CHARLIE are seated on their front porch engaged in a fierce game of checkers. ROY takes his checker and jumps over two of Charlie's. Before ROY can remove his victims, CHARLIE stays his hand.

CHARLIE

Hold on, now. You can't do that.

ROY

What do you mean? Sure I can.

CHARLIE

No, you can't. That was an illegal move.

ROY

The heck it was!

CHARLIE

You jumped backwards.

ROY

I did not!

CHARLIE

You jumped backwards and you ain't allowed to jump backwards until you've been kinged. That there's the rule.

ROY

I know what the rules are, Charlie. You don't gotta tell me the rules!

CHARLIE

Well if you know the rules, Roy, how come you ain't followin' 'em?

ROY

I *am* followin' 'em and if you weren't blind as a bat you'd know it!

CHARLIE

Are you makin' fun of my cataract again?

ROY

No, I ain't makin' fun of your...

CHARLIE

It ain't my fault I got a cataract, Roy!

ROY

Well, I know that...

(TUG ERSKINE, a forty-something mailman, enters from stage right carrying his mailbag. At the same time, MARGARET enters her porch from her front door. She is carrying a small rug which she hangs over the porch wall and shakes.)

CHARLIE

You heard what the doctor said, same as me. He said that cataracts come with age and we both know I'm older than you!

ROY

Charlie...

CHARLIE

But I ain't *that* much older so you best watch it. You just might wind up with a cataract yourself in a coupla years and see how many folks'll play checkers with you then!

(MYRA enters from stage right, pushing TRUDY in her wheelchair. She almost runs over TUG in her haste.)

TUG

Whoa, there!

MYRA

Oh! I beg your pardon, Mr. Erskine.

(MYRA wheels TRUDY past the Harper house.)

MARGARET

Hey, Myra. Hello, Miss Trudy.

MYRA

Margaret.

MARGARET

How was the parade?

(MYRA ignores her and hastily wheels TRUDY up the ramp and onto the Simpson porch.)

Myra...?

(MYRA wheels TRUDY into the house. MARGARET shrugs and exits into her house. TUG crosses up onto the KNOBB porch.)

TUG

Hey there, boys. Who's winning today?

CHARLIE

I'd be winnin' hands down if my brother here weren't so set on cheatin' me!

ROY

Dagnabit, Charlie! I ain't cheatin'!

CHARLIE

Tryin to take advantage of a blind man. You ought to be ashamed!

ROY

Tell him, Tug. Tell him I ain't cheatin'!

CHARLIE

You can't move backwards 'til you're kinged!

ROY

I didn't move backwards! See here, Tug, this is what I done.

(ROY repositions his checker. MARGARET enters her porch carrying a bowl of green beans. She takes a seat and begins snapping them.)

See, I had my man here. Then I jumped twice...

(ROY jumps two of CHARLIE's checkers.)

Just like that. Now is that cheatin'?

TUG

Looks like a clean move to me.

ROY

(To CHARLIE)

See? Tug here says it's a clean move.

CHARLIE

(To TUG)

He didn't move backwards any, did he, Tug?

TUG

Not yet. But keep an eye on him. He's sneaky.

CHARLIE

Don't I know it!

ROY

Aw, go on now!

(TUG laughs and hands ROY the mail. As ROY sorts through it CHARLIE suddenly jumps three of Roy's checkers.)

CHARLIE

Ah-ha!

ROY

What the...? You can't do that!

CHARLIE

The heck I can't!

ROY

That's an illegal move...

(As the two men continue arguing, TUG laughs and leaves their porch. He crosses onto the Harper porch and hands MARGARET the mail.)

TUG

Hey, Margaret.

MARGARET

Tug.

TUG

How come you're not down at the parade? Today's the big day.

MARGARET

Big day, my foot.

TUG

C'mon now! It's not every day famous movie stars come to town. It's only natural that folks are excited about it,

MARGARET

They're lining the street like it's the Fourth of July.

TUG

So?

MARGARET

Well, goodness Tug! They're *only* movie stars. I could understand it if President Eisenhower was coming...

TUG

Eisenhower? Gracious, Margaret! I'd much rather watch Liz Taylor ride by in a convertible than Ol' Ike.

MARGARET

That's because you're a Democrat.

TUG

It's because I'm a *man*.

MARGARET

I'll never understand all the fuss over Elizabeth Taylor.

TUG

That's because you're *not* a man. Why, I wouldn't be surprised if Tom tried to sneak a peek at Ol' Violet Eyes today.

MARGARET

My husband has better things to do today than stand on the street and gawk at Elizabeth Taylor.

TUG

Like what?

MARGARET

Like... no, I better not say. I don't want to jinx it. Lemonade?

TUG

Oh no you don't, Margaret Harper – you're not getting off the hook that easy. What gives?

MARGARET

Tom doesn't want me talking about it.

TUG

Oh, he doesn't care if you talk to *me*. Tom and I have been best friends since high school. So... is it good news?

MARGARET

Maybe.

TUG

C'mon lady – spill it!

MARGARET

He's up for a promotion.

TUG

Really?

MARGARET

He's meeting with Mr. Logan today.

TUG

Wow. Huh.

MARGARET

What?

TUG

Nothing.

MARGARET

You sound surprised.

TUG

No, no... well, yeah – I guess I am. Tom never struck me as an ambitious kind of guy.

MARGARET

What's that supposed to mean?

TUG

Nothing bad! Look, one of the things I admire most about Tom is how happy he is – how *content*. That guy's got the world by the tail – beautiful wife and family, nice home, good job. I've never known him to want more, that's all. But hey – if he wants it, he should get it. He's a hard worker, and one of the best guys I know.

MARGARET

I couldn't agree more.

TUG

And I won't say a word until he brings it up.

MARGARET

Thank you.

TUG

You're welcome. Now... does that offer of lemonade still stand?

(MARGARET laughs and stands up.)

MARGARET

Here. Make yourself useful.

*(She hands him the bowl of green beans. She exits into the house.
TUG takes a seat in a chair and starts snapping beans, eating a few
in the process. Back on the Knobb porch...)*