

# THE DRAFT BOARD

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Geff Moyer

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## **THE DRAFT BOARD**

**By Geff Moyer**

**SYNOPSIS:** The time is March 24th, 1958, and two young, naïve Tennessee farm girls have fibbed to their parents about spending the night with each other in order to camp out in a park across the street from the Memphis draft board on the morning Elvis is being inducted into the Army. Suffering the unusual smells of the big city, not bringing enough food, and being illegally camped out in a public park in a "not so nice section of town," creates an anxiety neither of these girls have ever experienced. While they await the arrival of their teen idol, they discover things about each other that not only surprise them, but could also alter their lifelong friendship.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(2 WOMEN)*

BETSY RAYE (f) ..... A farm girl, age 14-16.

PENNY (f) ..... A farm girl, age 14-16.

### **SETTING**

A park across the street from the Draft Board in Memphis, Tennessee.

**TIME:** Dawn, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1958

### **PROPS**

- ☐ 2 sleeping bags
- ☐ Thermos
- ☐ Box of Corn Pops
- ☐ Camera (appropriate era)
- ☐ Binoculars

**AT RISE:**

*Dawn. Birds chirping. Sun rising. The TWO GIRLS are in sleeping bags at the foot of a park bench.*

**BETSY RAYE:** *(Stirs, then suddenly sits up.)* Oh my god! Penny! Penny, wake up. It's dawn. Wake up! *(SHE slips on a sweatshirt and tennis shoes.)*

**PENNY:** *(Slowly stirring.)* Huh?

**BETSY RAYE:** It's dawn! If we missed him I'll kill myself.

**PENNY:** What time is it?

**BETSY RAYE:** Dawn! It's gettin' light. *(Shaking PENNY.)* Git up!

**PENNY:** Okay, okay. Jeez! Where're my glasses? Where're my glasses?

**BETSY RAYE:** You put 'em in yer shoe last night.

**PENNY:** *(Gets glasses.)* Oh yeah.

**BETSY RAYE:** *(Looking through binoculars.)* It don't look like it's open yet.

**PENNY:** *(Lays back down.)* So we can sleep a little longer.

**BETSY RAYE:** *(Yanks PENNY's hair.)* Git up!

**PENNY:** OW! Okay, okay. Gimme some orange juice.

**BETSY RAYE:** *(Without looking from her binoculars SHE hands PENNY a thermos.)* I don't see any lights on in there yet.

**PENNY:** *(Drinks.)* Ooh, that's so good. I feel like I could spit cotton.

**BETSY RAYE:** It's the city air. Full of dust and crap. We been breathin' it in all night.

**PENNY:** Hope it don't make us sick.

**BETSY RAYE:** It's worth it!

**PENNY:** But what if we catch TB? Or black lung disease?

**BETSY RAYE:** We're not in a coal mine, Penny!

**PENNY:** Prob'ly both go home with lung cancer, gaggin' and coughin' up blood, our hair fallin' out and...

**BETSY RAYE:** Stop exaggerating! You're always exaggerating!

**PENNY:** I am not!

**BETSY RAYE:** You are too! 'Member when you had that ache in your foot? You thought you caught polio, and it was an ingrown toenail.

**PENNY:** It hurt.

**BETSY RAYE:** Make sure yer camera's ready.

**PENNY:** *(Looking around.)* My camera! My camera! I can't find...

**BETSY RAYE:** It's in yer other shoe.

**PENNY:** Oh. Yeah.

**BETSY RAYE:** How many shots we got left?

**PENNY:** (*Squints at camera.*) Eight. I think.

**BETSY RAYE:** You think!?

**PENNY:** The number's so little...

**BETSY RAYE:** Lemme see!. (*Looks at camera.*) Nine. (*Returns camera to PENNY and goes back to watching building with binoculars.*) That gives us three in the car, three gettin' out of the car, three goin' into the building.

**PENNY:** Do we have anything left to eat?

**BETSY RAYE:** (*Hands PENNY a box.*) Corn Pops.

**PENNY:** Any jerky?

**BETSY RAYE:** We ate it all last night.

**PENNY:** (*SHE begins eating Corn Pops from the box, hesitates, sniffs the box, then the air.*) What's that smell?

**BETSY RAYE:** (*Sniffs.*) Some kind of factory, I guess.

**PENNY:** Smells like dead possums.

**BETSY RAYE:** Welcome to the big city.

**PENNY:** You think it smells like this every day?

**BETSY RAYE:** Prob'ly. Hey, hey!

**PENNY:** What!?

**BETSY RAYE:** A big tall Army fella is openin' the place up.

**PENNY:** I didn't think the Army ever closed.

**BETSY RAYE:** Shouldn't be long now.

**PENNY:** How do you know how long it's gonna be!? Nobody knows what time he's supposed to be here. It might not be until late this afternoon. We could be waitin' here all day.

**BETSY RAYE:** It's worth it.

**PENNY:** Our bus leaves at 2:45. If we miss it, we are dead!

**BETSY RAYE:** We won't miss it! Besides, my daddy said when he had to go into the Army, they made him show up at five-forty-five in the morning. Uncle Jackson had to be there at six-fifteen, and my cousin Garry at six-fifty.

**PENNY:** Don't the Army ever do anything ON the hour?

**SFX:** *Car driving up. Pointing, jumping up.*

**PENNY:** Oh my gracious! Looky there! Looky there! A yellow cab. I ain't never seen a real live yellow cab, 'cept in the movie pictures.

**BETSY RAYE:** Calm down! Yer actin' like a hick!

**PENNY:** (*Chuckles.*) 'Cause I am! So are you!

**BETSY RAYE:** I do not consider myself a hick. And you, Penny Irene Gibson, should not consider yo'self a hick teether. (Chuckles.) Even though your initials do spell "P-I-G!"

**PENNY:** You got no room to talk, Betsy Raye Aberdeen! B-R-A! 'Specially since you only bin wearin' one for a year.

**BETSY RAYE:** Two years!

**PENNY:** First year don't count! It was a trainer!

**BETSY RAYE:** Does too!

**PENNY:** I don't count my trainer year!

**BETSY RAYE:** Well, that's yer choice! I count mine!

*Pause.*

**PENNY:** Ya know, it looks like it could rain.

**BETSY RAYE:** God won't let it rain today.

**PENNY:** Well, if he does we could catch pneumonia.

**BETSY RAYE:** You ever been caught out in a rainstorm, Penny?

**PENNY:** Yeah.

**BETSY RAYE:** How many times?

**PENNY:** I don't know. Lots, I guess.

**BETSY RAYE:** You ever catch pneumonia?

**PENNY:** No.

**BETSY RAYE:** Just like you never had polio!

*A pause.*

**PENNY:** Ya sure we got the right day?

**BETSY RAYE:** The paper said today, March 24<sup>th</sup>!

*Pause.*

**PENNY:** Ya sure we got the right place?

**BETSY RAYE:** The Memphis Draft Board! There ain't no other Memphis Draft Board. What is wrong with you? (Beat.) Talk to me, Penny. You been actin' all funny ever since we got off the Greyhound.

**PENNY:** It's just that...

**BETSY RAYE:** What?

**PENNY:** Well, I... I... well... ifin I tell ya, you'll just git mad.

**BETSY RAYE:** I promise I won't.

**PENNY:** Ya promise?

**BETSY RAYE:** I jist said I did, didn't I?

**PENNY:** (*A moment.*) I like Ricky Nelson better than Elvis. There! I've said it. It's out in the open. (*Pause.*) Why are ya lookin' at me like that?

**BETSY RAYE:** I am flabbergasted! How could you tell me that!? Today! When's he's leaving me for two whole years.

**PENNY:** You promised to not git mad!

**BETSY RAYE:** *HE'S LEAVING ME!!*

**PENNY:** It ain't like he's going to the moon.

**BETSY RAYE:** He's going to Germany. Might as well be the moon. You watch! He'll fall in love with some pig-tailed, big-boobed, yodelin' Heidi girl and never come back. I'll have lost him forever. And now you go and tell me you like Ricky Nelson better! That's just pain on top of pain, Penny!

**PENNY:** I'm sorry. It just... just happened. I didn't plan it, Betsy Raye. I didn't just wake up one mornin' and say, "I love Ricky Nelson."

**BETSY RAYE:** Then how come this Benedict Arnold act?

**PENNY:** *Lonesome Town.*

**BETSY RAYE:** What!?

**PENNY:** When I first heard Ricky sing *Lonesome Town*, I bawled my eyes out, Betsy Raye. I couldn't help it. I felt every word he sang. Like you did with *Teddy Bear*.

**BETSY RAYE:** You liked *Teddy Bear*!

**PENNY:** I know!

**BETSY RAYE:** Yer bed's covered in 'em!

**PENNY:** Not anymore. I gave 'em to LoraJean.

**BETSY RAYE:** *AARRGH!* Pain on top of pain on top of pain! Why didn't you give 'em to me?

**PENNY:** I was gonna, then Momma said ask yer sisters first if they want 'em.

**BETSY RAYE:** And of course, LoraJean said yes. The only reason she took 'em was so I couldn't. You didn't tell her what we're doin', did ya? She'd tell our folks quicker than poop through a goose.

**PENNY:** Maybe not. All of a sudden she's a big Elvis fan, ever since I told her about Ricky.

**BETSY RAYE:** You told LoraJean about Ricky before you told me?

**PENNY:** Well, she wanted to know why I didn't want my teddy bears no more.

**BETSY RAYE:** You should've lied to her! Told her... told her teddy bears are for kids.

**PENNY:** If they're for kids, why would you want them?

**BETSY RAYE:** I was speaking hypodermically, Penny. You could've told her anything, something – they were contaminated with polio – anything to keep her from snatchin' 'em up! The one time when you do need to exaggerate, you don't! And all because of Ricky Nelson's stupid *Lonesome Town*!

**PENNY:** Have you ever listened to *Lonesome Town*, Betsy Raye? I mean really listened to it? "You can buy a dream or two, to last you all through the years... and the only price you pay... is a heart full of tears." It ripped my heart out, Betsy Raye. Ripped it right outta my chest.

**BETSY RAYE:** But he's so... so scrawny lookin'!

**PENNY:** Ricky Nelson is not scrawny!

**BETSY RAYE:** You've seen him on that *Ozzie & Harriet Show*. He looks scrawny. And they say the TV camera puts ten pounds on ya, so he must be really scrawny.

**PENNY:** You ain't never heard me say one nasty thing 'bout Elvis!

**BETSY RAYE:** You just said you preferred Ricky over him.

**PENNY:** That ain't nasty, that's preference. I could say nasty things about Elvis, but I chose not to because I know how much you care for him. But obviously, my friendship is stronger for you than yers is for me or you would not have said that Ricky is scrawny. (*A long silence.*) Harriet is prettier than Elvis's momma.

**BETSY RAYE:** They make her up for TV. She's probably as homely as an old sow!

*A pause.*

**PENNY:** Elvis' momma weighs three-hundred pounds.

**BETSY RAYE:** She has a glandular problem.

**PENNY:** She has a mashed potato problem!

**BETSY RAYE:** It ain't nice to poke fun at folk's ailments!

**PENNY:** Elvis' daddy looks like a used car salesman.

**BETSY RAYE:** Well, maybe he was. Their whole family were nothing but poor dirt farmers before Elvis made it big. Scrawny Ricky Nelson had it made with his rich TV family. He was born with a silver spoon up his butt.

*A moment.*

**PENNY:** It's "in his mouth."

**BETSY RAYE:** What?

**PENNY:** It's yer born with a silver spoon in yer mouth – not up yer butt.

**BETSY RAYE:** Oh.

*Pause. THEY both laugh.*

**BETSY RAYE:** I guess Ricky is kinda cute. In a scrawny way. But if you've made this big change, why'd you agree to come here with me?

**PENNY:** You're my best friend. I ain't gonna let you be in the big city all by yerself. Ya might get kidnapped or something. Like that Limburger baby. Besides, our folks think we spent the night with each other. If they find out, I'll be grounded 'til I'm thirty.

**BETSY RAYE:** They won't start looking for us until late afternoon. We'll be home by then.

**PENNY:** We better be! My daddy ain't drug me into woodshed for years, but he sure would if he knew about this. Plus, my daddy hates Elvis. He says he's just a black boy inside a white boy's body.

**BETSY RAYE:** My daddy said he'd like to take target practice at his wigglin' hips.

**PENNY:** Yer daddy likes to take target practice at everythin'! Just ask Willie Simmons.

**BETSY RAYE:** It was only birdshot. Besides, the little creep was tryin' to peek in my bedroom window.

**PENNY:** He was sittin' on a pillow at school for two days.

**BETSY RAYE:** Served him right, the little pervert... and his momma bein' a big haired Baptist!

**PENNY:** He likes you.

**BETSY RAYE:** I'd rather date a goat.

**PENNY:** That may be all you can date, 'cause now every boy in school's too scared to come near your house, 'fraid yer daddy's gonna shoot 'em.

**BETSY RAYE:** Well... I don't care... my heart belongs to Elvis anyway. Just like yers belongs to scrawny Ricky Nelson. You just wait 'til they draft Ricky. You'll be bawlin' yer eyes out.

**PENNY:** Well, it's a good thing there ain't no war goin' on, 'cause Elvis would make a bigger target than "scrawny" Ricky.

**BETSY RAYE:** You sayin' my Elvis is fat?

**PENNY:** He's heavier than my Ricky!

**BETSY RAYE:** A cornstalk is heavier than yer Ricky!

**PENNY:** And when yer Elvis gets to be his Momma's age, he'll be as fat as she is!

**BETSY RAYE:** You take that back!

**PENNY:** Can't take back the truth!

**BETSY RAYE:** PENNY IRENE GIBSON, I WISH YOU'D HAVE STAYED HOME!

**PENNY:** BETSY RAYE ABERDEEN, SO DO !!!

*A long pause.*

**BETSY RAYE:** I didn't mean that.

**PENNY:** Neither did I.

*Pause.*

**PENNY:** *(Sniffing.)* Ya know when ya find a dead cow out in the pasture and it's bin dead abuncha days?

**BETSY RAYE:** Yeah.

**PENNY:** It's all stiff with its hide all rottin' away...

**BETSY RAYE:** Yeah...

**PENNY:** Maggots in its eyeballs, flies buzzin' all...

**BETSY RAYE:** I git the picture, Penny!

**PENNY:** That's what it smells like here. Kinda makes you wonder if all big cities stink.

**BETSY RAYE:** New York don't! It smells like apple blossoms. To cover all the factory smells, the car exhaust and all, they went and planted thousands of apple trees. That's why they call it the Big Apple! The whole city smells like... like one of yer momma's apple pies.

*A pause, then BOTH grab a handful of Corn Pops.*

**PENNY:** Wish we had some more jerky.

**BETSY RAYE:** Took as much as I dared from the smokehouse. Daddy's been keepin' a close eye on it since Denny stole that batch.

**PENNY:** Did he get his hide tanned?

**BETSY RAYE:** Not even a peck on the cheek. He jist had to give daddy the money he got from sellin' it. If that'd been me... dead meat! Denny graduates this year, and he and Callie will prob'ly git hitched and pop out a kid. And Daddy knows that'd keep him on the farm.

**PENNY:** But to saddle yerself with a baby right after high school.

**BETSY RAYE:** Our mommas did it.

**PENNY:** Well, yeah, but everyone did back then.

**BETSY RAYE:** So what's changed? We're livin' on the same farm, doin' the same chores...!

**PENNY:** So... are you sayin'... you plan on doin' the same thing?

**BETSY RAYE:** Prob'ly.

**PENNY:** Betsy Raye Aberdeen, I thought you had more sense than that!

**BETSY RAYE:** Penny Irene Gibson, do you really think you're going to be able to draw comic books?

**PENNY:** Why not?

**BETSY RAYE:** What's yer favorite comic book?

**PENNY:** *Archie!*

**BETSY RAYE:** Who draws it?

**PENNY:** Uh, John Goldwater.

**BETSY RAYE:** Guys get all the good jobs, Penny. We're farm girls, Penny... stuck with bein' farm wives... like our mommas and grandmas and great-grandmas. We're just another crop... planted, grown, harvested, planted, grown, harvested.

*Pause.*

**PENNY:** I guess that means you won't be havin' Elvis' baby.

**BETSY RAYE:** And you won't be havin' Ricky's.

*Pause.*

**PENNY:** *(Rises.)* Oh my gosh! Would ya look at that!

**BETSY RAYE:** What?

**PENNY:** Some fool drivin' a big pink convertible!

**BETSY RAYE:** *WHAT!?*

**PENNY:** Comin' down the street. Who in their right mind would buy a pink convertible?

**BETSY RAYE:** *IT'S HIM! IT'S HIM!*

**PENNY:** He drives a pink convertible!?

**BETSY RAYE:** It's him, it's him, it's him, it's him... get your camera ready.

**PENNY:** Okay, okay! I got it.

**BETSY RAYE:** Take one of the car.

**PENNY:** Got it!

**BETSY RAYE:** Get another one!

**PENNY:** Got it!

**BETSY RAYE:** Oh my god, he's getting out. He's getting out.  
*ELVIS!! ELVIS!!*

**PENNY:** What are you doing?

**BETSY RAYE:** I want him to look this way. *ELVIS! ELVIS!!*

**PENNY:** This is kind of embarrassing, Betsy Raye.

**BETSY RAYE:** *HE'S WAVING! GET THE PICTURE! GET THE PICTURE!*

**PENNY:** Got it!

**BETSY RAYE:** *GIT ANOTHER ONE AS HE'S WALKIN' IN! (Plops down on the bench, exhausted.)* He's in the building. Elvis is in the building. The Army's got him now.

**PENNY:** Uh, Betsy Raye...

**BETSY RAYE:** He waved at me, Penny. He waved at ME...

**PENNY:** Betsy Raye...

**BETSY RAYE:** This is the most important day of my life...

**PENNY:** Betsy... I forgot to take off the lens cap.

**BETSY RAYE:** Did ya see his eyes? His smile? His... you what!?

**PENNY:** I forgot to take off the lens cap.

**BETSY RAYE:** You what!?

**PENNY:** I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

**BETSY RAYE:** *YOU WHAT!?*

**PENNY:** I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

**BETSY RAYE:** Of all the stupid, ignorant...

**PENNY:** I didn't mean to. I panicked...

**BETSY RAYE:** You did it on purpose!

**PENNY:** You got me all flustered and...

**BETSY RAYE:** Gimme that durn thing. *(SHE grabs the camera, takes off lens cap and starts to exit.)*

**PENNY:** What are ya doing?

**BETSY RAYE:** I'm goin' in there!

**PENNY:** It's a draft board. Ya can't go in there. Yer a girl.

**BETSY RAYE:** Watch me! *(SHE exits.)*

**PENNY:** Betsy Raye!! Betsy Raye!! BETSY! *(Meekly.)* Our bus leaves at 2:45.

**BLACKOUT.**

**THE END**

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