

THE DRAFT BOARD

A PERIOD COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By Geff Moyer

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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

(1-2 MEN, 2 WOMEN)

BETSY RAYE (f) A farm girl, age 14-16. (197 lines)

PENNY (f) A farm girl, age 14-16. (195 lines)

MALE VOICE (m) Offstage. (4 lines)

POLICEMAN (m) (20 lines)

SETTING

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

TIME: Dawn, March 24th, 1958.

PROPS

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

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The first advice I would give any group attempting a production of *The Draft Board* is to watch two movies: *Bye Bye Birdie* (to get the feel of the “mania” that surrounded rock and roll stars of that era) and *King Creole* (simply for the girls to experience the raw magnitude of Elvis Presley and the effect he had on women of all ages).

Although the two girls are lifetime friends and both from farms somewhere in the Tennessee countryside, they are quite different. Betsy Raye appears to be gutsier than Penny, yet it is Betsy Raye who eventually admits that their lives are going to be just like their mothers’ and grandmothers’ and great-grandmothers’. The farm is their only future. They’re just “another crop to be planted, grown and harvested.” Penny is more naïve than Betsy and “follows” along behind her friend, but deep down she is a much stronger and realistic individual. She sees beyond the farm and crops.

The dialects are critical. They help sell the naivety and innocence of both girls (Listen to “Scout” in *To Kill a Mockingbird*). I, personally, hear Betsy Raye speaking with a little faster clip than Penny, yet we must “see” Penny *thinking* before and as she speaks.

The setting is obviously simple – a park bench. What you wish to add (bushes, trees, city noises) is entirely up to you. The focus is the girls. Above all, have fun!

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! 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 never forgive myself.

PENNY: What time is it?

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

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: That can't be good! 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 exaggeratin'! You're always exaggeratin'!

PENNY: I am not!

BETSY RAYE: You are too! 'Member when you had that ache in your foot? You thought you had caught polio, and it turned out to be 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: Dependin' on how fast he's walkin', Betsy Raye. The camera has to advance after each shot, ya know.

BETSY RAYE: Penny, if you were bein' drafted into the Army, would you be walkin' into their buildin' fast?

PENNY: Prob'ly not. 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.

PENNY: Smelling dead possums, getting' lung cancer... I'd hate to live here all the time. Maybe that's why city folks are always in a hurry. They wanna get outta town.

BETSY RAYE: Yeah, but even when they do get outta the city, they complain. Look at my cousin Judy from Chattanooga!

PENNY: Little Miss Priss.

BETSY RAYE: Every time she comes to visit, all she does is gripe about the smells. “Why is this farm always so stinky?” One of these days I’m gonna lock her in with the sheep. Probably find her dead in an hour. Hey, hey!

PENNY: What!?

BETSY RAYE: A big tall Army fella is unlocking the front doors.

PENNY: They must be opening up.

BETSY RAYE: Shouldn’t be long now.

PENNY: How do you know?

BETSY RAYE: Know what?

PENNY: 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.*) 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!

MALE VOICE: (*Offstage.*) You girls need a lift?

BETSY RAYE: Uh, no, we’re fine.

MALE VOICE: (*Offstage.*) Ya sure? This isn’t the nicest part of town, ya know!

PENNY: What if we just ride around the block? Just to say we rode in a real yellow cab.

BETSY RAYE: And how do we pay for it?

MALE VOICE: (*Offstage.*) Last chance, ladies!

BETSY RAYE: We’re fine. Thanks anyway.

MALE VOICE: Okay. (*SFX: car driving away.*)

PENNY: Gosh, I’d like to ride in that!

BETSY RAYE: It’s just a car painted yellow.

PENNY: How many chances will we git to ride in a real yellow cab?

BETSY RAYE: Yer actin' like some country bumpkin! 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!

PENNY: You prob'ly should still be wearin' it!

BETSY RAYE: Don't go there, Penny! You know that's a sensitive subject.

PENNY: If you still wore your trainer you wouldn't have to stuff your bra.

BETSY RAYE: I do not stuff my bra!

Pause.

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

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

A pause.

PENNY: What if He does?

BETSY RAYE: (*Looking through binoculars.*) What if who does what?

PENNY: What if God does let it rain today?

BETSY RAYE: Then we get wet, I suppose.

A pause.

PENNY: 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 ya didn't catch polio.

A pause.

PENNY: Ooh! I got some soot or somethun in my eye! You got a tissue?

BETSY pulls a tissue out of her bra and hands it to PENNY, who grins.

BETSY RAYE: Stop grinnin', P-I-G!

Pause.

PENNY: Ya know... you were the last of us to take the training wheels off yer bike, too.

BETSY RAYE: Okay, smarty pants! You've seen my granny. What'd her boobies look like?

PENNY: Couple of basketballs sittin' in her lap.

BETSY RAYE: What's my mamma's boobies look like?

PENNY: Couple of volleyballs sittin' in her lap!

BETSY RAYE: That's why I ain't wearin' no more trainer! They wore trainers and look what happened! I'm just gonna leave mine be, let 'em do their own thing. *(Looks through binoculars.)*

Long pause.

PENNY: Wish we'd have bought some more food.

BETSY RAYE: Me too, but the bus tickets took most of our money.

PENNY: No kidding! Three weeks of my allowance.

BETSY RAYE: It's worth it.

Pause.

PENNY: Ya sure we got the right day?

BETSY RAYE: The paper said today, March 24th!

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! I am stooptified! No, I am mortified! 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 my sister.

BETSY RAYE: Which one? Please don't say LoraJean.

PENNY: 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.

PENNY: You shouldn't have done the egg burp.

BETSY RAYE: For cryin' out loud, it was just a joke.

PENNY: She didn't think you eatin' a hard-boiled egg, burping, then blowing in her face was very funny.

BETSY RAYE: She needs to get a sense of humor.

PENNY: It made her puke all over her new Hush Puppies. She loved those Hush Puppies.

BETSY RAYE: You didn't tell her what we're doin', did ya?

PENNY: No way Raye!

BETSY RAYE: Good, 'cause she'd have blabbed, ya know? She'd have told 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: Did I just hear you right?

PENNY: Huh?

BETSY RAYE: Did I just hear you say you told LoraJean something as important as that before you told me?

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

BETSY RAYE: I can't believe it! Something as important as that... as important as you dumpin' Elvis and you blab it to LoraJean!

PENNY: I told you, I didn't blab! She wanted to know why...

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

PENNY: Then why would you want them?

BETSY RAYE: What!?

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. It ain't nice to poke fun of a person's ailments, Penny.

A pause.

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. You heard what that taxi driver said. This isn't a nice part of town. 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.

BETSY RAYE: Does he use a stick or his belt?

PENNY: Don't have to use either. My daddy's got hands as hard as ping-pong paddles.

BETSY RAYE: My daddy uses his belt. The big thick one with the buckle in the shape of Tennessee.

A pause.

PENNY: My daddy hates Elvis.

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