

**Joe and the Big Hill**  
A Reader's Theater Script  
Adapted from *Betsy and Joe*  
by Maud Hart Lovelace



*CAST:*

*Betsy*

*Joe*

*Narrator 1*

*Narrator 2*

NARRATOR 1: Joe Willard had lived in Deep Valley for four years, but he had never been up on the Big Hill. He didn't even know which hill the Big Hill was.

JOE: Lots of them are big. Agency Hill. Pigeon Hill. Why isn't one of them the Big Hill?

BETSY: (scornfully) Agency Hill! Pigeon Hill! Better not let Tacy hear you talking like that. *This* is the Big Hill!

NARRATOR 2: They had reached the little yellow cottage where Betsy had lived until she was fourteen years old. Across the street stood Tacy's house. Beyond that on Hill Street there weren't any houses.

NARRATOR 1: There was a bench where they sometimes took their supper plates. There were the hills, billowy and green, running one into another so that you couldn't quite tell where one ended and another began.

NARRATOR 2: Waving at the Kellys, they climbed the steep road which rose behind Betsy's old house. Betsy showed him the thornapple tree she and Tacy used to play under.

NARRATOR 1: She pointed out the place where wild roses used to grow, and roses were in bloom there that moment! Flat, pink, wild roses, with yellow centers, very fragrant. Betsy picked some and put them in her hair.

NARRATOR 2: At the top she showed him the Eckstrom house. There was a ravine behind it.

BETSY: We thought the sun came up out of that ravine.

NARRATOR 1: Joe looked around at the pretty modern cottages now perched on the brow of the hill overlooking Deep Valley.

JOE: Who lives in these other houses?

BETSY: We don't know. We ignore those houses. They weren't here when we were little.

NARRATOR 2: She led him farther up the hill. Suddenly they stopped and she pointed in front of them.

BETSY: This is the Secret Lane.

NARRATOR 1: They went down a path bordered with beech trees, which cast such heavy shadows that the grass was sparse beneath them. No flowers grew there but the chilly waxy Ghost Flowers.

BETSY: Our club used to meet here. It was the T.C.K.C. Club. You never could guess what that stands for.

NARRATOR 2: Joe wasn't listening too attentively. He looked harder than he listened . . . looked at Betsy.

JOE: I love the way the color rushes up in your face when you talk.

NARRATOR 1: They came out on the crest of the hill overlooking Little Syria and the slough and Page Park and the river. They sat down in the grass, and Joe picked a strand and started to chew it. Betsy took off the big straw hat covered with poppies and put her arms around her knees.

NARRATOR 2: They looked down the grassy slope, full of yellow bells and daisies, over the valley at the changing shadows cast by the drifting glistening clouds.

NARRATOR 1: Joe began to recite a poem they had learned in junior English.

JOE: *"And what is so rare as a day in June?  
Then, if ever; come perfect days; —  
Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune,  
And over it softly her warm ear lays."*

BETSY: *"Whether we look, or whether we listen,  
We hear life murmur; or see it glisten.... "*

NARRATOR 2: She suddenly broke off.

BETSY: (announcing) I'm happy!

JOE: So am I.

NARRATOR 1: There was a pause.

BETSY: That was a pretty serious talk last night, that 'After Commencement Day, What?

JOE: Did you think so?

BETSY: Yes. The older I get the more mixed up life seems. When you're little, it's all so plain. It's all laid out like a game ready to play. You think you know exactly how it's going to go. But things happen ....

JOE: For instance?

BETSY: Well, there's Carney. She went with Larry the first two years in high school. Now he's gone to California and she can't fall in love with anyone else until she sees him again. And how is she going to manage to do that?

JOE: Well, she isn't through Vassar yet.

BETSY: And there's Cab. He thought as much as any of us that he would go through high school, but he didn't, and he never will now. He won't be an engineer at all.

JOE: He will be if he wants to enough.

BETSY: And there's Tony! On the stage! I always thought Tib was the one who would go on the stage.

JOE: Maybe she will.

BETSY: And Tacy and I were going to go around the world. We were going to go to the top of the Himalayas, and up the Amazon. We were going to live in Paris and have French maids. We were going to do all sorts of things, and now that Mr. Kerr has appeared! He says he's going to marry Tacy, and you know how he made Papa stock knitwear!

JOE: (laughing) I don't think he's selling Tacy a bill of goods. I think Tacy likes him.

BETSY: Yes, I'm afraid she does.

NARRATOR 2: Joe looked up at her as he lay in the grass.

JOE: What about you?

BETSY: Well, I was always sure I was going to be an author. I'm sure of it still. But I ought to begin selling my stories. I've been sending them out for almost a year now, and I don't even get a letter back. Just a printed slip that says they thank me for thinking of them. Do you write stories and send them out?

JOE: I write them, but I haven't started sending them out. I'm afraid they aren't good enough.

BETSY: I'm sure they are! I can't imagine you writing anything which wasn't perfectly wonderful.

NARRATOR 1: Joe looked at her.

JOE: (slowly) I think it's perfectly wonderful that you think so. I never had anybody to have confidence in me until I met you.

BETSY: You never needed anybody. You had confidence in yourself.

JOE: But it's a wonderful feeling, Betsy, having you like me.

BETSY: (quickly) I liked you the first time I saw you in Butternut Center.

NARRATOR 2: She stopped suddenly, color rushing up into her face.

JOE: There it goes.

BETSY: I can't help it. I shouldn't have said that.

JOE: Why not?

BETSY: It sounds . . . bold.

NARRATOR 1: Joe laughed at that and sat up abruptly. He kept on looking at her.

JOE: You're coming to the U, aren't you, Betsy?

BETSY: Yes, I am. A writer needs a lot of education. Besides, I want to learn a way to earn my living. You can't start living on your stories when your stories don't sell.

JOE: I'm glad you're going to be there, because I am. I'm going to be working at the *Tribune*, you know. I'd like to finish at Harvard, if I can.

BETSY: (admiringly) Harvard!

JOE: But first of all, I'm going to go through the U.

NARRATOR 2: Then he kissed her. Betsy didn't believe in letting boys kiss you. She thought it was silly to be letting first this boy and then that one kiss you, when it didn't mean a thing. But it was wonderful when Joe Willard kissed her. And it did mean a thing.

JOE: Remember what that fellow said last night? 'After Commencement Day, What?'

BETSY: Of course. That's what we've been talking about.

JOE: I've got the answer. After Commencement Day, Betsy.

NARRATOR 1: He smiled and looked enormously pleased with himself.

JOE: How does that sound?

NARRATOR 2: Betsy didn't answer.

JOE: It sounds just right to me. It has the right ring. Sort of a permanent ring.

NARRATOR 1: Betsy smiled, and her fingers lay in his, but she spoke firmly.

BETSY: (firmly) Never mind how it sounds. You've just graduated from high school. You have college ahead of you. You can't go talking about permanent rings.

NARRATOR 2: Joe's expression changed to gravity.

JOE: I know why you say that. You understand, I think, that I've always had a Plan for my life. In order to carry it out, I had to rule out girls, and I didn't mind. Even last fall, although I liked you a lot, I wouldn't let you come into my Plan.

But I've been doing a lot of thinking, Betsy. That Plan has been twisted about to let you in. You're in it, now, that's all. I wouldn't like it without you. I wouldn't give a darn for my old Plan if you couldn't be in it.

NARRATOR 1: They looked into each other's eyes and Betsy felt tears in her own.

NARRATOR 2: Joe kissed her again. He took the wild rose, drooping now from the heat, out of her hair, and put it in his wallet and put the wallet in his pocket.

NARRATOR 1: Betsy jumped up. She shook out the skirts of the plaid gingham dress that she had worn because it was Joe's favorite. She picked up the brown straw hat covered with red poppies.

BETSY: We must be going. Your train leaves this afternoon. Remember?

JOE: I hope you're going to write me lots of letters. The kind you wrote last year, sealed with green sealing wax and smelling sweet.

BETSY: Of course I will.

NARRATOR 2: Hand in hand they went back through the Secret Lane, to the steep road that led down to Hill Street.

NARRATOR 1: But there, at the top of the hill, Joe stopped. They paused and looked out over the town—the red turret of the high school, the leafy streets, the rooftops, the river, the shining rails that would take him away.

JOE: After Commencement Day, the World! (pause) With Betsy.



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