

TEN YEARS OLD

A Reader's Theater Script

Adapted from *Betsy and Tacy Go Over the Big Hill*

by Maud Hart Lovelace

Characters:

Betsy, who is 10 today

Tacy, her friend

Tib, her friend

Julia, her older sister

Mr. Ray, her father

Mrs. Ray, her mother

Mrs. Kelly, Tacy's mother

Mrs. Rivers, a neighbor

Margaret, Betsy's younger sister

Matilda, the hired woman

Narrator 1

Narrator 2



NARRATOR 1: In the morning it seemed thrilling to be ten years old. Betsy jumped out of bed and ran to the window. The lawn, the road, the branches of the trees, Tacy's roof across the street were skimmed with snow. But she knew it could not last, in April.

JULIA: Happy birthday!

NARRATOR 2: Julia was struggling into her underwear beside the warm chimney which angled up from the hard coal heater downstairs. She spoke politely. She did not pound Betsy on the back as on other birthday mornings. But Betsy suspected that Julia was thinking more of the dignity of her own twelve years than of Betsy's ten.

BETSY: (carelessly, off-handed) That's right. It *is* my birthday.

NARRATOR 1: Betsy dressed and went humming carelessly down the stairs.

NARRATOR 2: Her father pounded her plenty. And he held her while Margaret pounded. She was pounded and tickled and kissed. Of course it was hard to act careless during such a rumpus, but after it was over Betsy acted careless again. She crooked her finger when she lifted her milk glass, but just a little; she was afraid that Julia would notice.

MRS. RAY: (concerned) Don't you feel well, Betsy?

BETSY: (surprised) Why, yes. I feel fine.

MR. RAY: (mock serious) She's very quiet. It's the weight of her years.

NARRATOR 1: Betsy was startled until she saw that her father was joking. Her father was a

great one to joke.

NARRATOR 2: The pounding and joking showed that her birthday was remembered but still nobody mentioned asking Tacy and Tib to supper. Betsy got ready for school slowly. When her father left for the shoe store, she was still dawdling over her coat and stocking cap, tangling her mitten strings, and losing her rubbers. She gave her mother plenty of chance to bring up the subject. But it didn't do any good. At last Betsy spoke up.

BETSY: (to Mrs. Ray) Hadn't I better ask Tacy and Tib over to supper, mamma?

MRS. RAY: (carelessly) Not today.

NARRATOR 1: She sounded for all the world as though any other day would do as well.

JULIA: (importantly) Mamma's pretty busy today. You know Friday's cleaning day.

NARRATOR 2: Cleaning day! Betsy could hardly believe her ears. She tried to act as though it didn't matter, though. She thought a bit to herself;

BETSY: (to herself) When I was only nine I would have teased.

NARRATOR 1: She kissed her mother good-by and went humming out the door and across the street to Tacy's. Mrs. Kelly came to the door.

MRS. KELLY: Isn't this your birthday, Betsy?

BETSY: (to Tacy) *Indeed* it is.

NARRATOR 2: *Indeed* was one of the grown-up words they had decided to use now that they were older. Betsy looked hard at Tacy. Her manner was light and careless, very grown-up.

NARRATOR 1: Mrs. Kelly did not seem to notice the grown-upness. She took Betsy's round red cheeks in her hands.

MRS. KELLY: It's five years today that you and Tacy have been friends.

BETSY: Goodness!

NARRATOR 2: She forgot to act old for a minute because she *felt* so old.

NARRATOR 1: But she and Tacy acted old all the way down Hill Street, and even more so after they had cut through the vacant lot to Pleasant Street and called for Tib at her beautiful chocolate-colored house. It was fun to watch Tib's round blue eyes grow rounder as she listened to them talk.

BETSY: (carelessly) Will you both come to tea some day this week?

TACY: Yes *indeed*. I'd love to. Wouldn't you, Tib?

TIB: Um-hum.

BETSY: When I get some money, I'm going to buy some nail powder. I'm going to start buffing my nails. I think we all ought to.

TACY: So do I. I think my sister Mary would lend us a little nail powder, maybe.

BETSY: Do you really?

TACY: Yes indeed.

NARRATOR 2: Tacy loved to say "indeed."

NARRATOR 1: Tib didn't know how to talk in the new way. She hadn't learned yet. But she tried.

TIB: I borrowed my mamma's nail powder once and I spilled it.

NARRATOR 2: Betsy and Tacy hurried over that.

BETSY: We must buy some hair pins too,. Of course we're not quite ready to put up our hair, but we shall be soon.

TACY: I can hardly wait to get my skirts down. Ankle length is what I *prefer*.

NARRATOR 1: *Prefer* was another one of their grown-up words.

BETSY: What do you *prefer*, Tib?

TIB: I don't know what '*prefer*' means, exactly. (worried) Betsy, do you think I still look like a baby?

NARRATOR 1: Betsy glanced at her and hastily glanced away.

BETSY: Not so much as you did yesterday.

TACY: (helpfully) Try to talk like us, Tib. It's easy when you get started.

NARRATOR 2: They talked grown-up all the way to school; and they kept on doing it coming home from school at noon, and going back after dinner, and coming home again at three o'clock.

NARRATOR 1: On that trip, when they reached the corner by Tib's house, Betsy felt a strong

return of that queer feeling inside. The snow was melting and the ground was slushy and damp. It wasn't a good time for playing out. Today of all days, she should be asking Tacy and Tib to come to her house. And her mother had told her not to!

NARRATOR 2: Tacy and Tib acted embarrassed. Tacy looked at Tib and Tib looked at Tacy.

TIB: Why don't you come into my house to play?

TACY: I'd like to. Wouldn't you, Betsy?

TIB: There are some funny papers you haven't seen. Is it all right for us to look at them, now we are ten?

TACY: (hastily) Of course. Lots of grown people read the funny papers. Don't they, Betsy?

BETSY: Oh, of course!

NARRATOR 1: So they went into Tib's house where they always loved to go; it was so beautiful with a tower on the front and panes of colored glass in the front door. They sat on the window seat and looked at the funny papers, crooking their fingers when they turned the pages. Betsy began to feel better. She had an idea.

BETSY: I think we're too old to call each other by our nicknames any more. I think we ought to start using our real names. For instance, you should call me Elizabeth.

TACY: Yes. And you should call me Anastacia.

TIB: And you should call me Thelma. Hello, Anastacia! How-de-do, Elizabeth?

NARRATOR 2: The big names made them laugh. Whenever they said "Anastacia" they laughed so hard that they rolled on the window seat.

NARRATOR 1: Matilda, the hired girl, came in from the kitchen. She looked cross, but Matilda almost always looked cross.

MATILDA: What's going on in here?

TIB: Anastacia and Elizabeth are making me laugh.

BETSY and TACY: No. It's Thelma acting silly.

MATILDA: (looking around) Where are all those folks?

NARRATOR 2: Betsy, Tacy, and Tib shouted at that. They had such a good time that Betsy almost forgot how strange it was not to have Tacy and Tib come to supper on her most important birthday. But when the time came to go home she remembered. They walked

home through the vacant lot.

BETSY: Tacy, people don't make as much fuss about birthdays after other people grow up. Have you noticed that?

TACY: (embarrassed) Um—er...

BETSY: Not that it matters, of course. It doesn't matter a bit.

NARRATOR 1: It did, though.

NARRATOR 2: It was dusk when she reached home but no lamps had been lighted except in the kitchen where Mrs. Ray was bustling about getting supper. She wore a brown velvet bow in her high red pompadour and a fresh brown checked apron tied around her slender waist.

NARRATOR 1: Julia was scrubbing Margaret at the basin. And Julia too looked very spic and span.

MRS. RAY: Clean up good for supper, Betsy.

BETSY: Yes, ma'am.

JULIA: Mamma, don't you think Betsy ought to put on her new plaid hair ribbons?

MRS. RAY: Yes, that's a good idea.

JULIA: After all, it's her birthday.

NARRATOR 2: Margaret clapped her wet hand over her mouth and said, "Oh! Oh!" Margaret was only four years old.

NARRATOR 1: Betsy thought to herself some more.

BETSY: (to herself) Probably she thinks Julia is giving something away. Probably she thinks I don't know we'll have a birthday cake. (pause) Maybe we won't. Things get so different as you get older.

NARRATOR 2: She felt gloomy. But she scrubbed her face and hands. And Julia helped her braid her hair and even crossed the braids in back; they were just long enough to cross. Julia tied the plaid bows perkily over Betsy's ears.

NARRATOR 1: When she was cleaned up, Betsy went into the back parlor. The fire was shining through the isinglass windows of the hard coal heater there. It looked cozy and she would have enjoyed sitting down beside it with a book. But her mother called out:

MRS. RAY: Betsy, I borrowed an egg today from Mrs. Rivers. Will you return it for me,

please?

BETSY: Right now?

MRS. RAY: Yes, please.

BETSY: (to herself) Of all things!

NARRATOR 2: It seemed to her that she might return the egg tomorrow. It seemed to her that Julia might do the errands on this particular day. It was a nuisance getting into outdoor clothes when she had just taken them off. She tried not to show she was cross because it was her birthday.

BETSY: (a little cross) What must I wear?

MRS. RAY: You'll only need your coat and rubbers. Go out the back way.

NARRATOR 1: So Betsy put on her coat and rubbers and took an egg and went out the back way.

NARRATOR 2: Mrs. Rivers lived next door, and she was very nice. She had a little girl just Margaret's age, and a still smaller girl, and a baby. The baby was sitting in a high chair eating his supper and Mrs. Rivers asked Betsy to stay a moment and watch him. He was just learning how to feed himself and he was funny.

NARRATOR 1: Betsy stayed and watched him. And she said "indeed" and "prefer" to Mrs. Rivers and that cheered her up a little. Mrs. Rivers kept looking out of the window. At last she said:

MRS. RIVERS: I'm afraid your mother will be expecting you. Good-by, dear. Go out the back way.

NARRATOR 2: Betsy went out the back way and climbed the little slope which led to her house. The ground was slippery, for the melted snow had frozen again. The stars above the hill were icy white.

NARRATOR 1: She went into the house dejectedly. There was no one in the kitchen. The door which led to the dining room was closed.

BETSY: (to herself) They've started supper without me. On my birthday!

NARRATOR 2: She felt like sitting down and crying.

NARRATOR 1: She opened the dining room door and then stopped. No wonder she stopped! The room was crowded with children.

EVERYONE: Surprise! Surprise! Surprise on Betsy!

NARRATOR 2: Betsy's father stood there with his arm around Betsy's mother and both of them were smiling. Tacy and Tib rushed over to Betsy and began to pound her on the back, and Julia ran into the front parlor and started playing the piano. Everybody sang:

EVERYONE: Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday, dear Betsy,
Happy birthday to you!

MARGARET: (happily) It's a surprise party!

NARRATOR 1: It was certainly a surprise.

NARRATOR 2: There were ten little girls at the party because Betsy was ten years old. Ten little girls, that is, without Margaret who was too little to count. Betsy made one, and Julia made two, and Tacy made three, and Katie made four, and Tib made five, and a little girl named Alice who lived down on Pleasant Street made six, and Julia's and Katie's friend Dorothy who also lived down on Pleasant Street made seven, and three little girls from Betsy's class in school made eight, nine, and ten.

NARRATOR 1: There were ten candles on the birthday cake, but before they had the birthday cake they had sandwiches and cocoa; and along with the birthday cake they had ice cream; and after the birthday cake they played games in the front and back parlors. Betsy's father played with them; Betsy's mother played the piano for Going to Jerusalem; and when Betsy's father was left without a chair how everybody laughed!

NARRATOR 2: Betsy and Tacy and Tib played harder than anyone. They forgot to crook their fingers and to say "indeed" and "prefer." They forgot to call one another Elizabeth and Anastacia and Thelma. In fact, after that day, they never did these things again.

NARRATOR 1: But just the same, in the midst of the excitement, Betsy realized that she was practically grown up. Flushed and panting from Blind Man's Buff, her braids loose, and her best hair ribbons untied, she found her mother.

BETSY: Mamma, this is the first party I ever had at night.

MRS. RAY: That's right. The children are staying until nine o'clock, and papa is taking them home.

BETSY: Is it because I'm ten years old?

MRS. RAY: Of course it is.

NARRATOR 2: Betsy rushed to find Tacy and Tib. She drew them into a corner.

BETSY: (whispering proudly) You notice that we're having this party at night.

TIB: What about it?

BETSY: What about it? Why, it's a grown-up party.

TACY: It's practically a ball.

TIB: Oh. (pause) Of course, tomorrow isn't a school day.

NARRATOR 1: Tib always mentioned things like that. But Betsy and Tacy liked her just the same.



© Betsy-Tacy Society
P.O. Box 94, Mankato, MN 56002-0094
www.betsy-tacysociety.org
Lois Lenski illustrations © used with permission from HarperCollins