

SIDE 7 - Kate, Toad

THE COVER OF LIFE

Scene Six

*(TOOD comes onto porch with laundry hamper. She looks around, thinks about TOMMY.)*

TOOD. Dear Baby. There is a stillness in the house tonight because the boys are comin' home. Each of us sits in different places, different chairs, and stares into space. The boys are comin' home. The stillness is different for each of us - mine is like the air before a midsummer nightin' storm. It is makin' me ... tremble ... with joy and achin'. The boys are comin' home.

*(TOMMY enters with letter.)*

TOMMY. Your letters is sure pretty soundin'.

TOOD. Why don't they let you tell me exactly where you are?

TOMMY. *(Amused)* 'Cause there's a war goin' on!

TOOD. I mean, I get out the atlas and try to figure out where you are, and all I know is the South Pacific and the South Pacific is a big place.

TOMMY. We'll make up a secret code. All right?

TOOD. All right! I'd like that!

TOMMY. Hey, you ain't gonna recognize me when I get home. I'm fillin' out so good.

TOOD. *(Laughs, touches her stomach)* Me, too!

TOMMY. Hell, now that I'm a sailor, my stupid brothers'll know I'm just as much of a man as any one of them.

TOOD. *(Registers this last comment, then to herself)* How much of a man is that? *(Eagerly to TOMMY)* Hurry home.

THE COVER OF LIFE

*(TOOD takes shirt from hamper, dances with it. KATE enters. She is obviously not dressed for this Southern climate. She is carrying her camera and suitcase. She appears to have come from another planet. She is exhausted, hot, miserable.)*

Scene Seven

~~START~~  
*(TOOD turns while dancing and sees KATE. TOOD is startled.)*

KATE. Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you.

TOOD. Oh, that's all right. I was just ... daydreamin'. Can I help you?

KATE. Oh god, please, somebody help me. *(Catches herself, then with as much dignity as she can muster)* How do you do, I'm Kate Miller. From *Life* magazine. *(TOOD is immediately speechless, then, after a long pause)* Is this the Clifft residence?

TOOD. *(Finally, still stunned)* Yes, ma'am. *(Long pause)* It is.

KATE. Then you are expecting me?

TOOD. *(In awe)* 'Bout like the Second Comin'. *(Remembers her appearance)* Oh lord in heaven look at me. I would have to be washin' clothes for Mrs. Holcomb when the people from *Life* come here. *(Proudly)* She pays me.

KATE. *(As she sits, exhaustedly)* May I sit down?

TOOD. I am such a jackass. *(Catches her language)* Of course, please sit down. Would you like to come inside?

KATE. One thing at a time. Well, how do you do? I've just arrived in your charming little ... *(Looking around distastefully)* hamlet.

TOOD. Uh-huh. (*Trying to be casual*) Well ... hi. I'm one of the Cliffferts. The embarrassed one.

KATE. You're Tood.

TOOD. Yes'm.

KATE. Please, no "yes'm's" and "ma'am's." I don't think I could stand it.

TOOD. (*Smiles*) We talked on the telephone. Long distance.

KATE. Of course. Step-ins. (*Tight smile*) My files keep growing on you.

TOOD. Oh, you got to be kiddin'.

KATE. Addie Mae sent me as much material on this family as she could. Gospel singers turned war heroes. *Perfect*. I can tell you the people from *Life* are absolutely enthralled with this family.

TOOD. What else do you know about me? I'm not a Clifffert. Well, I *am* married to one, but that ain't been for that long.

KATE. Six months. And you are expecting a little Clifffert.

TOOD. That's right. How'd you know that? Oh, that's right - Addie Mae.

KATE. Where are the others? I've got to admit to being a little enthralled myself.

TOOD. Enthralled?

KATE. (*Explaining*) Enchanted, charmed ...

TOOD. (*Quickly, annoyed, very pointedly to KATE*) I know what it means. I finished tenth grade. I just ain't figured why you so ... enthralled.

KATE. (*Surprised, impressed with TOOD's firmness*) I apologize, Tood, I ...

TOOD. (*Humorously, but with a point*) Oh, that's all right, we get a lot of that in this here little ... hamlet.

KATE. (*Quickly, caught a bit offguard*) Oh dear, was I sounding grand? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.

TOOD. (*They both laugh again, warming up slightly to each other*) Besides, I figure you must be pretty grand to work for *Life* magazine. Don't pay no attention to me.

KATE. Well, it's just that ... I left New York two days ago and I can't sleep on a train ... and I'm starving ... and ... hot.

TOOD. First thing you need is a big old glass of iced tea. I got iced tea so good it'll knock your papa down. (*KATE reacts. TOOD starts to go to kitchen*) Lord mercy, how did a big thing like *Life* magazine find this bunch?

KATE. (*Relaxing, becoming herself*) *Life* never sleeps.

TOOD. You take sugar in your iced tea, Mrs. Miller? Is it Mrs.?

KATE. No to sugar. No to Mrs., but you can call me, "Kate." Please.

TOOD. Well ... Kate, I just baked three of the best coconut cakes you ever flapped a lip over. I'd be honored to cut one for you. Goes real good with iced tea.

KATE. Well, O.K., just a taste. (*TOOD exits, KATE chuckles as she quickly takes out her notebook and makes a note. Amused incredulity*) Flapped a lip over.

TOOD. (*Offstage, getting cake and tea*) How long you gonna be in our little hamlet, Kate?

KATE. My assignment is to get the real scoop on the women back home, sacrificing and waiting for our boys.

TOOD. (*Entering with tea and cake*) Uh-huh. How long you 'spect that scoop's gonna take?

KATE. Dunno. You're my first impression.

TOOD. Oh lord, don't have the women back home blamin' me for nothin'. (*Laughs*) Did you decide about stayin' with us?

END