

# This Is the Rill Speaking by Lee Hoiby

Libretto by Mark Shulgasser based on the play by Lanford Wilson

mezzo	Mother Atkins – early 40s	Allison – a teenager	
baritone	Willy Atkins , her son – teenager (needs to be able to whistle on pitch)		
soprano	Judy Atkins, her daughter – teenager		
mezzo	Maybelle, the Atkins’ neighbor 50s	Peggy, Judy’s friend – a teenager	
tenor	Tommy, Willy’s friend – teenager (needs to be able to whistle on pitch)		Manny – teenager (pool player)
baritone	Father Atkins– early 40s	Keith – a teenager	Earl – a teenager (pool player)

## SCENE 1 (The street in front of the Atkins’ home.)

Mother: Well, there goes Walt Robinson, up to the post office. Willy, do you want to run and stop him?

Willy: Run and stop him? What for?

Mother: You could offer to go for him. It’d be a good thing.

Willy: What do you mean? He’ll stay around the post office all day. It’s the only thing he does all day long.

Mother: Maybelle Robinson is over on her porch there.

Judy: You’re always talking to her. Why don’t you talk to somebody younger? She never says anything worth hearing.

Willy: I’m going down by the river...

Mother: I don’t know what to have for supper.

Willy: They’re tearing down that old bridge.

Mother: What old bridge is that?

Willy: The old bridge by the fork.

Mother: There’s no bridge there. You mean those rocks?

Willy: It used to be a railroad bridge, years ago.

Judy: Peggy should be coming over.

Mother: Peggy Harpur is not coming over here.

Judy: I told you.

Mother: I wish you wouldn't spend so much time with that girl.

Judy: Peggy Harpur is the nicest girl in the junior class.

Mother: That's not what I've been hearing.

Judy: Well, I can't help it if you've been listening to Maybelle Robinson. I don't know what she has against Peggy.

Mother: She runs a round half naked, and her fat as a tub. I'd think that girl would lose some weight, or cover herself, one.

Judy: Peggy is my friend, and she can't help it if she has gland trouble.

Mother: Well, she could cover her bare legs.

Willy: She just eats too much.

Mother: Don't you leave this house in that halter and shorts either.

Judy: What's wrong with a halter?

Willy: I'm going down to the river. They're using the rocks to build a house way up on the hill.

Mother: D'you think your dad would mind if we had liver?

## **SCENE 2 (Same.)**

Maybelle: It looks like it's gonna do something. What's that a-comin up the street? Is that the junkman? What's he a-doing? Now he's stopped. Looks like something was about to fall off his cart. He's tying it on...or something. Yes...it's gonna do something before long. You know, Rachel Jackson had a girl.

Mother: Rachel Jackson a baby girl?

Maybelle: Yesterday afternoon, and her over forty. Nobody even knew she was carrying it, fat as she is.

Mother: A baby girl. Where is she now?

Maybelle: Up to the hospital. Baby's in an incubator. Tiny thing. Born a month early from what I hear. Blue as a turnip. They had to give it blood. Her mother ought to know better than to have a child at her age and fat as she is.

Mother: And her with two boys out of school nearly.

Maybelle: It'll die.

Mother: tsk tsk tsk

Maybelle: tsk tsk tsk

Mother: tsk tsk tsk

Maybelle: tsk tsk tsk Blue as a turnip.

Mother: It'll break that poor woman's heart.

Maybelle: It'll break that poor woman's heart.

Mother: It'll break that poor woman's heart.

Maybelle: It'll break that poor woman's heart.

Both: It'll break that poor woman's heart.

Mother: It'll probably rain by evening.

Maybelle: There he goes again. I guess he got that tied on.

Mother: Cool things off some.

Maybelle: Whatever it was. Walt's hearing is getting worse. I swear it is.

Mother: Today's gonna be a scorcher.

Maybelle: He can't eat a thing but mashed potatoes. They took him off salt.

**SCENE 3 (undefined place where teenage boys hang out such as ball field, playground, woods)**

Tommy: You hear about Ben?

Willy: I heard they called off his party. He didn't come to school.

Tommy: His mother wouldn't let him have it. You know why? She caught him.

Willy: When did she?

Tommy: He came home for lunch and she came in without knocking.

Willy: He should have locked the door.

Tommy: She beat the tar out of him. He said he almost cried. She made him swear on the Bible that he wouldn't ever do it again. She said he'd go blind and go crazy and go to hell.

Willy: That's a lot of baloney. You think he'll quit?

Tommy: She pressed his hand against the Bible and made him swear.

Willy: What a mean thing to do. He used to do it three or four times a day.

**SCENE 4 (undefined place where teens hang out....a backyard, a school yard, soda shop)**

Judy (to Keith) I wish they'd be a breeze and cool things off come. It's no unbearably bad though, I suppose.

Willy: Damn I'll bet he looked surprised.

Judy: Dad says he can't remember a drier July in history. A breeze would be nice.

Keith: I'm taking the muffler off the car tomorrow.

Judy: They'll jail you if you do.

Keith: I'll tell 'em it wore out and I'm getting a new one.

Judy: John tried that and he got a ticket anyway.

Keith: They got somebody in jail. Lord, did he cuss out this town. We gave him a beer through the bars. I just hope he doesn't slip and say something.

Judy: It just looks like an awful lot of trouble for a headache to me.

Keith: Billy Burt nearly knocked old Skelly down in the middle of Church Street yesterday.

Judy: I feel sorry for Skelly. Someone like that. I really do.

**SCENE 5 (The Atkins' dinner table.)**

Father: Do what your mother tells you.

Willy: I am.

Mother: No, you're not. I can see.

(The four assemble at the table for dinner. They bow their heads briefly. Mother begins to serve.)

Tommy: (He whistles off) Blackie! Here boy! (He whistles.) Blackie come!

Judy: Keith's gonna take the muffler off the car.

Father: Well, if he wants to pay fine that's his business. You just better see he don't go blasting past here, waking me up.

Mother: Judy, don't say things to upset your father. Are you gonna eat that crust?

Willy: I don't like it, I tell you. I'll get sick. Honestly.

Mother: Willy, there are children in China starving for want of a crust of bread.

Willy: May I be excused, please?

Mother: They're children in China that will die this very night for want of that crust of bread.

Willy: Well, send it to them, then. Don't make me eat it.

Father: You eat that, young man.

Willy: It'll break my teeth. Feel how hard it is.

Mother: Your teeth aren't that tender.

#### **SCENE 6 (The park.)**

Keith: Where are you going so fast?

Allison: Home. Where would I be going?

Keith: You always cut through the park?

Allison: I didn't see you, Keith Fellers, or I wouldn't have. Smarty.

Keith: Well, I saw you.

#### **SCENE 7 (Judy's bedroom.)**

Peggy: That's lovely. It really is.

Judy: And that's the living room. And the bedroom will be all in white. White walls, of course, and white ceiling. And white lace curtains with some floral pattern in them: white on white. And they'll be a dressing table with a white pleated skirt in silk.

Peggy: Mmmmm. That's lovely.

Judy: And a white silk bedspread.

Peggy: It really is.

Judy: All in white. But not a cold white. Not that white. A kind of off-white.

Peggy: White on white.

Peggy: Cream.

Judy: No, more of an ivory.

Peggy: Mmm.

Judy: And then the kitchen will be green...pale green, you know, and yellow... very sunny yellow. And they'll be cabinets in pale green, and the floor and walls will be yellow and the oven and stove and sink are all light green, and the ceiling is very small checks. Just green and yellow checks. And the curtains... the curtains will be ruffled cotton. Just plain polished cotton. And they're checks. And that's the kitchen.

### **SCENE 8 (The street in front of the Atkins' home.)**

Willy: Tommy! Tommy! If I whistle once, it means I'm coming up for sure. You got that?

Maybelle: Is that lightning bugs over there...or is that someone in your yard with a cigarette?

Willy: Once, I'm coming up. Two times, it means maybe, and three times, I still don't know for sure.

Mother: No, that's lightning bugs. See, they're in the back yard thick.

Willy: And four times means I'm not coming up.

Maybelle: Can you see if Walt's going to bed, or is he still in there reading?

Mother: No, he's still reading the Bible.

Willy: Like this: (he whistles)

Maybelle: He'll put his eyes out;

Willy: Or this: (whistles)

Maybelle: He's not satisfied to be deaf.

Willy: Or this: (whistles)

Maybelle: He should be in bed.

Willy: Or this: (whistles)

Maybelle: It's past his bedtime. He's older than me eight years.

Mother: I know.

Willy: Tommy? O-K?

**SCENE 9 (Judy's bedroom.)**

Judy: Are you going to the movie tomorrow night?

Peggy: When?

Judy: Tomorrow night.

Peggy: Oh, yeah. It's very good, actually. I saw it last year in Springfield. It's very good. I want to see it again. It's about this kind-a island.

Judy: During the war? I think I saw that one.

Peggy: No, not that one. This one's in color.

Judy: No, I didn't see that one then.

Peggy: It's very good, actually

**SCENE 10 (A pool hall, or more likely, a basement playroom with a pool table.)**

Earl: Four in the side.

Manny: Shit, you can't make that one.

Earl: Shit, I can't.

Manny: Hell you can. I got six bits. Two bits you can't.

Earl: Shit, that's an easy 'un. Watch this.

Manny: Shit, you missed as good as a mile.

Earl: Hell I did.

Manny: Nine in the corner.

Earl: Four bits.

Manny: Hell with you too. Think I wanna throw dough away?

Earl: Two bits.

Manny: Hell, it's in there clean as a whistle. Watch this.

Earl: Two bits?

Manny: Hell yes.

Earl: We're even.

### **SCENE 11 (The park.)**

Keith: You always cut through here, do you?

Allison: I do not. Don't you stand so close either.

Keith: D'you want to go for a ride around?

Allison: No, thank you, I do not. I thought you was going steady with Judy Atkins.

Keith: Well, I don't see her around right now, but you are.

Allison: I happen to know Judy Atkins very well, and you better let me on by.

Keith: Does she talk about me to you?

Allison: I would say she does, yes, sometimes she does.

Keith: I'll bet it just makes you squirm, doesn't it.

Allison: Make me squirm. What do you mean, it just makes me squirm? Let me on by.

Keith: You don't have to get so hot under the collar.

Allison: I'm not getting hot under the collar or anywhere el... Come on. Come on.

Keith: Why, she won't have to know.

Allison: That has nothing to do with it.

Keith: You're more amply built.

Allison: Judy is just thin. You keep your hands away. I have to go home.

Keith: I've seen you watching me.

Allison: I have not. I suppose you think if you're the basketball hero of the town and all, ev'ry girl is ready to just jump right into your lap.

Keith: I know you have, I've seen you.

Allison: I haven't, I told you. I've seen you looking at me enough, and at ev'ry other girl around.



Keith: Well if you noticed that, you must have been looking. You want to sit in the car awhile?

Allison: No. I might sit here in the park, but not in your car.

Keith: That is fine with me.

Allison: I have noticed you. I couldn't help noticing you. That didn't mean anything.

Keith: I knew you wanted to.

Allison: I didn't say I wanted to do anything except just sit and talk.

Keith: All right, we'll just sit and talk.

Allison: Keith!

Keith: Take it easy!

Allison: Keith! I love you so!

**SCENE 12 (Judy and Willy's bedrooms, upstairs.)**

Judy: Willy? Are you sleepy? Are you asleep?

Willy: No.

Judy: Have you decided what you're gonna be?

Willy: I don't know. I been thinking I might e a writer like for the newspapers. Then I could write pieces about Nature and make people really notice nature. You know?

Judy: Un-huh.

Willy: And I'd have a lot of characters and they'd all talk; Only they'd all be things in Nature, around us all the time. Like it would be a countryside. And the tree would talk and tell all about itself. Like about its getting a new ring ev'ry year, you know? And the meadow would talk. And the brook would talk like a laugh kind-a. And the hills would talk and the berry bushes about the food they supply to wild animals. and the wheat fields 'n things.

Judy: That's beautiful. Really lovely. It is.

Willy: And I figure they'd each one have a little speech that they'd just say out directly about themselves like: "This is the rill speaking over here. They've been tearing down that old bridge down by the fork there."

Judy: What's a rill?

Willy: You know, "I love they rocks and rills."  
Judy: Oh, sure. That's nice. Are you sleepy now?  
Willy: Yes.

### **SEXTET**

Judy: And the bedroom will be white...but not a cold white.  
Peggy: That's lovely.  
Judy: More of an ivory.  
Peggy: It really is.  
Willy: I'm going down to the river.  
Judy: White on white.  
Willy: going down to the river.  
Peggy: White on white  
Mother: I don't know what to have for supper.  
Judy: White on white.  
Willy: They're using the rocks to build a house  
Peggy: White on white.  
Mother: No, he's still reading the Bible.  
Willy: way up,  
Judy: And the bedroom, the bedroom will be all, all in white...  
Mother: Maybelle Robinson is over on her porch there.  
Peggy: And the bedroom will be all, all in white...  
Willy: way up on the hill.  
Keith: Boy, did he cuss out his town!  
Judy: and the bedroom will be all in white, all in white  
Allison: Keith! I love you so!  
Peggy: and the bedroom will be all in white, all in white.  
Tommy: She pressed his hand against the Bible,  
Willy: way up on the hill, way up on the hill,  
Keith: Where are you going so fast?

Allison: I have so noticed you. I couldn't help noticing you.  
Maybelle: It'll break that poor woman's heart.  
Tommy: pressed his hand against the Bible.  
Willy: up on the hill.  
Keith: This is fine with me.

Judy: It's all in white.  
Allison: I love you so!  
Peggy: It's all in white.  
Tommy: We're going down to the river.  
Willy: I'm going down to the river.  
Keith: I knew you wanted to.

Willy: Are you going to the movie tomorrow? Judy? Good night.

Judy: Good night, Willy.

Mother: You two go on to bed in there now.

Judy/Willy: Good night, Daddy.

Father: That's enough, now.

Judy: Well, good night.

Father: Good night.

**CURTAIN**