

ACT ONE

START

(Darkness.)

THE LITTLE BOY

In 1902 Father built a house at the crest of the Broadview Avenue hill in New Rochelle, New York, and it seemed for some years thereafter that all the family's days would be warm and fair.

END

PEOPLE OF NEW ROCHELLE
THE SKIES WERE BLUE AND HAZY
RARELY A STORM. BARELY A CHILL.

WOMEN

LA LA LA LA LA...

PEOPLE OF NEW ROCHELLE
THE AFTERNOONS WERE LAZY
EVERYONE WARM. EVERYTHING STILL.

MEN

LA LA LA LA LA...

ALL

AND THERE WAS DISTANT MUSIC,
SIMPLE AND SOMEHOW SUBLIME,
GIVING THE NATION
A NEW SYNCOPATION –
THE PEOPLE CALLED IT RAGTIME!

(FATHER steps forward, a strong,
commanding figure.)

FATHER

Father was well-off. Very well off. His considerable income was derived from the manufacture of fireworks and bunting and other accoutrements of patriotism. Father was also something of an amateur explorer.

(MOTHER steps forward, a gracious,
appealing woman.)

MOTHER

The house on the hill in New Rochelle was Mother's domain. She took pleasure in making it comfortable for the men of her family and often told herself how fortunate she was to be so protected and provided for by her husband.

START

(GRANDFATHER exits.)

THE LITTLE BOY
Is Evelyn Nesbit the Harlot of Babylon?

MOTHER
Where did you hear that?

THE LITTLE BOY
I read it in one of Uncle's magazines.

MOTHER
I don't want you going in his room. I'm sure Evelyn Nesbit is a very nice person. She's just confused. She's strayed from the path.

THE LITTLE BOY
What path?

MOTHER
The right path. The one we all want to be on if only we could and if only it weren't so difficult.

THE LITTLE BOY
Not for women it's not. Men are tested almost every day of their Christian lives.

MOTHER
Not everyone's a Christian. You know that.

THE LITTLE BOY
They are in New Rochelle.

(A plane flies above, advertising an appearance by HOUDINI. MOTHER starts digging in the earth.)

THE LITTLE BOY
Houdini! Houdini's coming! Can we go? I'll do anything. Please!

MOTHER
We'll see.

(THE LITTLE BOY calls up to HOUDINI's plane as it circles overhead.)

THE LITTLE BOY
Warn the Duke!

(HE stands watching the plane disappear overhead as we hear it fly away. MOTHER looks at him, troubled.)

MOTHER

Edgar! Why did you say that?

THE LITTLE BOY

I don' t know.

MOTHER

What did you mean, "Warn the Duke"?

THE LITTLE BOY

I don' t know.

MOTHER

The things you children say. Read Father' s letter if you' re not going to tell me.

THE LITTLE BOY

"Dear Mother. This letter will reach you via the supply ship ERIK..."

(MOTHER has stopped digging in the earth. She has found something.)

MOTHER

Get Kathleen.

THE LITTLE BOY

What' s wrong?

MOTHER

Get Kathleen, I tell you.

END

(THE LITTLE BOY runs into the house. KATHLEEN, the Irish maid, and YOUNGER BROTHER join MOTHER. In silence, they look at the swaddled infant MOTHER is holding in her arms.)

KATHLEEN

Oh Holy Mother!

MOTHER

Get water, clean linens. Call the doctor.

(YOUNGER BROTHER goes back into the house.)

KATHLEEN

Is it alive? Oh, please, God, let it be.

MOTHER

It' s alive. It' s a Negro child. A newborn baby boy.

KATHLEEN

It' s like Moses in the bulrushes.