

**REHEARSAL
IN THE
RAIN**

PANOS SAKELIS

Translation by
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STARBUCK: There's no such thing as a plain woman. Every real woman is pretty. They're all pretty in a different way, but they're all pretty.

LIZZIE: Not me. When I look in the looking glass....

STARBUCK: Don't let Noah be your looking glass. It's gotta be inside a you. Then one day that looking glass will be the man who loves you. It'll be his eyes maybe. And you'll look in that mirror and you'll be more than pretty. You'll be beautiful.

“The Rainmaker” by R. Nash

(a synopsis of the theatrical play is enclosed at the end of the book)

CHAPTER 1 : THE TOWN HALL CLOCK

AUGUST 16, 1973

The first distinctive clang of the Town Hall clock rang out in the middle of the night. Before the ringing had stopped echoing throughout town, a sleepless late-nighter made to look at his watch – but he didn't have time to; everything had frozen into timelessness. From somewhere in the distance rumble like thunder could be heard. This timeless situation that had befallen our small town lasted no more than a second, and ended when the Town Hall clock struck a second time.

Hearing the clock, the late-nighter finally looked at his digital night clock. It was 02:40 AM. It can't be. I must have imagined it, he thought.

If there was one thing which the small provincial town was known and distinguished for, it was its college, which was founded 59 years ago. The late David Copper, dead and gone a long time now, had many useful connections and had managed to procure the necessary

license in order to build a school that would allow the youngsters of this isolated backwoods area to get a decent degree that would help them get into one of the country's bigger universities.

So it was that the college, with its wide variety of degrees, was the pride and joy of Copperville, situated roughly in the middle of nowhere.

There were many ranches and cattle farms in the broader area, and most of the commotion around the train station on the outskirts of town was from cattlemen sending their livestock to the big state markets.

The other town jewel and point of pride for the locals was the large clock adorning the right side of the Town Hall. Both the clock and the Town Hall itself had been donations from David Copper. The Coppers had been the first family to settle in the area and so had christened the town with their surname. But the family line had dwindled long ago, since the last of the Coppers had remained unmarried and produced no legitimate successors. Sure, there had been several children descending from David Copper and born out of wedlock, but Copper had managed to send his bastard children, along with their mothers, as far away as possible, making it worth their while with a hefty financial settlement.

The college was on the other side of town from the train station. The newer part of town developed around the college, with mansion-like homes spread across acres of land. The college campus and grounds also functioned as the town's main park, so there was never a shortage of hustle and bustle going on. Over the last decade, the college had finally acquired its own theatre hall, which now doubled for all college and town-related cultural events. The theatre hall, along with the illustrious campus library afforded the college Dean a certain prestige, since his was the sole approval needed for the organization of such events. That was, of course, one of the reasons he held an honorary position on the Town Council.

The town's sole bus route started at the train station on the outskirts of town, went through the centre down to the intercity bus station, and ended up at the college campus. There was no other bus line, but the majority would tell you there was little need for another; most people had their own car.

The only month when traffic generally died down was August,

and even then not for the whole month. In the last ten days of August, the Professors' Council at the college held regular meetings to determine which students would receive scholarships for the upcoming academic year.

The student dorms, on the edge of campus, provided room and board to students with limited funds. The scholarships were paid for in part by generous alumni donations; many college alumni who had succeeded in their careers wanted to contribute to the college. The rest of the scholarships were covered by the train station organization; the grounds peripheral to the station had belonged to David Copper and left at his bequest under the college's ownership.

The following summer would mark the 60 years since the founding of the college, and already 20 years had passed since the death of David Copper; in addition, they would be celebrating 80 years from the founding of Copperville itself. The mayor and the Town Council had decided they should extend the celebrations and make it a week-long affair. A series of events would take place, kicking off with the unveiling of a carved bust of David Copper on the Town Hall lawn, and ending with a theatre performance staged by the college Drama Club. In the mean time, events would include musical evenings organized by the local choir and the college Jazz Club, as well as a bazaar by the local Women's Charity Committee and many other happenings that would keep the town busy and in high spirits throughout the week. The week where everything was to go down was at the end of the academic year right after schools closed.

And so it was that everyone was waiting with great anticipation for the summer to end and for September to begin, so that planning could commence full-swing. You think it's easy organizing something so big? And what of it being a whole year away? So many things needed to be put into place that an organizing frenzy had begun, mostly on the part of the women, as soon as the decision had been made public. Club meetings, delegating responsibilities and the general layout of the events, including every little thing in between, had to be planned right down to a T. In previous years they had arranged for the setup of a Luna Park, but this year the whole town wanted to outdo itself in a spectacle of events that everyone would remember for a long time to come.

CHAPTER 2 : LET THE SHOW BEGIN

SEPTEMBER 10, 1973

Mayor Joseph Cohen had called Copperville's administrative council to order so that the celebration procedures could be made official. Since they were also celebrating 80 years from the town's founding, the Town Hall was all cleaned up already sporting several flags and banners, in lieu of the arrival of various representatives of the cultural events to take place. The mayor was sitting at his office desk, waiting for the councilman in charge to inform him of his guests' arrival. He intended on entering the conference room last, mostly for effect, but also because he knew they would all try and corner him into procuring for themselves a more prominent placement in the week's events. But the commencement and length of events had already been settled and would last a week, starting on Sunday, June thirtieth and end on Sunday, July Seventh 1974.

The mayor was focusing on some papers in front of him when he heard a light knock on his office door. Looking at his clock, he knew it was too early to be called for the council meeting. He frowned, figuring it might be David, his advisor, looking to ask more inane questions. The truth is the mayor did not much like David Carradine, the local councilor for Civic and Cultural Affairs, because he liked to project himself as overly cultured and tended to try and control all coordinative efforts for the celebrations. Given the fact that Carradine would be running in the local elections next winter, it was obvious that he was trying to secure for himself alone all future praise for the celebrations' success.

"Come in," he said in a gruff voice, and lowered his head to look busy.

The door opened and in walked a young girl. Treading lightly she approached the desk and sat down in a chair opposite the mayor.

"Good morning, Mr. Mayor," she teased.

At this, the mayor finally looked up to see his daughter sitting across from him.

"Well hello there," he said, softening his stern look. "To what do I owe the pleasure of your company, Nanita?"

"Did you forget I'm waiting on that birth certificate? I have to

take my papers in to college today.”

“Of course not,” he said. “I have them right here, I just forgot you were coming in for them today.”

“Yup, it’s today alright,” she said, making herself comfortable.

Joseph looked through the pile of papers in his Outgoing shelf and extracting his daughter’s birth certificate slid it along the desk towards her. Nanita took the document, put it in her bag and continued to stare at her father as if there was something she wanted to ask, but didn’t know how. Joseph knew that look and not wasting time, confronted her.

“What is it? Did you have an argument with your mother?”

“Freda wants me to help out with the bazaar the Women’s Charity Committee is organizing for charity,” she said, obviously displeased.

“And?”

“I told her she could forget about it, I don’t want to hang around those old hags that’ll be there,” she said bursting into giggles.

“So you’ve decided to focus solely on your studies?” Joseph asked with hidden relief, peering at Nanita curiously.

Even though Nanita was a good student, she wasn’t the kind to stay home and devote all her time to studying.

“Of course not,” she replied coolly. “I’m thinking of joining the college Drama Club, helping out wherever they might need me.”

Joseph knew well where this conversation was going but he retained his poker face a while longer.

“Have you told your mother?” he smiled.

“It doesn’t concern her,” she said petulantly. “It concerns you and me,” she said smiling sweetly at him.

“And why exactly does it concern me?”

“Because you are going to talk to the Dean, Nigel Gallahand,” she replied with unexpected seriousness. “And don’t act like you don’t know what I want, because you do.”

“Oh, boy...” muttered Joseph then exhaled deeply. “Sweetie, do you really think they’ll let you play so late in the year? The club has so many students who’ve already been there, waiting to get a part in the play. Why would they give one to a new girl?”

“Aha! So you were lying when you told me I was so good in my High School play?” said Nanita feigning insult.

“No, you were very good,” conceded Joseph. “But this year

they're going to make a really serious effort, with more people attending the performance than usual."

"Bingo!" said Nanita, with a mischievous smile. "That's exactly why I need to be in the play this year."

"I don't know. . . I'll try and pull some strings, see what I can do."

"Don't try. Just do. Either way," she added hastily, "they should let me try out for an audition and if they still don't like me, fine. But they have to give me a fair chance."

Joseph knew that his daughter had the ability to make his winter a very bleak one if he didn't cater to her fancy. He also knew that in truth his weakness for Nanita would compel him to try and satisfy her every caprice.

"Alright, time to leave me alone now, darling. I promise you I'll try my best," he said, indicating the piles of paper in front of him.

Nanita ran toward him, gave him a noisy kiss on the cheek and left, letting the door slam behind her. The mayor turned to his papers again, feeling a little more chipper than before. More than half an hour went by before he looked at the time again. By the chatter and hubbub coming from the conference room next door, he could tell it was starting to fill up. He was just about to make a call when a tall, attractive woman bolted through his office door in a hurry.

"Good morning Freda," he said, looking at her quizzically. She wasn't the type to be melodramatic without good reason.

"And to you," she said drily, sitting down where her daughter had sat not an hour ago. "I need to talk to you."

"I heard," he interjected her. "She already told me herself. She came to pick up her papers for college; she had an appointment with the college Admissions office today."

"Really?" she replied suspiciously. "It's just, her appointment is today at four, and she could have picked it up from me since she knew I'd be at the meeting today. . ." she drifted off.

Joseph smiled inwardly. That kid had him wrapped around her little finger. She was the apple of his eye. He was late in marrying and when he finally decided to marry at 40, he realized that having Nanita couldn't have made him happier; in his eyes, she couldn't have been a more perfect daughter.

"Never mind," he said calmly.

“Did she maybe tell you what she’s planning on actually doing this year?”

Joseph felt trapped between the devil and the deep blue sea. He had to tell Freda.

“She wants to act.”

Freda remained silent. Not breaking the chilly silence, she raised herself from her seat with feigned composure and obviously annoyed, exited the office without a word. Joseph knew he hadn’t heard the last of that matter. He’d make up for it by giving the Women’s Charity Committee a good slot in the week’s celebrations.

Not long after, Joseph heard a discreet knock at his door. Looking up he saw David Carradine step into his office, saying “They’re all here. They’re waiting for us.”

The mayor got up from his desk and gathered an armful of papers. Attempting at humor, he asked, “Is everything ready David or are they going to eat us alive?”

“Everything is under control, Joseph,” he added, following the mayor into the conference room. Their entrance didn’t seem to faze any of the guests, who were talking vividly between themselves. That’s what you get when you live in a small town and everyone knows everyone. And of course, everyone knows everything about everyone else; there is never a shortage of gossip in a small town. Then again, this kept everyone on an even keel. The mayor sat down and started talking loudly over the voices.

“Good morning all.” The noise continued. He repeated, this time even louder, “Good morning!”

The clamour finally died down, and turning to face him, everyone resigned themselves to the idea that the meeting had to officially begin at some point.

“Great, let’s get started then, we have lots to discuss so let’s not take all day,” he said. “I’m sure you all know why I called this meeting. The 80-year anniversary of our town’s founding will commence on Sunday, June thirtieth 1974. After the morning service, I suggest we kick-off with the Women’s Charity Committee bazaar in the Town Hall. This proposition was made by Mr. Carradine,” he said, looking at the councilor obliquely.

David stared blankly at the mayor and finally picking up on his cue, nodded vigorously in agreement. The town women were a force to

be reckoned with, especially for someone looking to make a career in local government. Some hushed chatter indicated that the first proposition had been unofficially approved. Joseph carried on.

“So. On July third, the Wednesday, we’ll be holding the rodeo show at the train station, and on Sunday the seventh the celebrations will be rounded off with a stage performance by the college Drama Club.” He paused. “The dates for these specific events are not subject to change and must therefore be finalized early on, since they require particular conditions and arrangements.”

No one felt like challenging the mayor on this statement and people started shifting their papers around or talking quietly amongst themselves. At that moment the phone rang. The mayor answered in a low voice, “Hello?” then added, “I’ll call you right back.” Turning to Carradine, he ordered sharply, “Take care of scheduling and I’ll be back right away. Just don’t forget that once something’s booked, it stays that way; no changes can be made after that.”

The councilor looked at the mayor puzzled but Joseph just nodded as if to say he’d explain later. Once the mayor had disappeared into his office, Carradine seized the opportunity to show everyone that from now he was in charge and was equally competent as the current mayor.

“Right then,” he said loudly over everyone. “Since the bazaar will be held on the first Sunday of celebrations’ week, that gives Ms. Moreto the opportunity to have the square available for her musical happenings on the following Saturday.”

Speaking just loud enough to be heard by most of the room, the college Dean, Nigel Gallahand, turned to professor Nick Hurmo and said snidely, “David thinks he can get into her pants, but he’s got no idea.”

Nick Hurmo, professor of Philosophy at the college and long-standing advisor of the college Drama Club, turned beet-root red up to his ears. His fondness for the maestro and local choir conductor of Copperville was a known secret. It was also a known secret that Ms. Liza Moreto would sometimes go out of town and usually returned looked especially reinvigorated. There wasn’t a lack of speculation and talk on this subject but no one knew for sure what has going on.

The fracas about to break out in the conference room was cut short by Carradine who said loudly, “Ms. Moreto, would please do the

honours of briefing us?"

Liza was a rather attractive woman of about forty. Her beauty, though not exquisite, retained a sensual quality that made men think of a juicy Hollywood starlet. Her dress-sense and her behaviour seemed to tease men by saying, 'You can look but you cannot touch. I'm the one who chooses you.' And that appeared to be her philosophy in life. It is said that several landholders claim to have seen her in far off bars and even paid to sleep with her, but that was probably a myth she kept alive for her own purposes. To say she was a woman of luke-warm temperament would be a disservice to her reputation.

"Right," she said hoarsely. "On Saturday morning we will have the children's choir perform, early afternoon we have a quartet lined up and in the evening a swinging jazz band."

She didn't have time to finish before everyone started clapping. Such events were always welcome to break the monotony of small-town life; the music coupled with free-flowing alcohol helped lubricate the town's spirits, and flirtations abounded in the young and old alike.

"And of course," she added gracefully, "don't forget that on Wednesday, after the rodeo show at the train station, we're going to set up line-dancing and live country music."

Liza felt pleased with herself at having gained everyone's approval; she glowed as everyone clapped and made positive remarks. Carradine tried to bring order to the conference room by tapping his pencil on the side of his water glass. Eventually, once the ruckus had died down again, he continued.

"Father Camillio, you have the floor, as well as Tuesday," trying to be funny.

Camillio was a sweet priest who represented all four of the town's churches at the council meeting. Turning to the young cleric next to him as if to draw courage, he let out a little cough then proceeded.

"If no one has any objections, we thought of setting up amusement parks in the church yards. That way we may also be part of the celebrations, even if in a secular way. Of course, our churches are always open, and we will continue our daily services, but we promise you on Tuesday we will focus all our energies on making sure the children have fun."

"An excellent idea, Father" said Carradine smiling, pleased that

all events were moving along swimmingly. The townsfolk would remember this week for a long time to come; it was the most important week and the mayor had handed it to him on a plate.

“I think that for Thursday we can organize a baseball game,” he added, looking to the local team coach for approval, who was also the high school’s gym teacher.

At that moment the mayor came back into the room and hearing this last proposal, interjected hastily, “Not Thursday, I’m afraid. Don’t forget that July fourth is dedicated to independence and so rightfully belongs to the sheriff. He couldn’t make it to today’s meeting, but I spoke to him on the phone and he agreed he’ll make arrangements with the Fire Department for the traditional day parade, and of course for the fireworks’ display in the evening.”

Carradine bit his lip. Just as things were flowing nicely, the mayor had to intervene. The mayor, however, nodded for him to proceed with business.

“Therefore,” Carradine continued cautiously, “the baseball game will be held on Monday. We haven’t decided which team we’ll be playing against but we’ll try and find one in the same league as us so that that the game is fair but interesting. Lastly, the mayor and I have secured, for one day only, a circus!”

A stiff silence befell the room. Dean Gallahand raised his hand to speak.

“Apart from the general expenses to set this whole week up, don’t you think the program is a little packed? How will we coordinate so many events in such few days? If we mess up, there’s no easy comeback from public humiliation!”

The mayor stood up and said imposingly, “Mr. Carradine will be the general coordinator. Relax and fear not, everything will work out just fine. We are determined to offer our town what it deserves and be sure we will succeed. Initially, monthly meetings will be held for everyone involved, as well as between individual teams. I will personally handle Public Relations for the week’s events.”

Carradine felt like the mayor had tossed him a hot potato, and that he’d simultaneously managed to make himself a guest of honour to this whole shindig; but it was too late to protest or react in any way. Trying to bide his time before the meeting came to an end, he turned to the college Dean.

“Dean, you haven’t told us what you are going to be staging for us this year.”

“Yes, Mr. Hurmo hasn’t decided yet,” he said coolly. “But you can trust me, we will be ready when the time comes and you won’t need to pay a cent either. As it is, we stage performances every year, so this year shouldn’t be any different for us.”

By saying this, the Dean simply confirmed what he knew to be true; he was positive that the college would live up to the town’s expectations and put on a stellar show. He was probably one of the few in town who had nothing to lose from this whole shebang. He continued with utter confidence. “From now on, Mr. Hurmo will keep you updated on our progress, though we will be getting into full swing come December. Until then we will be doing all things pre-production: selection of actors, confirmation of the play to be staged, settings, lights, you get the picture.”

In reality, everyone present felt like they were that ones that would be doing things for Nigel Gallahand. He was the lucky one, getting to reap the rewards and praise without having to lift a finger. The time had come, though, for the mayor to call the gathering to a close and set the date for their next meeting at the end of October.

“Thank you all for coming. And please don’t forget, Mr. Carradine will be at your disposal for anything you need,” he smiled, “day or night.”

Turning to the two men, he said “Mr. Gallahand, Mr. Hurmo. May I please see you in my office for a moment?” Leading the way, he allowed for them to step into his office then followed, closing the door behind him. They sat down and the mayor cleared his throat discreetly.

“Nigel,” he said with gravity. “Dean. I have a small favor to ask of you, and of Mr. Hurmo as well, in fact.” They both stared back inquisitively.

“I think I recall,” he started, trying to make his tone of voice more pleasant, “that for a while now, the Drama Club has made it a rule of not using freshmen as actors, but employs them as helpers, like in make-up, settings, that sort of thing. Correct?”

“And?” said Nigel.

“Well, this year, I’m kindly asking you to break that tradition. Hold auditions for all students and decide upon the best for the role.

Who knows? You might unearth some hidden talent in the process,” he said, searching their faces for their reactions.

Nigel looked at him quizzically, trying to figure out why such a proposal was being brought to the table.

“Joseph, why don’t you just cut to the chase and tell us what you want?”

Joseph visibly lost his composure, and staring briefly at his papers in front of him, he laced his fingers and placed them on the desk. Hesitantly, he continued, “Well, you see, my daughter is going to be a freshman this year at college. I’m not asking for any favors, only that you give her a fair chance. Have her audition and if she’s no good, then no problem.”

Nick Hurmo looked at the Dean. He knew the mayor was a strong card to hold in one’s deck and he figured he’d do well to keep him on his side. At the end of the day, he had nothing to lose.

“Nigel,” he added, quick to take a neutral position on the matter, “I have no objection opening up the auditions to everyone, so long as you also approve.”

Nigel peered into his hands and then, lifting his index finger toward the mayor, concluded, “Alright, Joseph, I agree; but only on two conditions. One, if your girl can’t act for shit, she is not getting up on that stage. And two, regardless of the outcome of the first condition, I want a good number of my people included in that list of official guests. Agreed?”

Joseph extended his arm for a handshake. “Agreed,” he concluded.

And with that, the meeting finally came to an end. Whatever had to be said, had been said.

SEPTEMBER 21, 1973

Holding a piece of paper in one hand, professor Hurmo walked down the corridor of the main college building toward the announcements’ board for student clubs and societies. The academic year was already under way, but a week had gone by and the Drama Club still hadn’t made any announcement relating to when rehearsals would start or what else their meetings would include. Many students were waiting to see what was involved in joining the Drama Club before

signing up. Singing up for students clubs was a strategic move that many felt would determine their future. Gradually, several students started following Hurmo down the long corridor to the announcements' board. It was known that the professor was the Drama Club's advisor and he was used to having students try and sweet-talk him into giving them even a helper's position in whichever play was being staged at the time. When it came to improving one's romantic status, being part of the Drama Club was better even than being in one of the college sports team.

The announcement was simple and to the point:

On October 3rd, at 4 p.m., the Drama Club will hold its first members' meeting. New members may apply.

The only one who didn't rush to read the announcement was Nanita. Even though she knew that getting into the club was the first step, she was saving her energies for all that she hoped would follow.