



# PETTY

THE BIOGRAPHY

WARREN ZANES



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# 1976

I wasn't much more than a child, lost in the land of the lost. It was preadolescence. My brother, four years older, had twisted my mother's arm and had her growing pot by the garbage bag full. I thought it was a beanbag chair in his back bedroom, until I caught him smoking it. My sister, two years older, was wearing homemade dresses and collecting volumes of fairy tales from around the world. I would avoid her in the hallways at school. There was no father at home. That was when I heard Tom Petty's music for the first time, on WBCN in Boston. FM radio was in its AOR phase and seemed like it would be there forever. The song was "Breakdown."

The Heartbreakers stepped into a shifting landscape, a moment of category confusion. "New wave" hadn't emerged as the near catchall term that it would become. Singer-songwriters were generally regarded as musicians who played acoustic guitars, didn't dance or otherwise bring any trace of James Brown's influence into the room, and between songs talked lightly of politics to well-behaved audiences. On that first Heartbreakers album, Tom Petty wore a leather jacket—he wasn't going to be thrown in with James Taylor. And the songs were too short, too close to Chuck Berry to land the group in the rock territory where Led Zeppelin still held the cave. The Heartbreakers opened shows for KISS. And then for Al Kooper. They were booked as an opener for Rush, for the Runaways, once even for a Tom Scott and the L.A.

Express show, where an audience member called out, "What is this? The Monkees?" Not sure what else to do, critics regularly dropped Petty and his band into the "punk" category. Soon enough, new wave would give him another place to live. But even that didn't last: before long, people started calling them a "rock-and-roll band."

It was a good moment for music; even if denigrating it was the necessary pose, pissing on Foreigner and Styx as if they were an active threat. Punk, while not a thing of the mainstream, had a kind of cleansing effect that extended upward from below. A lot became possible. Talking Heads, Elvis Costello, Mink Deville, Rockpile, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, Television, Graham Parker—all seemed like they belonged to the same family, and punk was somehow their birth mother, though many of them were at work years before Malcolm McLaren started selling clothes on King's Road. For those who did have records out before punk became "official," punk gave them an extended, sometimes dysfunctional family.

In the home I grew up in, we alternated between listening to WROR, an "oldies" station—thanks to a hippie uncle raised in the fifties—and WBCN, which played most of the acts named above. Something in the new music reminded us of what we liked in the old stuff. But Petty seemed to connect those two worlds better than anyone. Not the intellectual gymnast that Elvis Costello was, never as grandly romantic as Springsteen or as simultaneously strange and canny as Talking Heads, Petty nonetheless got in there a little deeper than the others.

"Breakdown" had as much space as "Green Onions." The Heartbreakers often revealed who they were in what they didn't play. It set them apart. If they were born under the sign of the Beatles and the Stones, the band was also a distinctly southern act—though not in the cartoon sense of, say, the Charlie Daniels Band, with the rehashed southern imagery that, for whatever reason, played well in middle America. The Heartbreakers had a different southernness, in some ways more like the Dan Penns and Eddie Hinton, musicians and writers who had been raised on the black sounds around them, players who held back when there was a song in the room, because there was a song in the room.

But there was something more going on, something beyond the groove, the taste, the lean but tough musicality. Petty's voice. He wasn't obvious as a lead singer. But there was a character in there. What would one day be cel-

ebredated as his defiance was present from the beginning. But it would have been nothing, would have meant nothing, without his romanticism. The defiance would have been empty. Petty's romanticism wasn't along the lines of Bruce Springsteen's or Tom Waits's, two songwriters who worked with elaborate panoramas of image, character, and place. His narratives were always more skeletal, perhaps less self-conscious. All three writers created songs that could be seen. They were children of the movies, bringing to their songwriting what they learned in darkened theaters. But Petty's scenes were fewer, as though half the storyboards had been thrown in the dumpster out back. Perhaps because of that, Petty made a little more room for the listener. His weren't the meticulously painted landscapes of "Jungleland" or even "Jersey Girl," songs in which people spoke of carrying guns across the river and ran into "corner boys." Not that Petty didn't have the detail—but it was the spare way in which he used it. He wasn't out to do for Florida what the others did for New Jersey and Los Angeles. Maybe because of that, you didn't get tangled up in information that ultimately took you too far from where you lived. "American Girl" seemed to be wide open for listeners to see themselves in the picture. I certainly saw myself. Something happened when that voice delivered those words in that way.

I didn't think it through in this way then, of course, not when I first found Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. I just knew in the drag of those years he was a good person to have around. It's the time when music means more than it ever will again. But it wasn't just me, and it wasn't just about being young; it seemed like everyone in my house was hanging on one Petty song or another. He grasped our circumstances. My mother eventually stopped growing pot for her kids. But she still listens to *Damn the Torpedoes*.



Ten years after hearing my first Heartbreakers records, just out of my teens but by that time in a rock-and-roll band and on the road, I was in my hotel room at the Hyatt on Sunset, the less than spectacular but somehow historically significant hotel Led Zeppelin had christened "the Riot House." We were only there because at some point we had been told to want that, and we were good students of foolishness. My band had just finished a three-night run at the Roxy. Every evening from the stage we informed the audience that we wanted Tom Petty to come down to a show, as if they had some pull. During

the days between the gigs, in every interview we did, we said the same thing to journalists. We figured someone out there had to know more than we did about how to get Tom Petty out of the house.

But the last show was over and it was almost 3:00 a.m. I was in the bass player's room, where the party was unfolding, when I heard the phone ring in my adjoining room. I went in and picked it up.

"Is this Warren?"

"Yeah."

"This is Tom Petty."

"Who is this?"

"It's Tom Petty . . . but I just drank a bottle of wine. I'm a little drunk."

"You sound like Tom Petty."

"That happens when I drink."

He apologized for not making the show and invited us to come out to his house the next night. So a couple of us did that, went and met a man who seemed almost as socially awkward as we were. We probably stayed too long. He may not have wanted to tell us it was time to leave. His family slept upstairs while we sat in a room below. It was 5:00 a.m. when the wrought iron gates closed behind us. I figured it was a one-off.



A few years later, twenty-two at the time, I was sitting in Petty's home office. My then girlfriend, Alison, was friends with his family, and I had come to know Petty a bit more on a three-month summer tour during which my band opened for his. Just prior to that tour, a fire burned down his family's Encino home, so the Pettys were renting Charo's Beverly Hills villa. I remembered Charo from Hollywood Squares. I had just quit my rock-and-roll band. I was too young to know just how scared I was and why, so I did the obvious thing: I told the person with me about my next band, what I wanted it to be like, how I'd stay out in LA and put it together there. But the person with me wasn't buying it.

"This isn't where bands come from," he said.

I was immediately disappointed, too disappointed to really hear his point. I'd wanted a cheerleader, someone to validate the story I was telling myself. But instead I was getting a truth, one of the unmovable truths in Tom Petty's worldview. He laid into me a little. "If that's what you want to do . . . I mean, if



you want a band," he told me, "you should go back home. Go back home and get one."

However long it had been since he'd run away from Gainesville, Florida, from the rednecks and the college boys calling out for "Satisfaction," however long it had been since that town had both loved him and kicked him down its main streets, he knew it was the place that made him. He didn't find rock and roll in Malibu. He'd brought it with him.

## INTRODUCTION

The author Karen Blixen once said, “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.” But what if a person can’t tell a story about his sorrows? What if his story tells him?

—STEPHEN GROSZ

**The house was different from any Tom Petty had ever lived in. It was in Pacific Palisades, just off Sunset, nothing a man without money could consider; but neither was it a home typical of those the rich and famous are looking for out there in the land of trophies. There were chickens in the yard. It was like a thing ripped from an Adirondacks postcard and dropped into a redwood grove by the Pacific. There were no pastels, no Corinthian columns signifying wealth and, however inexactly, taste. It was dark, all knotty pine, with cracks of light visible through some of the logs.**

Not too long after he moved in, an itinerant cleaning lady walked up the driveway—anything is possible in LA—and he hired her. She stole what she could before he caught on, more than a month in. Things like that happened in this place. But, finally, what made it most unlike any other home he’d lived in was this: he was alone in it.



Petty found himself in the “Chicken Shack” right on the heels of a remarkable string of successes. There wasn’t much glory left to dream up that he hadn’t already experienced. It had been years since he’d passed through the various phases that begin when kids sign record contracts: the excitement, the expectations wide and high, the astonishment that, yes, it was

really happening, the seemingly endless waiting, opening slots on tours with the wrong headliners, the hotels blending one into the next, some fun with loose cash, cars, women, houses, a song on the charts, adventures in Winnebagos and buses, some disappointment, monotony, interactions with both the wise men and the clowns of the record industry, and—for the privileged few who actually begin to taste stardom—the unexpected isolation. This had gone on for long enough to normalize into something he could expect to find waiting for him each day when he awoke.

Tom Petty had taken up residence in a situation that even the most hopeful musician has to set aside as fantasy. And he'd honored what he'd been given by doing what he could to make the best possible records, one after another. He held himself to that. Every song had to count. When he wasn't on the road, he was in the studio. His family knew the deal, and suffered for it. By the time he really entered manhood, he was locked into the album cycle and knew little about life outside of it. On the music side, the results were pretty straightforward: in a culture of argument and friendships lost because you couldn't see eye to eye on what acts meant the most, Petty was the guy most everybody agreed on.

His story has a whiff of Horatio Alger and at least a little Elvis to it: a shitkicker from some two-bedroom ranch down in North Florida *got out*. And once he *was* out, he walked, without a lot of fanfare, into the room where the big dreams are kept, where he was given a place to hang his hat and coat. It had happened. Yet there he was, so many years into it, alone in a strange house in Pacific Palisades, staying in bed most days. Getting high was the last thing that seemed to be working. The songs had all but stopped coming.

None of us knew this. We saw the guy with well-worn and hard-earned rock-and-roll success, the nod of approval from his heroes, a wry, slightly twisted smile on his face—a musician who, apparently, wouldn't know how to fuck up a hot streak if he had to. And he'd been on one for a long time. Even his inner circle, small by most standards, had not adjusted its view of the man. No one was fully aware of what was going on out there in that house, how low Petty had gone. Or how much lower he would go. He was falling from a high place, and no one caught on when he lost his footing.

A little more than a decade before, after touring with and behind Bob Dylan for almost two years, a formative if sometimes strange, sometimes

euphoric, sometimes maddening collaboration arranged by Dylan himself, a chain of creative high points raised Tom Petty, already a platinum-selling artist, to the status of rock-and-roll elder statesman. He was young for the job but few filled the position better.

At the outset of that run, Petty stood alongside George Harrison, Dylan, Roy Orbison, and Jeff Lynne as a Traveling Wilbury. And he was there at a Beatle's request. Then, despite the lukewarm, even *harsh* initial response of MCA, his label at the time, he released his first solo recording and found himself with the biggest record of his career. "Free Fallin'," "I Won't Back Down," and "Runnin' Down a Dream" were playing everywhere. He followed that with another major release, this time done with his longtime band, the Heartbreakers, which generated two hits, including "Learning to Fly." Then, as if by that time the whole thing had a momentum that couldn't be slowed, a greatest hits package came out that yielded another hit in the form of a bonus track, "Mary Jane's Last Dance." *Greatest Hits* ended up going past the ten times platinum mark. In its wake, Petty looped back to solo territory and created *Wildflowers*, the recording he still considers his best. From that album, another hit, "You Don't Know How It Feels," won the Grammy, somewhat casually. A deeper collection, six CDs deep, entitled *Playback* was then released. Intended only for the listeners fanatical in their devotion to Petty, it caught everyone off guard and went platinum itself. The timeline was like a pileup of good fortune.

But it was with all of that accumulated success and stature lending a golden sheen to his name that Petty came back down through the clouds. He had acted on what some considered an overdue decision and ended a long marriage that had started where many do, in possibility and promise, before growing complicated, and then going dark. True to the nature of divorce, no one in his family was quite prepared for what would happen on the upper floors when the foundation was ripped out. Petty included. All that had fueled his mind and spirit since he was a young man dreaming his way out of Florida, the grand ambitions, the visions of glory, the self-made character of his success, the drive to write songs—it all seemed like cartoons screened on a monkey's back.

When making a follow-up to *Wildflowers*, Rick Rubin noticed that when Tom Petty did make it into the studio to work, he was often hiding behind

a pair of sunglasses, sometimes even walking with a cane. Entertainment wasn't a world in which you asked a lot of questions. So Rubin didn't.

Petty closed himself off from the world he'd built. Visitors came to see him: Stevie Nicks, his manager Tony Dimitriades, a few bandmates. But even that traffic slowed. And when it *was* still coming, most guests didn't get too far past the front door. Some speculated that he'd given himself over to drug addiction. Others felt sure that he was having a midlife breakdown of some kind. For a while there, he was behaving more like an animal that had gone off to die than a man at the peak of his career.

Back among the redwoods, Tom Petty felt like he was at the end of something. And though he wasn't, he would have to pull himself up to see the vague outline of a future worth sticking around for.

# 1

## FAMILY SECRETS

Whenever I smell chicken shit, it reminds me of the house my father grew up in.

—TOM PETTY

**Florida was a good enough place to run away to. You at least had a chance there if** you needed to hide from some black mark on your record, some misadventure better left in another town. It was more uncharted and more unchecked than many other places, in the way that parts of the American West had been at one time. Of course, Florida had no prairie, plains, or deserts of the kind that gave western life its grand character, its John Ford vistas. If one writer described Florida as a “lone and distant place,” it was a vain effort to mask the brute facts with romantic but ultimately vague language. Florida was a swamp.

The strange history of the Black Seminoles is one reminder of that swamp’s role as a place one layer beneath the law. Escaped slaves, coming from the states just north of Florida, didn’t always head up the eastern seaboard in their often hopeless bids for freedom. Florida was the southern option. Down there, the Seminole Indians took them in by the hundreds. But this was no underground railroad, no temporary refuge. The escaped slaves became the Black Seminoles, many of them transported to Oklahoma reservations as tribe members when the deals were cut years later. In their case, Florida served its purpose.

It was around 1910 when William Petty needed a place to run to. He gave no thought as to what his decision to move to Florida might mean for

the next generations—he was just getting out of a bind. Petty, called “Pulpwood” by some, had been working in the Georgia lumber trade, turning timber into pulp. Without significant forethought, he’d married a Cherokee woman who worked as a cook in one of the mill camps. He wouldn’t be the last in the family line to find himself marrying in haste. Maybe he was in love, but there aren’t records for that kind of thing. What he came up against very quickly was this: for a Native American at that time, there weren’t options. A Cherokee female wasn’t going to have an easy time moving through American life, certainly not at the side of her white husband. Soon enough, the lumberman felt the disdain of the men who worked with him. On a few occasions, it got rough. More than once he and his bride had to move on. At some point, however, the other millworkers found Petty’s limit. He got some blood on his hands. That’s when Florida started to seem like a good idea. They got away fast and never again saw the state they had once called home.

Even at that time there were a few different Floridas. Wealthy speculators like Henry Flagler, “the man who built Florida,” belonged to one of them. Flagler, alongside John D. Rockefeller, had made a fortune with Standard Oil. Different from Rockefeller, Flagler blew his fortune developing Florida. His first hotel, the Ponce de Leon, helped establish fantasy as one among Florida’s native languages. Flagler was what friends and admirers and some history books call a “visionary.” He had witnessed Palm Beach in its natural state, seen a city of luxury in his mind’s eye, and then built it. His mansion, Whitehall, was drooled over by the *New York Herald*, wherein it was described as North America’s Taj Mahal. His railroad, which he brought down the east coast of the state and out over the waters to the Florida Keys, not without massive expenditure, was a symbol of the kind of ambitions that would make the Florida of today. But in the shadows of such ambitions, there were the laborers on whose backs such dreams were carried. Those laborers lived in the other Florida. And *that* was the one that became home to Petty and his Cherokee bride, whom he called Sally.

When the couple got down there, they moved around, sometimes as migrant laborers in the produce machine. Mixed together with other southern poor, blacks, and Caribbeans, all of whom got work and lost work contingent on nature’s whims, they may have been free of some discriminations but only by hiding in the midst of others. Those landowners who

made money growing citrus products and winter vegetables minimized their gamble with nature by paying the lowest wages they could get away with. A bad turn in the weather—and there were some legendary freezes, including those of the winter of 1894–95—could send waves of misery through the industry. The hardship was always hardest among the laborers.

By the time Farm Security Administration photographers were crisscrossing the nation during the Depression era, capturing in pictures the conditions among the country's very poor, Florida provided plenty of human imagery. Among the migrant workers were faces that told a sorry story of American working life.

Petty and his wife eventually got out of the unforgiving lifestyle of the migrant farmer. Perhaps because some time and miles had passed since that “incident” in Georgia, Petty was able to get back into the pulpwood business and even buy a plot of land. At last, the soil beneath their feet was their own, and nothing meant more if you were coming from the shit-hole of migrant labor.

It was a few acres near a place called Reddick, in Marion County, back in the woods and away from town. There were shady oaks and a few magnolias. The soil allowed for farming, and they grew corn and whatever else they needed. With a few chickens to supply eggs and the occasional meat for the table, they had a degree of self-sufficiency, if living at a near subsistence level. Inside their home, small by any standards, the walls were patched with varnished newspaper. The trouble in their lives, whenever trouble came, started when Sally's dark skin got unwanted attention. If staying home was one solution to that, it seemed just fine to her. She was a family secret in human form.

“I'd never seen an outhouse until I saw theirs,” says Tom Petty of his grandparents' place. “They had a little cornfield next to a tar paper kind of house, up on blocks. I remember newspaper patches on the walls, which struck me as funny, you know? There was a big iron pump that brought water into the kitchen. I don't have any memory of a conversation with my grandfather, just that he wore a hat and sat out on the porch with other men. But he wasn't inviting. Nice enough, I guess, but you didn't walk over to him or anything.” At least three children were raised in the Reddick house, including twins named Earl and Pearl. Their skin a little dark, they all did like their mother and got where they needed to be going when color



became an issue. "It makes you learn to shut up," says the grandson. "They knew that there was no point in trying to be anything other than a white family." The further one got from being a white family, the harder life became. And theirs was hard enough. A number of Cherokees changed their names to Macintosh.

Fishing, hunting, doing what they could to avoid their father's guiding hand, which often came down hard and without a word passing from his lips, Sally's children lived almost as if they were in the century that had passed rather than the one that was under way. They learned the woods. They knew how to hunt the wild pigs and turkeys in the thicket, to deal with alligators and snakes in or near the water, including those that were better left alone. Some of Florida's best fishermen came out of worlds like that. "I think that's where my father felt most at home," says Petty of his father, Earl. "Being in a small boat on one of those lakes, that's where he came alive. What he loved more than anything was to be in a fucking swamp. And there were so many in central North Florida. There, he was a master at existing. Wasn't afraid of anything. I once saw him push an alligator, from right behind his head, just push him down in the water. Laughing." The presence of the Ocala-Gainesville line, with a whistle heard for miles, was the only sign that there was something going on somewhere else that might prove another option. Knowing a little something about elsewhere, it wasn't a draw to Earl's parents. But the sound eventually got to their children. Earl, in particular, started looking down the tracks.

It's difficult today to understand what a train whistle meant to a young man at that time. It was a symbol as loaded as any Earl would ever know. It was the sound of the end of the worst parts of growing up in Reddick. Like having an Indian for a mother. And that's how he thought of her on bad days. He didn't want to be branded an outsider. "We're not really sure if our grandmother's name was Sally or Fannie," Petty says. "My brother thinks it was Sally, but we just don't know. We weren't told a lot, and I guess we asked even less." When Earl eventually did get on that train and head north, he was old enough to know that part of the plan was to find a woman. And he'd be damned sure, he told himself, that she'd be fair-skinned and from another side of life.



Earl Petty met Katherine Avery when he returned from the Second World War, during which he served as an air force groundsman in Egypt. He hadn't just gotten out of Reddick; he'd seen the world. In fact, he'd seen enough of the world to know that Gainesville was about the right distance from Reddick. Any farther was too far. He'd overshot the mark first time around. He didn't need a pyramid in his backyard. And Gainesville was where he found his fair-skinned girl, working at Eli Witt's Candy and Tobacco. He was a driver, and she worked in the office.

Katherine was born in Sycamore, Georgia, to John and Troas Avery. Her family, in search of more, or, at least, better, had moved to Gainesville when she was still young. Sycamore was a small town, not on the path of what was to come. "My mother aspired to be better than that, not to be *country*," Petty says. "But in that respect, she certainly made an interesting choice when she picked a husband." The Florida for which the Averys would set out wasn't one they needed to go to in the night and undercover, like the Pettys. They made their way in broad daylight, fueled by a dream. America had forced its way out of the Depression, and no one wanted to go back where they'd just been. For Katherine and her sisters, Gainesville was the big city. By the time the war ended, she had let herself get caught up in the midcentury hope for something better.

In 1945, the University of Florida in Gainesville had 587 students enrolled. By 1946 it had more than 8,000. That rate of growth meant a few things. One, business was good in the halls of learning. Two, if you lived in town and weren't a part of the world of young people, you were going to be outnumbered. It was a buoyant time. If the state of Florida wasn't growing quite as quickly as the University of Florida, it was boom times nonetheless. Florida was well on its way to becoming *Florida*. Land of Sunshine.

To reimagine the fifties, whether in Gainesville or anywhere else in America, means setting aside some images and ideas about the era that have all but hardened into place. Too often the period is remembered as a time of ruthless conformity, with Little Richard providing counterpoint along the way. In significant ways, the push for conformity was real. But the convenience offered by the "decade" as an organizing tool for history, and the widespread tendency to establish the "straight" fifties in order to celebrate the sixties and its breakthroughs, has distorted the picture of midcentury life. The duck-and-cover fifties, with its blacklists and anxiet-

ies played out in Senate subcommittees on juvenile delinquency has become *the* fifties. But was the conformity of the era simply an effort, imposed from above, to control difference? Or was that conformity a choice made by many and for good reason?

In Earl Petty's case, conformity had its benefits. It was bound up with an interest in leaving the Depression and the war behind and a desire to be a part of a situation that was, finally, about the "good life." Fitting in also meant putting distance between himself and the small house back in Reddick. So long as he was a Cherokee, he was an outsider, and far less likely to get a share of the rewards. In the part of the world he'd chosen for himself, even by the late fifties, 99 percent of the population favored laws banning interracial marriage. His parents were on the wrong side of that popular position. No, conformity wasn't a weakness, it was a place to get to as soon as he could. "As a Cherokee," says his son, "Earl would be on the underside of the American dream. But if you were a white male in the fifties, it could be an incredible time.

"In so many ways," he continues, "my father was like a man hiding out in plain view, afraid of being found out. I think there was a lot of theater in his life, a lot of masks, a lot of acting. But I sure didn't know this then. I just thought he was an asshole. It would take me years to get past what he did to me in order to understand his situation. I only saw the outer stuff, the bravado, the machismo, the anger. We knew so little about the world he came from, because he kept it behind a wall he'd built himself. I think he felt he had to. And, you know, he was probably right. I didn't think about what it meant to be a Native American, what it meant to be a kid who grew up in a shack with his Indian mother and his white father, suddenly in a college town, just as America was moving full speed ahead into the glorious fifties. That's quite a scene, really."

There are books that throw light on the era's lost men. *The Organization Man* of 1956 tells a compelling, sometimes chilling story of postwar life. The author, William Whyte, seizes on a shift from an America founded on ideals of individualism and the "Protestant work ethic" to a country wherein a corporate sensibility begins to choke off that spirit. It is, in some respects, the sociological companion piece to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Whyte also puts a finger on an aspect of fifties aspiration that speaks to Earl Petty's situation. The suburbs, he argues, were a "new melting pot."

There were those who had been pushed to the margins as ethnic outsiders who, now ensconced in the middle-class suburban environment, could transition into being “white.” This obviously had limits, harsh for those, such as African Americans, who had no chance of “passing.” But for a mixed-race Earl Petty, it meant having a shot. *If* he did it right.

The same year he married Kitty, 1947, they found a small house where they lived for a few years before moving to the two-bedroom ranch that would be their home for the rest of their lives. As far as being half-Cherokee was concerned, it was not discussed. Within three years of their marriage, their first child, Thomas Earl Petty, was born. It was 1950 when Tom came home from the hospital. With him, Earl and Kitty would move to that second house, a small place off the park, surrounded by live oaks draped with Spanish moss. Just one year after Tom’s birth, *Time* magazine would declare the generation to which his parents belonged the “silent generation.” Born around the Depression and living through the war, they had things they wanted to leave behind, as if there were a collective memory bank they agreed to seal off. The optimism of midcentury American life was real. Earl felt it as he drove the truck for Eli Witt’s tobacco and candy company. But, still, a darkness tugged at him.

Troas Avery, Kitty’s mother, didn’t simply have issues with her son-in-law Earl Petty; she had issues with all Earls. She’d married two of them. Her eldest daughter, Evelyn, married one. By the time her daughter Kitty did the same, Troas was refusing to speak the name “Earl.” She called Kitty’s Earl “Petty.” She called Evelyn’s Earl “Jernigan.” The name brought her bad luck. And, in Earl Petty’s case, it wasn’t just the name—she didn’t like *him*. He drank and gambled, without good results in either department. He made it to church on time, yes, but the results weren’t so good there either. And now he was going to try his hand at parenting.

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