EDDIE: A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by

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(The scene is a small, sparsely-furnished and run-down room. TOM and MA are in the room, sitting or standing. They are dressed in clothes that are worn but clean. TOM is sixteen; MA is forty.)

TOM
And if he’s not the right one? Then what do we do?

MA
It’s him; I’m sure.

TOM
I can’t do it unless I’m sure too.

MA
Nobody’s making you do it, and you better decide right quick. Just give me back the gun; it’ll be done with as soon as he walks in that door.

TOM
No.

MA
You don’t even have to watch. Just go on outside and wait.

TOM
No. It’s not your place to kill a man.

MA
See there, you’re old enough to know what’s right and wrong; you don’t need me to tell you anymore. I won’t force you; you know that. If you want to back out--
TOM
I said I'd do it. I have to.

MA
Step it! You don't have to do anything except what you knew is right. You make it sound like I'm pushing you into this. If you won't listen to me--

TOM
Oh come on. You been pounding revenge into my head ever since I knew what it meant. Even before. You're not pushing me now any more than you ever did. And then you drag me all over the country the last six years, looking for him. No, you're not pushing me.

MA
Tom, I tried making a life for you and me, but it just wasn't any use. I had to find him and pay him back, or never knew any peace.

TOM
I'm sorry, Ma.

MA
It had to be finished. I couldn't raise you with his sin hanging over us both, could I? Isn't it a mother's duty to bring her son up right, just like it's a son's duty to look out for his mother? And shouldn't he pay for what he did to me?

TOM
I don't know. You say it has to be, but sometimes--

MA
Tommie, did you forget already how it was to have nothing but beans and bread for supper every single night? Did you think I liked washing floors or working in these greasy truck-stop diners just so we'd have that to eat? Remember how the kids used to tease you because you "didn't have a father"? You knew what was right then, and you stood up to them. And I can't even set foot in a church either, I'm still so ashamed. All because of that one night.

TOM
Ma, I'm sorry. I just forget. Sometimes it seems like it's all past and we ought to let it lay.

MA
No, it's not past as long as he's alive. There's no way I can forgive, or forget. I could almost cry every time I think of the life I should've had, before that--that bum came along. I had a
good life; I was free, white, twenty-one, and I had a good job
and a good home. You can bet it wasn't my fault; I had too much
to lose. I knew right from wrong. Not him, though. You should've
seen how sorry he was, after he'd gotten his thrill.

TOM

Ma, don't talk about it.

MA

Oh, I remember it all, every bit, why shouldn't I talk about it?
He said he'd marry me and love me "forever!" Ha! He could spread
that crap so thick -- I believed him. Nobody else had ever
talked like him. That very first time he saw me, at the store,
and saying how he had to buy something just so he could get a good
look at me. Yeah, he was sorry, and I forgave him, so long as
he'd marry me. He had me fooled right down the line.

TOM

Ma, I know. You don't need to tell me again. I know.

MA

Do you? You don't act like it. So two months later I told him
I was pregnant. That was a pretty picture alright, just like I
used to read about when I was a girl, the two of us alone on the
river bank, and a full moon just coming up over the hill, and the
crickets. When I told him, he just looked at me funny, got in his
car, and drove off. He didn't even say goodbye. I saw the devil
in his eyes then, but it was too late. God, I was so ashamed and
so hurt I was ready to jump in the river, right then. Maybe I
should have, I wouldn't have had to suffer my father kicking me
out and calling me a whore, after I went home and told him the
truth instead of lying. I learned after that, Tommie; you can't
trust anybody you love. I forgot it with you, I guess, but I'm
too old not to need somebody. Don't you see, if you turn on me
too, I -- I just don't know what I'd do. I need you; you're all
I got. You're all I lived for.

TOM

I'll do it. I swear, if it's him I'll kill him. It's got to be
that way. You're right.

MA

God knows, sometimes when I was carrying you I prayed something
would happen. Sometimes I was afraid, because of that one night
and how wrong it all was; but I knew it wasn't my fault and I
wouldn't be punished. I didn't want a baby, not his baby, but one
day I knew you were mine too, and you were all I had.

TOM

I know, Ma. I guess you're all I have.
MA
We just have this one more thing to do, and then we'll be free. You'll be free. You're almost a man now; you got a life to live too.

TOM
I'm happy with you, Ma. But I've got to make sure he's the one.

MA
I told you he is.

TOM
It's been seventeen years.

MA
But I haven't forgotten. I could never forget, not in a hundred years. You just don't forget somebody like that.

TOM
He couldn't have changed?

MA
No, not his eyes. I never saw anybody with eyes like his. He's the one.

TOM
Alright. But I'm going to talk to him first, just to make sure.

MA
You think he'll admit to it? Don't you have any sense at all?

TOM
I don't know. But if he is the one, I'll know it. If he is my father.

MA
Don't call him that. He's not your father; he's just a bum on the street. Don't forget that -- just a bum on the street.

TOM
Okay, okay. But I know I'll be able to tell.

MA
No, it won't work. There's no way you'll be able to tell for sure. He won't admit it, and that's what it'll take to convince you. It's okay; I raised you to think for yourself. But you better give me back the gun.
I will be able to tell.

No you won't.

And I'm not afraid, either.

I'm not calling you a coward. I just don't think you can do it. You won't be sure.

Maybe you're right.

Of course I am.

Look, can we do it this way then? I'll do it for sure, just let me talk to him for a few minutes. If I can be sure, it'll be easier. Maybe he'll accidentally say something, so I'll know, but I'll do it regardless. I swear. Just let me have twenty minutes.

Are you sure? I want you to feel right about it, but I don't want it to go wrong now, after we've hunted all these years.

I told you I can do it. I promised.

Alright, twenty minutes then. I'm believing in you, Tom.

I can do it. But you better wait somewhere else, so he won't know right away.

You're right; he'd probably try to run again, or pretend he never saw me before. It'd just be --

(Slow footsteps are heard coming upstairs.)

Here he comes.

Where can I hide?
TOM
Wasn't there an empty room down the hall?

MA
I think so. I'll be in there, then. I'm counting on you, Tommie.

TOM
Sure, Ma. And give me some time with him, okay? I have to be sure.

MA
It's all up to you now.

(Exit MA. TOM sits on the bed, nervously checking his gun. As the footsteps come closer, he puts it away. Enter EDDIE, a man of about forty-five. His clothes are clean but shabby.)

EDDIE
Hey, who the hell are you? What're you doing in here?

TOM
... I was looking for... the manager. Yeah, I was looking for the manager.

EDDIE
There's no manager here. Who let you in?

TOM
Nobody. The door was unlocked, so I came in.

EDDIE
Listen here, young fella, you don't just go letting yourself in any room you please.

TOM
I was looking for a place to stay. I don't want any trouble. They told me this was a rooming house and I might find a place here.

EDDIE
Who told you?

TOM
Some guys in the cafe. They said--

EDDIE
I don't care what they said, you got no business poking around in somebody's room. If I decided you was a burglar, I could shoot you right now.

TOM
You keep a gun?
EDDIE
That's my business. You just better explain yourself real fast, or I'm calling the cops.

TOM
Aw, look Mister, I don't want any trouble. Look around, I didn't steal anything. And nobody's stopping me from knocking you down and getting out of here, except I don't do stuff like that. I told you I was just looking for a place to stay, and your door was open.

EDDIE
It was, huh? Now, I don't usually leave my door open. That's pretty strange. You sure you didn't just push on it some, maybe put a bobby pin in the lock?

TOM
Please, Mister, all I wanted was a bed. No trouble, just a bed.

EDDIE
I'm not accusing you of nothing, just figured everybody, especially a fellow looks like he's on his own, knows how to get around locked doors and such.

TOM
I don't do stuff like that.

EDDIE
Suppose you tell the truth now. Why don't you have a place? You don't look like a drifter.

TOM
Looks aren't everything. And I'm not running away from home, if that's what you're thinking. I haven't slept in a bed in a week, and I figured I'd have one tonight, regardless.

EDDIE
Regardless of what?

TOM
I'd either have a room or I'd be in jail. That's what I figured; it didn't much matter which it was.

EDDIE
Why in jail? You don't care if they pick you up? That don't sound right.

TOM
Yeah, I guess I care. I'm not breaking any laws.
EDDIE

Except trespassing.

TOM

Yeah, except trespassing, but they'd give me a lot of crap. You
don't know if there's a place around here I can stay, do you?

EDDIE

How you fixed for money?

TOM

Couple dollars.

EDDIE

Yeah, I reckon I could fix it up with the manager tomorrow.
Come on, let's go check out the room down the hall. It might be
empty; was the last time I looked.

TOM

NO! It's not open; I tried the door, but somebody yelled at me to
go away. Yours was the only one open. Suppose you could spare
a glass of water?

EDDIE

Oh, sure.

(EDDIE gets the water.)

That enough?

TOM

Yeah, thanks.

EDDIE

Any time.

TOM

Well, at least I got warm, and thanks for not calling in the cops.
Maybe I better take off now?

EDDIE

You don't look like a drifter. No, you look like a nice kid.

TOM

Yeah, well, I guess I better go now. Maybe I can still find a
place somewhere else. Got any idea where I could look?
EDDIE

Winter's not a very good time for travelling, is it? Mighty uncomfortable out. Young fellow like yourself must have a reason. You sure you're not in any trouble, Boy?

TOM

No, no trouble. Just... just felt like moving around some.

EDDIE

Yeah, I was like that myself, I was your age. How old you say you are?

TOM

Didn't. I'm sixteen, almost seventeen.

What's your name?

EDDIE

T--, hey, wait a minute. What do you want, anyway?

EDDIE

Don't want a thing, just trying to be friendly.

TOM

Yeah? I've met guys like you before. No thanks, Mister. I'm not your kind of boy.

EDDIE

Wait a minute! You act like you forgot there's more than one kind of person in this world.

TOM

I been around enough to know I don't have what you want.

EDDIE

Not everybody's out to take advantage of you, Boy. Take me. Here I am just trying to be friendly, and after all I didn't call in the law. Where I come from we tried to treat strangers like they was our next-door-neighbors. Besides, I don't get much chance to talk to young fellows like yourself.... Sometimes seems I don't talk to anybody. I get pretty lonesome here, maybe as lonesome as you get on the road.

TOM

I get by okay.

EDDIE

No, the fellows here most of them are just no-good drunks; all they ever think about is where the next bottle's coming from.
TOM

You don't look too sober.

EDDIE

Nothing else to do here. Look, we'll make a deal.

TOM

I knew it. See you around, Buddy.

EDDIE

No, wait, hear me out. All I want is somebody to talk to, and you want a place to stay. Well, you stay here and we'll shoot the breeze for awhile, and then I'll give you the room for the night. The door bolts on the inside; that should stop you worrying about me. I'll even throw in some bread and cheese. That's all the food I got right now or I'd offer you more. What do you say?

TOM

What's the catch?

EDDIE

No catch. I just want to help you out.

I don't like charity.

EDDIE

It ain't charity. It's a swap. You don't have to be beholden to me.

TOM

And all you want is to talk? What about?

EDDIE

It don't matter at all. Just as long as we can be friends for awhile.

TOM

That sounds pretty funny to me.

Friends? That sounds funny?

TOM

Maybe not. Okay, you seem like a pretty straight guy; I'll stay here for now. But I'm not making any promises about staying all night.

EDDIE

Suit yourself. May as well introduce myself. I'm Ed. Call me Eddie, my friends do.
TOM

I'm Tom.

EDDIE

Pleased to meet you, Tommie.

TOM

Not Tommie, Tom. I don't like being called Tommie.

EDDIE

Oh, okay, Tom.... Sorry.

TOM

Tommie's for kids.

EDDIE

Sure. How about sitting down over here and I'll get out the food. You're hungry, I bet.

TOM

Yeah, I could use a bite or two. What do you do here?

EDDIE

Not much, few odd jobs. Mostly just sit around and listen to my radio. Why don't you take your coat off, relax a little?

TOM

No! I mean, no, I'll keep it on for now. I still feel chilly. Didn't know it ever got this cold here.

EDDIE

Oh, sure, we get a norther blowing in, drops the temperature forty degrees in an hour. Have to admit it's pretty nasty out now; sorry I can't get my room any warmer. Ever hear what Will Rogers said about weather out here?

TOM

No, can't say as I have.

EDDIE

If you don't like it, wait a day. It's true too, near as I can tell. Say, here's some wine, might warm you up. You know, some days I don't reckon I could get along without a drink. Helps you talk; helps you sleep; helps you pass the time.

TOM

Helps you forget?
EDDIE
Well, sure. I guess it does that too. You got anything to forget? Ha.

TOM
Don't you have anything to forget, Eddie?

EDDIE
Me? Naw.... Here, help yourself.

TOM
No thanks, I don't drink.

EDDIE
Just a drop? Guess I can't blame you; you're probably still scared of me; afraid I might slip you a mickey.

TOM
If I thought that, I wouldn't be here. You might as well give me some, just a small glass. You must be pretty old?

EDDIE
Well, if you call forty-five old, I guess I am. Yeah, I guess I am.

TOM
You don't look that old. You must've lived a clean life.

EDDIE
Oh sure. Clean-living-Eddie they call me. Don't smoke, drink, or screw.

TOM
I bet.

EDDIE
Well, maybe once in a while. Fellow's got to have his fun, right? Like you, you're just bumming around, going wherever you feel like. Not too many young fellows do that these days. I like you, Tom. You're alright.

TOM
I guess so.

EDDIE
I wish I could be as free as you, Tommie.

TOM
Tom. Look, let's not talk about me.
EDDIE
Tom. Okay. I was just going to say that once you get to be my age, you start wanting somewhere to settle down. You get tired of just hanging around, never putting down any roots. I've always wanted a piece of land, not much, but a place of my own I could always go back to. My folks had a place, but they got rid of it and moved to the city when I was a kid. That's life, I reckon. Your age, that's the time to get it out of your system. Don't wait.

So you been around?

TOM
Oh sure, all over the country.

EDDIE
Were you in the war?

TOM
Yeah.

EDDIE
Where'd you go afterwards?

TOM
Oh, I came here for a few years, until--

Yeah? Until what?

EDDIE
Until I went West.

TOM
Why'd you go West?

EDDIE
Nothing else to do, I guess. See, after I left home I went out East and played ball. I was pretty good in my day; played for the Giants. Then they drafted me and my leg got shot up. Football was all I could do, least it was all I wanted to do, so I was pretty well lost after that.

TOM
You came here then?

EDDIE
Yeah. Nothing for me back East.
You never got married?

How'd you know that?

Just didn't seem like you ever did, or if you did it didn't last very long. Right? So why didn't you?

Well, I reckon I just never found anybody I liked enough to want to settle down with.

Never found anybody at all?

Tom, I'll tell you something. Women ain't worth the trouble they cause. Sure, I liked a few here and there, but I finally learned you can't trust 'em. Can't trust 'em at all. And the ones you think you can trust, well, those are the worst.

Come on, Eddie. I know better than that. What was it made you go sour on them?

I'll tell you, I just don't feel like talking about women. They're not worth it.

That's not the reason. You must be hiding something.

I got nothing to hide. What's it to you, anyway?

You want to be friends, right? How can you talk or be friends if you're hiding something?

I told you I got nothing to hide. So don't keep asking. I just don't feel like talking about it.

About what? You tell me you don't trust women, but you won't tell me why.
EDDIE
I told you I didn't want to talk about it.

TOM
Okay, I'll see if I can figure it out myself. You went West, but you won't tell me why. And you're sour on women, but you won't tell me about that either. So it must be something happened to you while you were here.

EDDIE
Nothing happened. I just hung around while I was here, and I just went West because I wanted to.

TOM
Eddie, you don't just hang around. Nobody does. Why--

EDDIE
Christ! Why you asking me all these questions?

TOM
I thought you wanted to talk. Right? Didn't you want to talk?

EDDIE
Yeah, but you make it sound like we're in court or something.

TOM
Sorry. I'll just shut up.

EDDIE
Well hell, Tom, I'm sorry. You gotta understand what it's like for me here, nobody around but these bums. Like I said, I don't talk to folks very often. I guess I just forgot how.

TOM
Sure, Eddie. I understand.

EDDIE
No you don't. You been around, but there's a lot you don't know. You're still a kid. You don't know what it's like to live like me. You don't care.

TOM
Says who?

EDDIE
Oh, forget it. Just forget I said it. Maybe you do know what it's like. But Tom, I just want you to know I appreciate you staying here to talk.
Sure, Eddie. As long as we talk about nothing, right?

What?

As long as we just run on about nothing, like a couple of old ladies. That's what you want, isn't it?

No, but --

Then why don't we talk about something that matters? Maybe I can even help you out, but not unless you talk about it.

Talk about what?

I don't like to play games, Eddie, so don't act dumb. Talk about why you're not happy. Is it because of something you did, something on your conscience?

No. I'm just lonesome. Like I said, when you get to be my age you start wanting to settle down.

What else? That's not much of a reason.

I don't have a family. My folks are gone, I guess, never saw them again after I left home. They never meant much, but they were all I had. Went back to where we used to live a few years ago; they'd torn down all the old houses and put up some big building. Nobody'd ever heard of my folks. And like I said I got no wife or kids.

That's too bad.

I'm all alone, Tom. Don't like to think about it, but when I die, it's just going to be one guy less in the world. It won't matter to anybody, except the fellow gets my rent money.
TOM
You're not making any sense. You're lonely because you got no family, but you can't have a family because you don't trust women? It keeps coming back to that, but you won't tell me why.

EDDIE

It wasn't my fault.

TOM
What wasn't your fault?

EDDIE
It wasn't my fault they can't be trusted. There was a time I figured I could have a family and a home just like any other guy, and that's what I wanted. To make something for somebody besides me. But then I found out about women and how bad they are.

TOM
How did you find out?

EDDIE
There you go asking questions again. I bet you never gave your old man any peace. Always "Daddy, what's this, Daddy?"

TOM
I never had a father.

EDDIE
What? Everybody has a father.

TOM
I never did. And I don't want to talk about it, okay?

EDDIE
Oh sure, Tom. Sure. Sorry.

TOM
And you didn't answer me. How did you find out about women?

EDDIE
It don't matter, does it?

TOM
Of course it matters. Look, if you don't want to talk, okay, but it seems like if you talk you can get it off your conscience.

EDDIE
There's not anything on my conscience. I told you, I lived a clean life.
TOM
Yeah? You never lied or cheated? Never killed anybody, or tried to? Never raped a girl?

EDDIE
No.... No, I never did any of that stuff. None of it. I never raped a girl.... Look, I just know about women, alright? I ain't saying women made me this way, all I know is I don't have anybody, anybody at all.

Except me, Eddie.

You really mean that?

TOM
Sure. I figure you're my friend; you're giving me a room. I'd just like to find out about you, is all.

What do you mean?

EDDIE
You know, just see where you've been; what all you've done. I bet you been around even more than you let on.

Well, that's for sure. You really want to hear about me?

TOM
Sure. When did you leave here?

Oh, in 'fifty, I guess.

EDDIE
Did you stay here long?

Long enough to.... Never mind.

Never mind what?

EDDIE
Just never mind. I was here about a year.

And you left in --
EDDIE
In June. Yeah, in June. I remember because I just bought a car,
your first one. A Chevy. Took me all the way out West, to California,
no trouble at all. Yes sir, sunny--

But I don't understand why you left here in the first place.

EDDIE
I told you. I felt like it. Wasn't anything here for me anymore.

Anything except trouble?

EDDIE
Wait a minute. Why'd you say that?

TOM
Well, Eddie, the way you talk about wanting a place to settle down.
It's not like you were still a kid. It seems like you'd have to
have a reason besides just wanting to.

EDDIE
No. I just wanted to. I always wanted to go West.

TOM
You don't mean that, Eddie. You mean you had to go West-- or somewhere.
Anywhere but here. Right? And it had to do with women, right?

EDDIE
No. That's not true.

TOM
Why do you keep on lying to me? I thought I was your friend.

I'm not lying, I swear.

TOM
That's not fair, Ed. You wanted to talk, and that was just fine.
I like talking to you. But now you're telling lies. That's no good.

EDDIE
Why do I have to tell you all this stuff?

TOM
What stuff? You haven't told me a thing except lies.

EDDIE
All you want to talk about is something bad. Why can't we talk
about good things? You act like something's wrong with you, like somewhere along the line you learned a lot of really bad things about people without learning any of the good things.

TOM
That's for sure. I was going to stay here tonight, but now I don't think I better. Seems like a guy who lies to his friend might do anything. You might call the cops in on me, or do anything.

EDDIE
I wouldn't do that, Tom. You're my buddy.

TOM
Some buddy. I'm no buddy of yours, unless you quit lying. I want to be your friend, but I can't while you're telling lies.

EDDIE
Okay, I'll tell you.

TOM
No, you don't have to explain. Don't worry about it.

EDDIE
Tommie, please--

TOM
I told you, don't worry about it. And I'm Tom, alright?

EDDIE
Tom. Alright, Tom. I didn't want to tell you, because -- because I wanted you to respect me.

TOM
What's that got to do with anything?

EDDIE
I told you, Tom, I like you. A lot. Maybe even like a -- like a -- anyway, I wanted you to respect me, not to think I was a bum. But it don't seem like that's the way things work out. You want to find out the worst about me, that's what it'll have to be. Maybe you won't even think it's that bad, and we can still be friends.

TOM
So what did you do?

EDDIE
I had to leave because -- because I knocked up a broad.
Don't call her a broad!

EDDIE

Why not?

TOM

You shouldn't talk like that. So you made her pregnant and ran out on her.

EDDIE

That's right. But it wasn't my fault.

TOM

Sure. You make me sick, you whining old bastard.

EDDIE

No, it wasn't! She made me do it; I didn't want to.

TOM

Oh, right. Here's poor old Eddie alone in a room with a girl, and she knoc*eks him down, throws him on the bed, and rapes him. Tell me that's how it happened. I need a good laugh.

EDDIE

I didn't rape her. She got me drunk and then when I didn't know what I was doing she made me. It wasn't my fault, Tom.

TOM

Eddie, what girl wants to get knoc*eked up? You're not making any sense.

EDDIE

That's what you think. Well, you're going to learn the hard way, about women. They'll do anything to get what they want. You can't trust 'em.

TOM

Yeah? Know what I think? I think you're just making excuses for leaving her like you did. What do you suppose happened to her? Huh?

EDDIE

I don't know. Why do you care?

TOM

And you don't give a damn, do you? I think that makes you a bum, Eddie, a low-down bum.
EDDIE
Let me tell you something, Boy. You said before I wasn't too sober. Well, I been on the bottle most of my life, except when I was playing ball. And except when I came here after the war. Yeah, I was gonna make a new start in everything. But she got me back on it.

I don't believe you.

EDDIE
It's true. There was that one night when she made me get drunk, and then she kept me on it. Even when I didn't want it, she always made me take a drink or two or three. So when I finally got away, I was right back where I'd always been.

Well, it was still wrong.

EDDIE
I knew you'd act like that.

TOM
What did you expect, me to shake your hand?

You never had anybody to warn you about them. Otherwise you'd listen to me.

TOM
I can take care of myself.

EDDIE
Yeah, you'll leave pretty soon and just forget about old Eddie, forget all I'm trying to tell you. Or else you'll remember what a bum you thought I was. But Tom, I won't forget you.

You bet you won't.

EDDIE
No, I mean it. You're the first person ever gave me a chance in a long time. You listen to me. You --

Alright. Forget it.

TOM
No. You're important to me.
TOM
I don't want you thinking about me like that.

EDDIE
But you said we was friends.

TOM
Look, let's talk some more. Why don't you tell me about the girl? What she looked like, how you met her. Just so I can be sure.

EDDIE
Sure? Sure about what?

TOM
Sure -- sure it was your fault -- sure -- I don't know. How'd you meet her?

EDDIE
She was working in a five-and-ten in Midwest City. That's just south of here.

TOM
I know.

EDDIE
Anyway, I went in there for something, and got to talking to her. She was the cashier. She said right off she liked me. She said I was different than all those dumb farmers. I sure was different; she knew I didn't know anybody around here, so I'd be easy to hook. She could always get the law on her side.

TOM
So then you went with her for awhile, knocked her up, and ran out on her.

EDDIE
Christ, Tom, I never ran out on her. She scared me off. Yeah, all she wanted to do was tie me to her; and she figured she had me when she told me she was expecting. Women do that, Tom. That's their way of getting their hands on you, for good. I fooled her, though. She didn't set her trap quite good enough. The safest way to be with women is to never feel like you owe them anything. Maybe you'll get by okay there, the way you were talking before about not wanting charity. Maybe that'll help you out.

TOM
What did she look like?
EDDIE
Well here, I still carry her picture. See for yourself...
Surprised you, huh? It's not because I like to look at her, you
can bet. Just so I won't ever forget what women are really like.
Just so I can always look at her and say "You're pretty, but
you're evil clean through."

TOM
I never knew... she was that pretty.

EDDIE
Oh, she was a looker, alright. That's how come I liked her, at
first.

Why'd you change your mind?

TOM
She was too hard, Tom. She wasn't like an ordinary girl, you know,
silly, just thinking about what she ought to wear the next day,
who she'll invite to her party. I liked her for that at first,
but later on I got to seeing that she was too mean. She wanted
something she'd walk right over you to get it. Thought she had
God on her side, too, the bitch.

TOM
Don't talk about her like that!

EDDIE
Why not? It's the truth. You should've seen her that night she
told me she was expecting. She was sure she'd trapped me good;
you could see just how proud and mean she was. Just like she'd
killed some big bear. She flat told me I was marrying her, and
when I said no—that it was her fault more'n mine—she said she'd
see me run into church with a gun at my back. So I lit out and
never came back.

TOM
You came back now.

EDDIE
Yeah, I guess so.

TOM
I don't believe you, Eddie. It wasn't that way. You're just
trying to cover up for yourself for running out on her. Why else
would you come back here? You're still lying.

EDDIE
Hell, she could take care of herself. She could of got somebody
else as easy as she almost got me. But it was me she wanted, and
she was like a crazy dog when I told her it wasn't going to work that way.

TOM
God, don't you ever do anything but lie?

EDDIE
Why should I lie to you? You already act like you hate me; I got nothing to gain by lying.

TOM
Well sure it's not your fault. You got started on the wrong track when you were born and you been on it ever since.

EDDIE
Have it your way. But I'll tell you something, Tomm-- Tom. After you're gone I'm gonna pretend you believed me and didn't hate me anymore. You hate me, don't you? I can tell.

TOM
No. You just make me sick.

EDDIE
I don't care; it's okay if you hate me. Because after you leave I'm gonna pretend... you're my boy.

TOM
You won't pretend nothing like that. You're crazy. I told you I don't want you thinking about me like that.

EDDIE
You got no say in it. I'll think what I want to.

TOM
You're crazy.

EDDIE
Nope. Man's got to leave something behind, or else it don't matter if he lived or not. So I'm gonna pretend you're what I'm leaving. I got to.

(TOM draws the gun, levels it at EDDIE)

TOM
Yeah? See this gun, Eddie?

EDDIE
Tom... what...?
TOM

Just shut up and listen to me. Want to know what the girl's name was, the one you ran out on? It was Laurie Brown.

EDDIE

How'd you know?

TOM

She sent me after you, Eddie. She sent me to get you.

EDDIE

She can't.... It wasn't my fault! Can't just kill a man.

Oh no?

TOM

You can't-- I thought we was friends. I'm your friend.

EDDIE

I told you to shut up. I'm not just some guy with a gun, Eddie. Sure, if I was just a hood, maybe I'd do it or maybe I wouldn't. But how about if she was my mother, Eddie? How about if we had to live like dogs all our lives, because you lied to her and then ran out on her? How about that, Eddie? Think I'd use this gun then?

EDDIE

Tom... you... you're my--?

TOM

I'm not your anything. She told me.

Tom.

TOM

I got to kill you.

EDDIE

Why? Why, Tom? You're just a kid; you can't kill a man.

I got to.

EDDIE

You can't kill your own father.

TOM

You're not my father. I told you I never had a father.
EDDIE
I am your father. Look, I'll make it up to you some way. I don't have much money, but you can have it all.

TOM
Forget it.

EDDIE
You never had a father, but you got one now. We can do things, if you want to. You need somebody to tell you how to get along, somebody to help you out. We—we could travel around, you and me.

TOM
You don't understand. I promised Ma I'd do it. I owe it to her.

EDDIE
You owe it to her to kill your own father?

TOM
I got to.

EDDIE
But you and me, we're friends. I helped you when you first came in here.

TOM
You were just lonely.

(TOM lowers the gun a bit.)

EDDIE
Sure I was. But I still helped you out. We talked, just like friends. At least that's what I thought we were.

TOM
Maybe we were, but I still owe it to Ma. Even if I don't want to.

EDDIE
See there! You don't want to.

TOM
But I got to.
EDDIE
I'm your pa. Don't that mean nothing, Tom? It ain't right. It ain't right.

(Enter MA. EDDIE and TOM stand still, surprised, for a moment. TOM lowers the gun further.)

MA
It ain't right? You shut up, you son of a bitch. Go ahead and shoot him, Tom. I heard it all; you know he's the one. Shoot him!

EDDIE
I should've known you were sneaking around here somewhere. You ain't changed. Get out of here!

Shoot him! I waited too many years for this.

MA
He ain't shooting anybody, are you, Tom?

Eddie
Wait, Ma.

MA
Didn't he say he's the one?

EDDIE
I'm the one alright. I'm his pa.

MA
Shut up. Didn't he come right out and say it? That's all you wanted to hear.

TOM
Yeah, but--

MA
And didn't you swear you'd do it, regardless? Answer me. Didn't you?

TOM
Yeah.

MA
So what are you doing just standing there? I brought you up to stick to your word; now you're turning on me too, just like he did. He's poisoned you.
EDDIE
You're the one poisoned him. Sending him in here to kill his own father. If that ain't poison--

MA
I didn't send him anywhere. He came here because he wanted to. He knew what was right, still does. Give me the gun, Tom.

TOM
No.

MA
What's got into you? I said give me the gun. We'll talk about it later.

Don't listen to her.

EDDIE
Keep out of this, you son of a bitch. You're here to die, not to talk.

EDDIE
You ain't changed. Always got to have your way. Always trying to get somebody else to do your dirty work. See what she's like, Tom? She's got her hooks in you just like she tried to get 'em in me.

MA
He can't talk about me like that. You can't let him.

TOM
He says it was--it wasn't his fault.

MA
Well, who you going to listen to? Some drunken bum, or your own mother?

He's not a drunken bum.

TOM

You tell her, Tom.

MA
Look at him. He stinks. This whole room stinks like a dog house. We stay here any longer we'll start to smell too. That's what happened to you, Tom. Let's get it over with so we can get out of here and breathe again. Before we suffocate.
EDDIE
You sure changed your mind in seventeen years, Laurie.

MA
How was I to know any better? I never was around anybody like you before. My folks told me; I should’ve listened to them.

EDDIE
You never listened to nobody. You always thought you were too damn good for anybody. That's why you tried to get me, you were too good for farm boys. That's just what you said.

MA
Well you lied to me, saying how you had money, had a job lined up. You were smart. You knew I wouldn't even look twice at you otherwise. You were just a bum, but you were smart.

EDDIE
I did have a job. That was gonna be my chance. I had it all fixed. I was gonna put some money by, get a piece of land. Have a place of my own, just like I told Tom here I always wanted. Till you got me on the bottle again.

MA
You never been anything but a drunk.

EDDIE
I tried. It was all your fault.

MA
My fault? Get off your high horse, Mister. Tom, you can't just let him talk to me like that. You know better. Make him stop.

TOM
I don't know, Ma. I don't know anymore.

EDDIE
He knows I'm his father. That's what he knows.

MA
Yeah, he knows how you turned yellow and ran out on me. Ran out on us. He knows the grief you caused us; he lived it for sixteen years.

EDDIE
It was your bull-headed pride he was living. That's all. You just couldn't take it when I wouldn't have you.
MA
Yeah, all you wanted was my body. Just like a damn dog.

EDDIE
Well, you sure didn’t mind giving it to me, did you? Hell, you didn’t just give it to me, you threw it at me. I never saw a woman wanted it as bad as you did.

TOM
Don’t talk like that. You can’t talk about her like that.

MA
I told you, Tom. I told you what he was like. Shoot him, right now. Just treat him like you would a snake, that’s all he is.

That’s not all he is, Ma.

TOM
You’re right, Boy. Tell her the truth. She’s no good.

EDDIE
You shut up. She’s still my mother.

MA
He won’t shut up, Tom. You got to do it yourself. He’s just a no good.

TOM
Shut up. Both of you. I don’t know what anything’s about anymore. Leave me be.

EDDIE
Tommie.

TOM
Aaah. Don’t call me that.

(He raises gun as if to shoot.)

MA
Go on. Now, just pull that trigger. He won’t call you that again. Ever. And we’ll be free.

EDDIE
Tom, I’m sorry. I’m just a stupid old bum. She’s right. All I ever wanted was for you to like me.

MA
Go on.
EDDIE
I don't care. You feel you got to, go ahead. Just you make sure you want to. As long as you're sure, as long as it's because you want to and not her, you got my forgiveness.

MA
He's forgiving you. He's crazy, Tom. He's got no right to live.

EDDIE
But I won't crawl, Son. And I won't try to run. You go ahead and do it; I'll just stand right here. She wants me to crawl, but I won't do it.

MA
Shoot him, Tom.

EDDIE
I run away once, I reckon that was once too often. I ain't running again. I'm a man.

MA
Why are you doing this to me?

TOM
I can't.

MA
All these years. All these years, and now you're letting him off. Well I won't. He ain't leaving here alive, even if I have to kill him myself. Give it to me.

TOM
I can't Ma. I can't. It's not right.

MA
It's not right? Don't you tell me it's not right. I gave up my whole life for you, my home, my church, everything I ever wanted. I could've gone back, after it was all over.

EDDIE
See, it was all your fault. Every bit of it. You didn't have to keep him. You could of gotten rid of him, even before you had him.

MA
No Ed, no. Not everybody runs away like you did. Not everybody's out for his own skin. I carried Tom for nine months, and then I carried him till he could walk, and fed him and gave him a home. And you can bet we couldn't stay in one place very long, not when folks found out I wasn't married. I did it for him, because he needed a mother. A boy needs a mother. And I loved him; he
was all I had.

EDDIE
No, you just kept thinking you'd find me and could hold him over me again. Just like you did then, just like you're doing now.

TOM
Don't say that, Eddie.

EDDIE
He probably would've been better off if you got rid of him. He never had a father, fellow needs a father too. You bringing him up crazy anyway, all this talk about killing and revenge. You don't care about him; all you care about is you. Why else you trying to get him to kill his own father? You know I'm your father, don't you Boy?

TOM
I don't know--

MA
Tom, Tom. Don't turn on me like this. Not for him. This is all I ever asked of you.

TOM
I can't kill a man, Ma.

EDDIE
Tom, ain't it because I'm your father, and not just anybody?

TOM
It was wrong what you did, Eddie.

EDDIE
Say it's because I'm your father. Please? I liked you even before I knew you was my boy, didn't I? I'm not Eddie; I'm your father. Please?

TOM
I can't.

EDDIE
I need you, Tom. She just wants to use you, but I need you. I'd never make you kill somebody. And you need me.

MA
Tom... for me? You're all I got, Tom, don't turn on me.
EDDIE
Hell, she could get anybody she wanted, she don't need you. She's just a whore, Tom, she's always been--

TOM
Don't talk like that.

MA
I'll kill him!

EDDIE
She's just a lying whore. They all are.

MA
Stop it!

EDDIE
She's probably not even sure I was your father.

TOM
Eddie!

MA
You son of a bitch!

(She grabs the gun and shoots ED twice. He falls slowly.)

EDDIE
Oh on... no.... It can't be like this. Not after I found my boy... it can't. See, Tom? Don't you see? Don't forget me, Boy.... Don't forget your old pa here... Tommie.... Please?

TOM
Pa? Pa?

(ED dies.)

MA
There. It's done with now.

TOM
He's dead.
Let's get away from here. Come on, the bus leaves pretty soon.

You killed him.

Now we can live, Tom. That's a fair trade. He got what he deserved. He paid what he owed.

No.

We'll talk about it later. Let's go.

It was wrong.

You wanted him dead, didn't you? You wanted to be sure, and now you're sure.

No.

NO? I heard him say it, right to your face. He was the one.

No Ma. I'm sure... he was my pa, now he's dead. You killed him. And that's wrong.

We got the right one. That's all. We just came here to do a job.

It wasn't a job!

And we did it. Sure you couldn't do it yourself. It's okay. It's not easy to kill a man, even an old bum like him.

He wasn't an old bum. He was my pa.
MA
Don't say that. Look at him-- filthy, raggedy. He's no more your pa than I am.

TOM
I never thought it would be this way. When we started looking for him, I thought it would just be some guy, somebody on a dark street somewhere. Somebody I never seen before, never would see again. I never thought it would be my father.

MA
It was just some guy. Tom, you got to believe that.

TOM
That's just what he said.

MA
It was right. He deserved it. Remember all those years we --

TOM
All those years. Now he's dead.

MA
You got to stick by me.

TOM
I had a father... for an hour.

MA
We're free now. We got our whole lives, just like we planned. It's all clean now. It's all over and done with. We're free.

TOM
It won't work. Hell, we're not free.

MA
You can't do this. I did it for you, don't you see? I did it for you, Tom. I'm your mother.

TOM
You did it for you, just like he said.

MA
You're all I got in the world, and now you're turning against me. Against your own mother. I'd do anything for you, Tommie. I killed that bum for you. I'd die for you.
TOM
At least now he's dead you can quit calling him a bum.

MA
... No....

TOM
You can give him that much.

MA
... It's all over, isn't it?

TOM
Yeah, it's all over. You killed my father.

MA
I don't know... can't go on, Son, knowing you... knowing you--

TOM
Knowing you killed my pa. And he wasn't much, but he was something I never had before. Knowing I can't forgive you for that, Ma. Just like you could never forgive him. You taught me that much.

MA
Don't we still have each other?

TOM
I don't know.

MA
I'm still your mother. You still need me, don't you?

TOM
I don't know. Seems like I still got you, whether I want you or not.

MA
You don't believe all that stuff he said about me? You wouldn't believe that about your own mother?

TOM
Doesn't matter. Things can't be the same anymore.

MA
My own son. I just didn't see... I thought you wanted it like this. I believed in us, Tom. All those years, we were set to have a good life.
TOM

Not anymore.

MA

I can't go on, knowing my boy hates me. That was for you. Everything's for you. But you hate me, I can see it. You won't understand as long as I'm still around. You won't understand about me till I'm gone, just like you didn't want him till he was dead.

TOM

Ma, I don't hate you.

MA

It sure went fast, didn't it?

TOM

Yeah. But--

MA

Don't try to tell me different. I know. It sure went fast, those years we helped each other out.

TOM

They're gone, Ma. I'm sorry. Come on, we'll talk about it on the bus.

MA

Well, it's got to be finished now. Promise to remember me, Tom?

TOM

Remember you when?

MA

When you're free.... It's just got to be finished; may as well do it now. Just promise.

TOM

Okay. I promise.... I'm sorry. What are we going to do now? We better get out of here.
MA

Now? Just finish it up. Good luck, Son. Goodbye.

TOM

Goodbye? Ma?

(She walks out the door; a single shot is heard. The lights fade on TOM.)