Blood Brothers

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLY RUSSELL

The child of a working-class family whose father struggled with drug addiction, Willy Russell has a varied past—he worked at a folk club, taught, and even ran a hair salon. After making an impression with his writing at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Russell began writing musicals, plays, and TV scripts. *Blood Brothers*, which he refers to as a "Liverpudlian folk opera," premiered in 1983, and then moved to the West End, where it won the Olivier Award for Best Musical. Russell has continued writing since that time, and has even expanded his range to include novels and albums. He lives in Liverpool with his wife Anne. They have three children.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A socially-conscious and relevant work about class, social stratification, and poverty, *Blood Brothers* was written in 1983, four years after Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came into power in the UK. A notoriously hardline conservative, Thatcher took office during a time of economic stagnation and high unemployment. Her solution to these problems often came at the expense of working-class citizens, particularly who those who worked in industries such as mining and industrial labor (like Eddie). The Winter of Discontent of 1979, during which labor unions led strikes against pay caps meant to stimulate economic recovery, would certainly have been on Russell's mind as he wrote his musical. Indeed, during the period from 1980 to 1984, British industrial production fell by a full twenty-five percent, leaving over three million people unemployed.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Some critics have speculated that Russell based his play off of Alexander Dumas' *The Corsican Brothers*, a novella about conjoined twins separated at birth. Russell, however, denies this influence. Russell's other well-known work, *Educating Rita* (commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company), focuses on another inhabitant of Liverpool, this time a hairdresser. Another working-class portrayal of the British 1980s economic crisis is the movie *Billy Elliot*, and the recent musical of the same name. The theme of warring brothers is an ancient one, and one of its earliest portrayals is the Ancient Greek tragedy *Antigone*, which portrays the devastation that follows two siblings' rivalry. To understand the scope of the musical genre in the 1980s, read and listen to *La Cage aux Folles*, written in the same year as *Blood Brothers*, but utterly different in terms of style, form, and content.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Blood Brothers*
- **When Written:** 1982
- **Where Written:** Liverpool, UK
- **Literary Period:** 20th century musical
- **Genre:** Musical
- **Setting:** Liverpool, UK
- **Climax:** Mrs. Johnstone reveals to Mickey and Edward that they are twin brothers
- **Antagonist:** The English class system, as represented by the unstable and snobbish Mrs. Lyons

EXTRA CREDIT

Long live the play! The revival of *Blood Brothers* on the West End ran for twenty-four years, making it the third-longest running musical in the history of the UK.

Universal appeal. In 2012, a version of the play traveled to South Africa, and many of the main parts were played by black actors. Its director believed that the universal themes of the piece would be instantly relatable to South African audiences.

PLOT SUMMARY

The musical *Blood Brothers* begins as its Narrator tells the audience about the Johnstone twins, Mickey and Edward, who were separated at birth and died on the same day. We next meet the twins' mother, Mrs. Johnstone, a lower class woman who was abandoned by her husband after giving birth to five children, and while pregnant with another. She reminisces about the days when she used to go dancing with her husband, who made her feel like **Marilyn Monroe**. Now, however, her life is a never-ending cycle of unpaid bills and hungry children. She works at the house of Mrs. Lyons, a wealthy woman who longs for a child of her own.

Mrs. Johnstone is devastated to find that she's carrying twins. There's no way she can afford to feed two more mouths. An unlikely solution presents itself, however, in the form of Mrs. Lyons, who pleads to take one of the twins—but only if Mrs. Johnstone swears, on the Bible, never to reveal the truth of their bargain. The Narrator warns that misfortunes will follow. Soon after, Mrs. Johnstone gives birth, and as Mrs. Lyons takes one of her twin boys away, the poorer woman laments all the debts she's had to pay. When she goes home, she lies to her

children, telling them that one of the twins has died.

After Mrs. Johnstone returns to work, Mrs. Lyons grows jealous and suspicious, believing that Mrs. Johnstone is paying too much attention to the new baby. She proceeds to fire Mrs. Johnstone—and when the cleaning lady tries to take her baby back, Mrs. Lyons, knowing Mrs. Johnstone to be superstitious, comes up with a fatal lie. She tells Mrs. Johnstone that if two twins, separated at birth, ever learn the truth about their origins, they will die on the spot. Horrified, Mrs. Johnstone agrees to keep their secret. The Narrator warns that one day the Devil will come to punish the two women.

Seven years pass, and Mickey, the twin who stayed with Mrs. Johnstone, grows up in a rough-and-tumble environment. Edward, who grew up believing Mrs. Lyons to be his mother, matures in the lap of luxury. When still boys, the two meet by chance, and become fast friends. When they find that they share a birthday, they agree to become "blood brothers," allying against Mickey's bullying older brother, Sammy. When Mrs. Johnstone realizes that the two have met, she is horrified, and sends Edward away. Mrs. Lyons reacts even more violently, and contemplates uprooting her entire family in order to escape.

Despite their mothers' disapproval, Mickey and Edward continue to see each other, and we witness a series of children's games (many involving **guns**), as the two boys play with their other friend, Linda. The trio gets up to various pranks, eventually drawing the attention of the police, who threaten Mrs. Johnstone while flattering Mr. Lyons. Mrs. Lyons takes this moment to move her family to the country, despite Edward's lack of enthusiasm. Before Edward leaves, however, Mrs. Johnstone gives him a **locket** with a picture of herself and Mickey, so that he can always remember them. The boys are lonely without each other, but the first act ends on an optimistic note: Mrs. Johnstone's family is being relocated to the country as well, a move that she hopes will remove her children from a life of crime and squalor, and will help her to forget the sins of her past.

As Act Two opens, seven years have passed, and the boys are now fourteen. Both have become interested in girls, but feel awkward and unsure. Mickey and Linda, meanwhile, clearly have romantic feelings for each other, but Mickey's lack of confidence has thus far kept them from any real connection. A moment of violence ruins this relatively calm beginning, as Sammy, now a full-fledged juvenile delinquent, attempts to rob a bus.

Mickey and Edward both struggle at school, with Mickey insulting a teacher, and Edward refusing to take off the locket despite his posh boarding school's dress code. When Mrs. Lyons learns of his disobedience, she's appalled, and she becomes even more upset when she sees the contents of the locket. The Narrator returns once again to remind Mrs. Lyons, and us, that the devil will be coming eventually.

After a failed romantic interaction with Linda, Mickey spots Edward, wishing that he could be suave and cool like "that guy." Edward, meanwhile, longs for what he sees as Mickey's freedom. The two meet, and after a moment, joyfully recognize each other. The two decide to see a porn film together, and set off for Mrs. Johnstone's house together so that Mickey can get money—unaware that Mrs. Lyons is following them. Mrs. Johnstone is shocked but delighted to see her long-lost son. After the boys exit, Mrs. Lyons emerges. She accuses Mrs. Johnstone of stealing Edward's affection, and claims that her son was never hers. She becomes violent, and attacks Mrs. Johnstone with a kitchen knife. Although eventually disarmed, she curses Mrs. Johnstone, calling her a witch, before exiting.

The boys meet up with Linda and experience yet another scrape with the police, before deciding to spend the summer together. An idyllic sequence follows, in which the trio transitions from fourteen to eighteen, glorying in the joys of youth and summer, even as the Narrator warns that soon, both their joy and their childhood will end. At eighteen, Edward—who has developed feelings for Linda—is going to university, while Mickey is working in a factory. With some encouragement from the self-sacrificing Edward, Mickey asks Linda to be his girlfriend, and she enthusiastically accepts.

In October, Mickey gives Mrs. Johnstone news: Linda is pregnant, and the two will be getting married. Their wedding, however, coincides with a severe economic downturn, and Mickey is fired. By the time that Edward returns for the Christmas holiday, his friend is downtrodden and careworn. Mickey tells Edward that he is still a child, and doesn't know anything about life, claiming that the idea of blood brothers was just "kid stuff." A rejected Edward meets up with Linda and confesses his love to her, but leaves after finding that she has married Mickey and is pregnant.

Mickey, impoverished and desperate, agrees to participate in a burglary with Sammy. The crime goes awry, and Sammy murders someone; he and Mickey are sentenced to jail. Imprisoned, Mickey becomes depressed, and is prescribed addictive **antidepressants**. After he's released, he continues taking the pills, despite the pleas of his mother and his wife. Eventually, a desperate Linda asks Edward, now a city councilman, for help finding an apartment and getting Mickey a job. After Mickey reacts with anger at her efforts, the devastated Linda seeks comfort with Edward, and begins an affair with him.

As the two carry on their affair, Mickey resolves to stop taking his pills, for Linda's sake. He's derailed when Mrs. Lyons—fully unhinged—reveals Linda and Edward's affair. The enraged Mickey finds a gun and sets out to confront Edward, followed by a distraught Linda and Mrs. Johnstone. The Narrator warns that the devil has arrived. Finding Edward in the town hall, Mickey accuses him not simply of the affair, but of secretly fathering his child, which Edward denies. As Mickey continues

to threaten Edward with the gun, Mrs. Johnstone bursts in and tells the young men the truth: that they are twins, separated at birth. This revelation completely unhinges Mickey, however, as he realizes that he could be the one living Edward's life. As he gesticulates wildly with the gun, he accidentally shoots and kills his twin, and is immediately shot and killed by the police in turn. The play ends with this horrific and bloody tableau, as the Narrator wonders what really killed the twins: superstition, or the British class system?

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Johnstone – The biological mother of Mickey and Edward (as well as a horde of other children, including Sammy and Donna Marie), Mrs. Johnstone is a deeply superstitious woman who is forever scrambling to get by, but has a good heart and a strong sense of right and wrong. After being left by her husband, she believes that she has no choice but to give up one of her twin boys—Edward—to her wealthy employer, Mrs. Lyons. As the play goes forward, Mrs. Johnstone becomes tortured by guilt and regret, though she remains kind and loving despite her grief. She is the moral center of the play, and survives the play's deadly finale despite the fact that both of her youngest sons are dead.

The Narrator – All-knowing and always slightly menacing, the Narrator takes many roles throughout the musical. Sometimes he plays various parts (such as the Milkman), while at other times he watches the action and comments upon it. As the narrative goes forward, the Narrator constantly reminds the audience (and readers) of the terrible choice that began this chain of events, and warns us of the terrible acts that are to come. Despite his frequent mentions of fate and superstition, however, at the end of the play the Narrator claims that it was class, and not fate, that caused the tragedy that the audience has just witnessed.

Mickey – As the twin that the lower-class Mrs. Johnstone keeps, Mickey has a rough-and-tumble childhood, but at his core he is an honest, sincere, and goodhearted individual (much like his twin brother Edward). Unlike Edward, however, Mickey takes many hard knocks in life, from impregnating his girlfriend (Linda) to getting laid off from his industrial job, to being arrested for a crime carried out by his brother Sammy. The audience watches as Mickey disintegrates from an open and optimistic boy to a cynical young man, hardened by his time in prison and addicted to antidepressants. His rage at Linda and Edward for carrying on an affair, and at his mother for keeping him (and thereby dooming him to grow up in poverty), drives the play's tragic finale.

Edward – Like his twin brother Mickey, Edward is a sincere, honest, and good-natured boy. Despite having grown up in the lap of luxury with the high-strung and snobbish Mrs. Lyons, he is not entitled or arrogant. Indeed, his sheltered upbringing has made him more innocent and trusting than his lower-class twin. Unlike Mickey, however, Edward gets every opportunity in life, from attending a private school to being accepted at one of the top universities in England. He eventually uses his position as a city councilman to help the embittered and impoverished Mickey—but also begins an affair with Mickey's wife, Linda, whom Edward has been in love with for years. Good-natured and well-meaning as he is, this fatal mistake leads directly to the play's bloody final scene.

Mrs. Jennifer Lyons – The opposite of Mrs. Johnstone—whom she employs as a cleaning lady when the play begins—the infertile and snobbish Mrs. Lyons adopts Edward as her own child, and raises him as a wealthy, upper-class boy. Like Mrs. Johnstone, Mrs. Lyons is haunted by the original act of a mother giving up her child, but in Mrs. Lyons' case, this guilt turns into suspicion and paranoia. She makes up a superstition to keep Mrs. Johnstone away from Edward, and eventually becomes so convinced that she will lose her son that she tries to kill Mrs. Johnstone. Eventually, Mrs. Lyons' hatred and madness become so pronounced that she reveals Linda and Edward's affair to Mickey, thus contributing to the murder of her adopted son.

Linda – Linda begins the musical as a tomboyish young girl, but quickly morphs into an object of desire for both of the twin brothers. At the beginning of her adolescence, she only has eyes for Mickey, even telling him she loves him long before their first kiss. After years of poverty (and Mickey's imprisonment), however, she turns to Edward for comfort and support, and the two begin an affair. Despite this unfaithful act, Linda is a sympathetic character, one who loves both twins, and is driven to betray her husband by desperate and dismal circumstances.

Sammy Johnstone – The "bad apple" of the Johnstone family, Sammy begins the play as an object of envy for his younger brother, Mickey. Dropped on his head by a young Donna Marie when he was a baby, Sammy quickly becomes a juvenile delinquent, even trying to rob a bus as a teenager. Eventually, the adult Sammy turns to a life of crime, and persuades the unemployed Mickey to help him. This attempted robbery, however, ends with a murder, and Sammy presumably winds up in jail, as does Mickey.

Mr. Richard Lyons – A wealthy businessman, Mr. Lyons feels affection for his wife Mrs. Lyons and his son Edward, but is too oblivious and self-important to realize that Edward is in fact not his biological child. As Mrs. Lyons' mental health deteriorates, however, Mr. Lyons becomes increasingly alarmed. Throughout the play, he is paternalistic and preoccupied.

The Policemen – Figures of authority, policemen show up at various unlucky times throughout the musical. At first their antics are fairly comical as they try to keep Edward, Mickey,

and Linda from mischief, but later on they arrest Sammy and Mickey after a failed robbery attempt. In the final scene, they shoot and kill Mickey—but only after he has murdered Edward.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Miss Jones – The secretary to the Managing Director, Miss Jones transcribes the firing of many employees (including Mickey) before being fired himself.

Donna Marie – One of Mrs. Johnstone's older children. Donna Marie dropped Sammy on his head when he was a baby, and she too becomes a mother at a young age.

Milkman – A character played by the Narrator, the Milkman threatens to stop delivering to Mrs. Johnstone unless she pays him. This is the final straw that convinces her to give up one of her twins.

Gynecologist – Also played by the Narrator, the Gynecologist reveals to Mrs. Johnstone that she's going to have twins.

Catalogue Man – The Catalogue Man scolds Mrs. Johnstone for ordering gifts she can't afford for her children.

Finance Man – The Finance Man attempts to force an impoverished Mrs. Johnstone to pay her bills.

Teachers – Generally figures of joyless oppression, one teacher tries to force Edward to remove his locket, while another mocks Mickey for being bored in school. Like the policemen, they symbolize authority.

Neighborhood Children – Friends of Mickey and Linda growing up. The neighborhood children enjoy playing games about war, **guns**, and violence.

Managing Director – Another figure of uncaring authority, the managing director fires hundreds of employees (including his faithful secretary Miss Jones, and the luckless Mickey) without any feelings of guilt or remorse.

Judge – The Judge sentences the juvenile delinquent Sammy, but is lenient on him because he finds Mrs. Johnstone attractive. Like many figures of authority in the play, he is hypocritical and dishonest.

Conductor – The conductor drives the bus that the criminal Sammy tries to rob.

Doctor – Employed at Mickey's prison, the doctor prescribes him antidepressants, beginning his addiction.

Warder – The warder takes Linda to visit Mickey while he's in prison.

Woman – A strange woman who greets Mickey at Edward's former house after the Lyons family moves away.

Neighbors – The Johnstones' neighbors in Liverpool rejoice when they hear that the large, rowdy family is moving to the country.

City Councilors – The councilors, Edward's colleagues, are horrified witnesses when Mickey guns Edward down in city hall (and is killed in turn by the police).

Sarah – The young daughter of Mickey and Linda.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

CLASS AND MONEY

Throughout the musical *Blood Brothers*, the theme of class and money plays a dominant role, controlling characters' actions and determining their lives. This pattern begins when Mrs. Johnstone makes the fateful decision to give away one of her twin boys to her employer Mrs. Lyons. She does so not because she doesn't want two babies, but because she simply can't afford two extra mouths to feed. Thus the action that sets the entire narrative in motion in fact stems from the forces of class and money. The all-powerful nature of these ideas is then evident throughout the rest of the narrative as well, as Mickey and Edward's lives diverge drastically due to their differing financial circumstances. Although linked by genetics and similar in temperament, the unknowing twin brothers have vastly contrasting lives. While Mickey spirals further and further into drugs, depression, and crime because of his poverty, Edward finds doors opened for him at every turn due to his wealth.

Although playwright Willy Russell takes care to emphasize that class and money are nearly unstoppable forces, he also makes sure to show all of the ways that they can be overcome. For example, the poor Mrs. Johnstone is a loving, caring, and grounded individual, while in contrast, the wealthy Mrs. Lyons is neurotic, unstable, and (eventually) evil. Mrs. Lyons may be upper-class and cultured, but it's Mrs. Johnstone who becomes the moral center of the play. Similarly the kinship among Edward, Mickey, and Linda shows how people can overcome the barriers of class. Although Mickey and Linda are poor and ignorant compared to the refined Edward, the three share a tight bond. In the end, however, their relationships are eventually torn apart by money and class—the same forces that they seemed to overcome. Ultimately Russell shows the cost of the economic realities of his society, and the terrible toll they take on individuals' lives.

NATURE VS. NURTURE

On some level, the lives of Mickey and Edward seem almost like a science experiment: what will happen when two genetically similar boys are

raised in vastly different circumstances? Is a person's character determined more by their genetics, or by their upbringing? Throughout the play, Willy Russell illuminates the contrasts that stem from Mickey and Edward's separate childhoods, and compares them with the similarities that the two share. Mickey, for instance, is rough, rebellious, and jaded from a young age. In contrast, Edward is intelligent but innocent, which is made clear by his generosity towards other children and his tendency to get himself in trouble by accident. The differences between the two boys are rooted in the fact that Mickey grew up in a rough and tumble neighborhood, while Edward came of age in the lap of luxury.

At the same time, however, the boys feel a kinship with each other, calling themselves "blood brothers" years before they know they are in fact related. Although they have many superficial differences, at core they are both loving, decent, and honest individuals, much like their mother, Mrs. Johnstone. Their similarities are further emphasized by the fact that they fall in love with the same woman, Linda, and she feels strongly about both of them. Tragically, it is ultimately this similarity that ultimately leads to their joint downfall. Russell never comes down on one side or the other in the "nature vs. nurture" argument, but instead shows how both genetics and upbringing affect one's personality and fate.

SUPERSTITION AND FATE

The theme of superstition and fate is one that the playwright—in the voice of the Narrator—brings up over and over again throughout the musical. Near the beginning of the play, the devious Mrs. Lyons tells Mrs. Johnstone that if two long-lost twins ever learn that they are related, they will both die instantly—and at the end of the play, despite the improbability of Mrs. Lyon's made-up superstition, this is exactly what comes to pass. The Narrator also spends many of his songs referencing various other superstitions, such as breaking a mirror or spilling salt on a table. Although he, an omniscient character, clearly knows that Mrs. Lyons has invented her superstition about twins, he is essentially saying that by making it up, she has made it real.

The threat of this false superstition is made to seem even more powerful by the contrasting mothers in the play: Mrs. Johnstone and Mrs. Lyons. Somewhat gullible, but also steadfast and loving, Mrs. Johnstone believes the fake warning wholeheartedly, and many of her actions throughout the play are motivated by her fear of her children dying. Mrs. Lyons, meanwhile, knows that the superstition isn't true, but eventually comes to partially believe it anyway. She has allowed a belief—one that she knowingly created to control another person—to control her *own* mind. This is ultimately proof of her instability and eventual insanity.

The end of the play, of course, brings about the deaths of both Mickey and Edward, seemingly confirming that the superstition was correct—and that from the moment of their separation, the twins were fated to die. Yet the play actually suggests a far more interesting question. Through their various actions—which were themselves motivated by fear and superstition—the mothers within the play actually cause their sons' deaths. Russell is proposing, therefore, that we as humans essentially make our own fate by believing in fate—that through our fear of the future and our irrational beliefs, we make our worst nightmares come to pass.

COMING OF AGE

The musical *Blood Brothers* deals with many dark and complex issues. One of the lighter but equally important themes within it, however, is that of coming of age. Although the play ends with the twins Mickey and Edward's deaths, most of the musical is occupied with their lives and the events of their growing up. We see them evolve from infants, to boys, to teenagers, to young men, and at each point playwright Willy Russell makes sure to show us the unique difficulties and preoccupations of that stage of life. Songs such as "Kids' Game," for instance, depict children of elementary-school age playing together, and illuminate the complex and shifting social ties that they share. As the boys grow up, the music becomes more mature, moving onto songs such as "That Guy," which articulates the unique brand of self-confidence and self-loathing that comes with being an adolescent.

As the brothers become young men, the play shifts once again, and begins to focus on the anxieties and difficulties of adulthood. The same characters that audiences and readers saw as children and teenagers now struggle with the trials of daily life as an adult. For Mickey, this means trying to be a husband and a father when he's been laid off, and then struggling to become a healthy, whole person again after being imprisoned and becoming addicted to **antidepressants**. For Edward, this means dealing with his feelings for his best friend's wife. In both cases, the men fail: Edward begins an affair with Linda, while Mickey becomes crazed and kills Edward with a **gun**. That we have seen these characters' entire lives up until this point, however, makes us understand clearly how they ended up in these situations, making their eventual dooms even more tragic.

THE POWER OF THE PAST

Throughout *Blood Brothers*, many characters dream of a new beginning, even as they are still mired in the past. Both Mrs. Johnstone and Mrs. Lyons exemplify this impulse. Mrs. Johnstone begins the play reminiscing about her deadbeat husband and mourning his loss, while also trying to figure out how to feed her family. Mrs. Lyons, meanwhile, decides early on in the play to pretend that her adopted son, Edward, is actually her biological child. Like

Mrs. Johnstone, though, Mrs. Lyons cannot run away from the past. Her desperate need to prove that her son is actually hers makes her more and more possessive and paranoid, until she finally becomes completely unhinged. By trying to erase the past, she has in fact given it power over her. Mrs. Johnstone is similarly delusional. In the Act One finale song "Bright New Day," she imagines a world for herself and her children without crime and poverty. Act Two, however, proves that these misfortunes will follow her family wherever she goes, as two of her sons become criminals despite her best efforts.

At the same time, the power of the past can sometimes be a positive force in the play. Although Edward and Mickey eventually lose their close bond, they are best friends for most of the play. Their shared past—a past that they are not even aware of—exerts a great deal of power over them, making them call each other "brother" without realizing that they actually *are* brothers. Similarly, the boys both have a rich and rewarding relationship with Linda because of the trio's shared past. The relationships among all three characters, in fact, have been shaped by their past interactions with each other. Of course, the secret of the twins' birth is the ultimate sign of the power of the past. Despite their mothers' many desperate attempts, the boys will not stay away from each other. Further, despite their own blamelessness in the lies about their origins, the two ultimately pay the price for their mothers' past deception.

VIOLENCE

Violence, in forms both innocent and deadly, shows up over and over again in *Blood Brothers*. Even as children, the characters play violent games, "killing" each other with pretend **guns** in the song "Kids' Game." As they grow older, the violence becomes more real and threatening, reaching its first peak when Mickey's older brother Sammy commits murder during an armed robbery. Of course, the violence doesn't climax until the final scene of the play, when Mickey kills Edward with a gun, only to be shot himself by policemen.

Throughout the play, there are signs of how present and powerful violence is, cropping up in unexpected times and places. For instance, the seemingly refined Mrs. Lyons at one point slaps Edward, proving that she is not as gentle and loving as she pretends to be. Even the fun that Mickey, Edward, and Linda share is tinged with violence, as when Mickey and Linda encourage Edward to break a window with a rock. These characters are all so accustomed to violence that they believe it to be something casual, normal, and even fun. Russell, however, clearly has a different view. By weaving violence into so many moments of his narrative, he essentially allows the audience to become used to it—and then he depicts a shocking, brutal act of violence in the final moments of his play. This reminds us that violence always has consequences, and should never be thought of as "normal."

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

MARILYN MONROE

One of the first songs in the musical—sung by Mrs. Johnstone—constantly returns to the refrain of Marilyn Monroe. At first, Mrs. Johnstone views the movie star as a figure of glamor and wealth, and aspires to be like her. She's flattered when people compare her to the platinum blonde, and even sometimes uses her sex appeal to manipulate men in power. As the musical continues, however, Mrs. Johnstone compares herself negatively to Marilyn Monroe, noting that she herself has become old and poor, quite unlike her idol. She continually comes back to the movie star, however, and as her family's luck gets worse and worse, Mrs. Johnstone notices how poorly Marilyn Monroe's life turned out as well. The parallels between Marilyn Monroe and the Johnstones continue late into the play, as when Mrs. Johnstone compares her son Mickey's dependence on antidepressants to Monroe's own addiction struggles. Although Monroe began as an icon of beauty and aspiration, she ends up being yet another tragic example of a life gone terribly awry.

GUNS

Guns crop up over and over again over the course of the musical, foreshadowing the terrible violence that sits at the narrative's end. They at first seem relatively innocent, as when the neighborhood children use pretend weapons to play war games, and when Mickey hides his brother Sammy's air rifle. Quickly, however, they turn sinister, and eventually Sammy accidentally uses a gun in a robbery, an act that ends in a murder. Of course, the fearsome power of guns is finally demonstrated in full when Mickey confronts Edward with a gun at city hall. Although he does not intend to shoot his twin, he is so crazed and enraged that he does so accidentally, and is then shot by policemen. By the end of the play, Russell has demonstrated that guns cause violence and havoc in a variety of situations.

SHOES ON THE TABLE

Near the beginning of the musical, Mrs. Johnstone reacts with violent fear when she sees shoes on the table—something commonly thought to mean bad luck. Mrs. Lyons then uses Mrs. Johnstone's superstition to convince her to keep her sons separate and in the dark about their relationship. Throughout the play, the Narrator continually emerges and warns the characters that the "shoes are on the table," along with various other symbols of bad luck (such as a

cracked mirror, etc.). These symbols remind the characters of the bad luck that they have brought about themselves, and also remind the audience of the terrible finale that lies ahead. At the end of the musical, however, the Narrator tells the audience that it was the class system, rather than bad luck or superstition, which doomed the two brothers.

EDWARD'S LOCKET

Before he moves away from Liverpool, Edward receives a locket from Mrs. Johnstone with a picture of herself and Mickey in it. Although he doesn't know that he possesses a picture of his mother and brother, Edward treasures the locket, even getting into trouble at his boarding school for refusing to remove it when ordered to do so by a teacher. On a narrative level, the locket symbolizes the bond that Edward feels with Mickey. On a deeper level, however, the locket illuminates the connection between Edward, Mickey, and Mrs. Johnstone—a connection which, despite Mrs. Lyons' best efforts, cannot be severed. On the question of nature vs. nurture, the locket represents Russell leaning towards the side of nature, implying that although Edward has been separated from his blood relations, he still feels a deep and powerful connection to them.

MICKEY'S ANTIDEPRESSANTS

During his time in prison, Mickey suffers a mental breakdown and is eventually prescribed antidepressants, to which he becomes addicted. Although Mrs. Johnstone and Linda try desperately to curb his addiction, he continues to take his pills, symbolizing how far he has fallen and how much he has lost due to his unemployment and prison time. After nearly overcoming his addiction for Linda's sake, Mickey grows incensed and insane when he finds out that his wife and Edward have been having an affair. On a broader level within the play, antidepressants also symbolize the "quick fix" that psychiatrists believed such drugs to be in the early 80s. Rather than actually dealing with other underlying issues, many patients like Mickey were immediately prescribed powerful medications, which put them in a state of foggy numbness rather than actual helping their mental states. (It's important to remember, however, that although Russell's portrayal of antidepressants is wholly negative, they are necessary and life-saving medication for many people. In the case of the play, antidepressants are less a condemnation of these drugs themselves, and more a representation the struggles of addiction, and the tendency to turn to substances when faced with overwhelming difficulties.)

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bloomsbury Press edition of *Blood Brothers* published in 1995.

Act 1 Quotes

So did y'hear the story of the Johnstone twins?
As like each other as two new pins,
Of one womb born, on the self same day,
How one was kept and one given away?
An' did you never hear how the Johnstones died,
Never knowing that they shared one name,
Till the day they died...?

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Edward, Mickey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

From the first moments of the musical, audience and readers alike know that a tragic ending lies in store for the main characters. Setting the narrative up as a "story" creates a fable-like atmosphere, one that will continue throughout the play.

Also introduced in this first passage is the use of the second-person point of view, as the Narrator addresses audience/readers directly. This device will occur frequently within the play, making us feel directly involved in the narrative's proceedings, and implicated as terrible events occur.

Last, this passage takes care to create a sense of parallelism between the Johnstone twins. They are clearly two halves of the same whole, both literally and verbally, even though their fates differ vastly.

MRS. JOHNSTONE: Oh God, Mrs. Lyons, never put new shoes on a table...You never know what'll happen.
MRS. LYONS: Oh...you mean you're superstitious?
MRS. JOHNSTONE: No, but you never put new shoes on a table.

Related Characters: Mrs. Johnstone (speaker), Mrs. Jennifer Lyons

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

As Mrs. Johnstone performs domestic tasks in Mrs. Lyons' home, she becomes distraught when her employer puts new shoes on a table--a terrible omen, Mrs. Johnstone believes. Her vehement reaction introduces the theme of superstition, which will become increasingly important as the narrative continues.

At first, as shown here, superstition is seemingly laughable and misguided. In fact, Mrs. Lyons will soon use Mrs. Johnstone's superstitiousness (which is implicitly associated with her class and level of education) to manipulate and fool her. By the end of the play, however, it will become clear that superstition in fact comes from a place of truth. The bad omens associated with the twins do in fact point to their deaths, starting with the seemingly silly "new shoes on a table."

In the name of Jesus, the thing was done,
Now there's no going back, for anyone.
It's too late now, for feeling torn
There's a pact been sealed, there's a deal been born.
...
How swiftly those who've made a pact,
Can come to overlook the fact.
Or wish the reckoning to be delayed
But a debt is a debt, and must be paid.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Mrs. Jennifer Lyons, Mrs. Johnstone

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

As the two mothers decide to deceive their sons, Mr. Lyons, and the whole world, the Narrator ominously announces that they can never go back on their word. He reminds the women (though of course they cannot hear him) that regret is useless--an impossible truth, of course, for Mrs. Johnstone, who has just given up all claim to one of her sons.

Even more foreboding than the idea of regret, though, is the Narrator's mention of "a debt" that "must be paid." By agreeing to such a massive deception, Mrs. Johnstone and Mrs. Lyons have (the Narrator suggests) committed a grave and unforgivable sin. Eventually, they will pay for their crimes, however long they may delay "the reckoning" of which the Narrator warns.

Only mine until
The time comes round
To pay the bill.
Then, I'm afraid,
What can't be paid
Must be returned.
You never, ever learn,
That nothing's yours,
On easy terms.

Related Characters: Mrs. Johnstone (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Grieving the loss of her son despite having agreed to it, Mrs. Johnstone looks back on the many debts that she's paid in her life. This song brings up another vital issue behind the idea of a debt: that of class and money. Over and over again, the play hammers home the difficulty of life in poverty. For Mrs. Johnstone, of course, this is the only life that she has ever known. She understands all too well the concept of debt, and the fact that nothing in this life is really yours.

Despite her resignation, however, Mrs. Johnstone still longs for all that she can't have--especially her infant son. No matter how many times she's told that "[w]hat can't be paid/ Must be returned," she "never, ever learn[s]" to accept that she will never have the life she really wants.

MRS. LYONS: You do know what they say about twins, secretly parted, don't you?
MRS. JOHNSTONE: What? What?
MRS. LYONS: They say...they say that if either twin learns that he once was a pair, that they shall both immediately die. It means, Mrs. Johnstone, that these brothers shall grow up, unaware of the other's existence. They shall be raised apart and never, ever told what was once the truth. You won't tell anyone about this, Mrs. Johnstone, because if you do, you will kill them.

Related Characters: Mrs. Johnstone, Mrs. Jennifer Lyons (speaker), Edward, Mickey

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Terrified that her son will love his biological mother more than he loves her, Mrs. Lyons lies to Mrs. Johnstone in this passage, playing on her superstitions and ignorance. Mrs. Lyons, of course, knows that the saying she has made up about "twins secretly parted" is false. What she does not know, however, is that by creating this false superstition, she has actually set in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy.

By consistently acting out of selfishness, fear, and paranoia, Mrs. Lyons makes her own worst fears come true. Not only does she lose her son's love, but he eventually loses his life. This tragic truth illustrates how easily lies can in fact become realities. Whether or not Mrs. Lyons believes her own words doesn't matter; what does matter is that words have power, and her false prophecy can all too easily become true.

You're always gonna know what was done
Even when you shut your eyes you still see
That you sold a son
And you can't tell anyone.
But y'know the devil's got your number,
Y'know he's gonna find y',
Y'know he's right behind y',
...
Yes, y'know the devil's got your number
...
And he's knocking at your door.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Mrs. Johnstone

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

As Mrs. Johnstone grapples with her conscience, the Narrator takes on the voice of her guilt, reminding her that no matter what she does, she will always have to carry her terrible secret and shame.

Even more disturbing than Mrs. Johnstone's guilt, though, is the metaphorical "devil" that the Narrator conjures up, repeatedly telling Mrs. Johnstone that this "devil" is going to "find" her, no matter what she does.

The "devil" represents not just guilt, but Mrs. Johnstone's sin, and the terrible fate that is coming for her and her son. No matter how much she internally punishes herself for the crime she's committed, her guilt will never be as awful as the terrible doom that awaits her family.

MICKEY: What's your birthday?
EDWARD: July the eighteenth.
MICKEY: So is mine.
EDWARD: Is it really?
MICKEY: Ey, we were born on the same day...that means we can be blood brothers. Do you wanna be my blood brother, Eddie?
EDWARD: Yes, please.

Related Characters: Edward, Mickey (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

As innocent though rambunctious children, Mickey and Eddie meet and immediately bond. Although Mickey is the less educated of the two, he is seemingly the more insightful. Though the idea of "blood brothers" is only a superstition, in the case of Mickey and Eddie it has a deeper meaning, one of which neither boy has any awareness.

Also palpable in this exchange is the innocence shared by the two boys. They are too young to really understand about money and class, let alone violence or fate. Although they feel a mysterious kinship, they don't know enough to question it. Instead, they decide easily and simply to be "blood brothers," completely devoted to each other even though they have no idea of the complex web of lies that surrounds their uncomplicated friendship.

You see, you see why I don't want you mixing with boys like that! You learn filth from them and behave like this like a, like a horrible little boy, like them. But you are not like them. You are my son, mine, and you won't..you won't ever...Oh my son...my beautiful, beautiful son.

Related Characters: Mrs. Jennifer Lyons (speaker), Edward

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Already, Mrs. Lyons has become paranoid and suffocating. Her snobbishness has morphed into full-blown class hatred as she strives to keep her son away from his brother and his biological mother. She repeats "you are not like them" in order to remind both herself and her son that they are different than the Johnstones (even though Eddie is, in fact, a Johnstone by blood).

Mrs. Lyons' repetition of "You are my son" only further emphasizes her possessive and paranoid nature. She is desperate to reassure herself that she owns Eddie and that he will never be taken from her. What Mrs. Lyons does not understand, though, is that her own actions will eventually alienate her from her son, as she becomes increasingly dictatorial, prejudiced, and unstable.

But you know that if you cross your fingers
And if you count from one to ten
You can get up off the ground again
It doesn't matter
The whole thing's just a game.

Related Characters: Linda (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Along with Eddie, the neighborhood children play a game that involves battling with toy guns. Going over the rules, they explain that once you're shot in the game, you can simply "cross your fingers," count to ten, and get up once again.

To the children, death is nothing more than lying down on the ground and then standing back up on your feet. They don't understand the actual implications of guns, violence, or their own mortality.

Of course, the game the children play is also a terrible foreshadowing of what is to come (and it introduces the recurring the symbol of guns). For audiences, who understand that both the Johnstone twins are doomed to a violent death, these games have a terrible element of dramatic irony.

MRS. LYONS:...If we stay here I feel that something terrible will happen, something bad.
MR. LYONS: Look, Jen. What is this thing you keep talking about getting away from? Mm?
MRS. LYONS: It's just...it's these people...these people that Edward has started mixing with. Can't you see how he's drawn to them? They're...they're drawing him away from me.

Related Characters: Mr. Richard Lyons, Mrs. Jennifer Lyons (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

Deeply distraught that her son has met his (unknown) brother, Mrs. Lyons begs her detached husband to move the family away. She claims that she wants to remove her son from the bad element in the neighborhood, when really she only wants to separate him from Mickey and Mrs. Johnstone.

Already paranoid, Mrs. Lyons cannot understand that her son is simply growing up, making friends, and moving outside his comfort zone. Instead, she views every sign of his coming of age as proof that he is being "draw[n] away from [her]" by Mickey.

Along with Mrs. Lyons' fear comes a degree of snobbishness and pride. She hates Mickey not only because he represents Eddie's true family, but because she views him as low class and inferior.

Act 2 Quotes

Happy, are y'. Content at last?
Wiped out what happened, forgotten the past?
But you've got to have an endin', if a start's been made.
No one gets off without the price bein' paid.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

The Johnstones rejoice as they get to move to their new home out in the country. Mrs. Johnstone is especially jubilant, convinced that this change will allow her to leave behind her troubled and secretive past. Even in the midst of their happiness, though, the Narrator reappears with threatening news: he reminds Mrs. Johnstone--and the audience--that she can never truly escape the sins that she has committed.

Particularly ominous is the Narrator's talk of an "endin'." Since we already know that the play will conclude with the twins' deaths, the audience is clear on exactly how terrible the "endin'" that the Narrator references will be. By also referencing the "start," he reminds us that the twins' awful demise will only occur because of the original crime committed by their mothers.

MRS. LYONS: Where did you get that…locket from, Edward? Why do you wear it?
EDWARD: I can't tell you that, Ma. I've explained, it's a secret. I can't tell you.
MRS. LYONS: But…but I'm your mother.
EDWARD: I know, but I still can't tell you. It's not important, I'm going up to my room. It's just a secret, everybody has secrets, don't you have secrets?

Related Characters: Edward, Mrs. Jennifer Lyons (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Having received a locket as a gift from Mrs. Johnstone, Eddie refuses to tell his mother how he came by it, knowing that she will be furious (but not understanding why). Once again, Mrs. Lyons shows her paranoia and her utter lack of understanding of her son. As children grow up, they naturally begin to keep secrets. Mrs. Lyons, though, views this as a sign of insolence and insubordination, and becomes even more convinced that her son is pulling away from her.

Also notable is Eddie's question to his mother: "[D]on't you have secrets?" Of course, as readers/audience members, we know that Mrs. Lyons is keeping a massive secret from her son. Eddie, however, still innocent despite his newfound independence, is entirely unaware of the dark and convoluted history of his own origins.

What…Linda…Linda…Don't…Linda, I wanna kiss y', an' put me arms around y' an' kiss y' and kiss y' an even fornicate with y' but I don't know how to tell y' because I've got pimples an' me feet are too big an' me bum sticks out an'…

Related Characters: Mickey (speaker), Linda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

Frustrated and tongue-tied, Mickey has no idea how to tell Linda how he feels, so he instead rants to an empty stage about his feelings for her. In an often-dark musical, this moment is a relieving bit of lightheartedness. It's important to remember that this musical is not simply about sins, fate, and poverty--it is also about three young people growing up, and the strong bonds that they share.

By showing us Mickey's awkward adolescence, the play also makes us feel more connected and sympathetic towards him. Considering that we know that he is doomed, this technique is a tragic one, making us care deeply for a character who will inevitably die at the end of the play.

EDWARD: I wish I was a bit like
Wish that I could score a hit like
And be just a little bit like
That guy
MICKEY: I wish that I could be like
Just a little less like me
Like the sort of guy I see, like
That guy
That guy.

Related Characters: Edward, Mickey (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Not realizing that each is viewing his childhood friend (and secret brother), Mickey and Edward watch and envy each other from a distance here. Having been brought up in different circumstances, they have become vastly different people--yet despite this long time apart, they still feel a connection, and each wishes to be more like the other.

It is also significant that Edward and Mickey use so many of

the same words and expressions to describe each other. Although one is posh and the other poor, they are still two halves of the same whole, and use similar language to express themselves.

Beyond the brothers' connection with each other, the play is also taking another opportunity to emphasize the awkwardness and comedy of coming of age.

MRS. LYONS: Afraid he might eventually have forgotten you? Oh no. There's no chance of that. He'll always remember you. After we'd moved he talked less and less of you and your family. I started…just for a while I came to believe that he was actually mine.
MRS. JOHNSTONE: He is yours.
MRS. LYONS: No. I took him. But I never made him mine. Does he know? Have you told…
MRS. JOHNSTONE: Of course not!
MRS. LYONS: Even when—when he was a tiny baby I'd see him looking straight at me and I'd think, he knows…he knows. You have ruined me. But you won't ruin Edward!

Related Characters: Mrs. Johnstone, Mrs. Jennifer Lyons (speaker), Edward

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77-78

Explanation and Analysis

Meeting again after years and years, the two mothers have a confrontation: Mrs. Johnstone is confused and placating, while Mrs. Lyons is aggressive and accusatory. By now, her paranoia has morphed into a raging delusion. She is convinced that Eddie will never be her true son, and that Mrs. Johnstone has somehow kept a hold on him despite the physical and temporal distance that Mrs. Lyons has placed between them.

This conversation exemplifies the different ways that guilt affects these two women. Mrs. Johnstone has tried to put her sin out of her mind, and to focus instead on the family still with her. Mrs. Lyons, in contrast, has become obsessive and unstable, convinced that she will be punished for what she's done. She believes that she must protect her son from the obsession that has ruined her, unaware that her actions will actually lead to his death.

MRS. JOHNSTONE: YOU'RE MAD. MAD.
MRS. LYONS: I curse the day I met you. You ruined me.
MRS. JOHNSTONE: Go. Just go!
MRS. LYONS: Witch. I curse you. Witch!
MRS. JOHNSTONE: Go!

Related Characters: Mrs. Johnstone, Mrs. Jennifer Lyons (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

Becoming increasingly hysterical, Mrs. Lyons grows convinced that Mrs. Johnstone has ruined her life and her happiness. In revenge, she curses Mrs. Johnstone, calling her a "witch," and even attempting to hurt her.

In a complete reversal, Mrs. Lyons, once so skeptical of superstitious beliefs, now believes that Mrs. Johnstone has supernatural powers, and even attempts a curse of her own. Her deception--both of her own son, and of Mrs. Johnstone--has eaten her alive. She's become consumed by guilt, fear, and paranoia, and has no grasp on reality left.

Even in this horrifying moment, however, Mrs. Johnstone remains nonviolent. She does not attack the crazed Mrs. Lyons, but only attempts to defend herself.

And who'd dare tell the lambs in Spring,
What fate the later seasons bring.
Who'd tell the girl in the middle of the pair
The price she'll pay just for being there.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Linda, Edward, Mickey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

As the play depicts the idyllic adolescence of Linda, Mickey, and Edward, the Narrator returns to ruin the perfect picture, reminding the audience/readers that the happiness we are witnessing will soon turn to sorrow. He also adds a new element to the complicated web, informing us that Linda will play an unknowing and unwilling part in the terrible fate that is yet to come.

This passage also has a somber message about coming of

age. Linda, Mickey, and Edward aren't just innocent about their fate--they are innocent about the world, and the terrible way that it will rip them apart because of class and money. Their lack of knowledge about their doom becomes a metaphor for their broader ignorance about how difficult life can be.

EDWARD: If I was him, if I was him
That's what I'd do.
But I'm not saying a word
I'm not saying I care
Though I would like you to know
That I' not saying a word
I'm not saying I care
Though I would like you to know.
But I'm not.
LINDA: What?
EDWARD: Mickey.

Related Characters: Linda, Edward (speaker), Mickey

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

As Mickey, Eddie, and Linda get older, the seeds of discord begin to spring up: although Mickey and Linda are childhood friends, and clearly compatible in terms of their class, Eddie is also in love with Linda. In this song, he tells her of his feelings, but disguises them by saying that he would only express them if he were Mickey. The situation has grown increasingly complex, an unfortunate fact of growing up together.

It is also notable that Mickey and Eddie, despite having been raised in vastly different circumstances, are in love with the same woman. They may have different levels of money, education, and stature, but at their core, they are still intensely similar: proof that no matter how different the boys' nurture was, their inborn natures remain an important part of their character.

Take a letter, Miss Jones,
Due to the world situation
The shrinking pound, the global slump
And the price of oil
I'm afraid we must fire you,
We no longer require you,
It's just another
Sign of the times,
Miss Jones,
A most miserable sign of the times.

Related Characters: Managing Director (speaker), Mickey, Miss Jones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

The Managing Director of a factory has his secretary, Miss Jones, fire many of his employees, including Mickey. This event will cause a downward spiral in Mickey's life, leading him to end up in jail and addicted to antidepressants.

The Managing Director, however, does not care about the consequences of his actions. Although he may call what he has to do a "miserable sign of the times," he has no real empathy for his workers, nor does he particularly care about firing them. Instead, the Managing Director is a personification of a cruel and difficult economy that seemed to have no mercy whatsoever for the workers whose lives it ruined.

This song reflects the play's anguished attitude towards money and class, which ultimately prove just as damaging and fatal as the forces of superstition and fate.

EDWARD: I thought, I thought we always stuck together. I thought we were...blood brothers.
MICKEY: That was kids' stuff, Eddie. Didn't anyone tell y'? But I suppose you still are a kid, aren't y'?
EDWARD: I'm exactly the same age as you, Mickey.
MICKEY: Yeh. But you're still a kid. An' I wish I could be as well Eddie, I wish I could still believe in all that blood brother stuff. But I can't, because while no one was looking I grew up. An' you didn't, because you didn't need to; an' I don't blame y' for it Eddie. In your shoes I'd be the same, I'd still be able to be a kid. But I'm not in your shoes, I'm in these, lookin' at you. An' you make me sick, right? That was all just kids' stuff, Eddie, an' I don't want to be reminded of it. Right? So just, just take yourself away. Go an' see your friends an' celebrate with them.

Related Characters: Mickey, Edward (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92-93

Explanation and Analysis

Eddie and Mickey have now grown up; Eddie is in college, and Mickey has already been laid off from his factory job. While Eddie remains young and carefree, eager to celebrate and spend time with Mickey, Mickey has become increasingly jealous and resentful. He wishes that he'd possessed the advantages that Eddie did, and believes that he has been ruined by his circumstances. It is this resentment, in fact, that will also lead to the fatal confrontation between Eddie and Mickey. Although bonded together for years by their shared natures, their vastly different upbringings are now tearing them apart.

It is vital to understand that Mickey and Eddie have been separated solely because of their economic differences. A rich and privileged boy, Eddie is allowed to escape responsibility and to continue life as a carefree youth. Poor and lower class, Mickey has no recourse but to attempt to find another job. The forces of class and money are so strong, in fact, that they can even pull apart two brothers so close that even being separated at birth did not stop them from finding each other.

I didn't sort anythin' out Linda. Not a job, not a house, nothin'. It used to be just sweets an' ciggies he gave me, because I had none of me own. Now it's a job and a house. I'm not stupid, Linda. You sorted it out. You an' Councilor Eddie Lyons.

Related Characters: Mickey (speaker), Edward, Linda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Now embittered and cynical, Mickey furiously confronts Linda, convinced that she has conspired with Eddie to get their family a house, and to get him a job. During his years of unemployment and prison, Mickey's jealousy towards Eddie has soured into hatred. Irrationally, he refuses to accept any help from his former best friend, despite their previous closeness and Eddie's honest desire to help.

Also at play here are Mickey's feelings of insufficiency and shame. He knows and hates that he cannot support his family and Linda, and also instinctively senses that Eddie is in love with Linda. His jealousy, combined with his self-hatred, harden into an utter lack of reason or kindness. He accuses his wife and berates her, despite the fact that she is only doing what she believes to be best for her husband and her family, eventually driving her away completely.

There's a man gone mad in the town tonight,
He's gonna shoot somebody down,
There's a man gone mad, lost his mind tonight
...
There's a mad man running round and round.
Now you know the devil's got your number.
He's runnin' right beside you,
He's screamin' deep inside you,
And someone said he's callin' your number up today.

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Mickey

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

When Mickey finds out that Linda and Eddie are having an affair, he completely loses his grip on reason, finds a gun, and sets out to shoot Eddie. In the midst of a chaotic and frantic song, the chorus returns to the Narrator's original refrain: "the devil's got your number."

This is the play's way of telling us that fate has at last caught up with the Johnstone twins. Despite the fact that Mickey knows nothing about his mother's original pact, he is still reaping the consequences. The devil is "screamin' deep inside" of him, and will not rest until he pays the price for a series of decisions over which he had utterly no control.

MRS. JOHNSTONE: Mickey. Don't shoot Eddie. He's your brother. You had a twin brother. I couldn't afford to keep both of you. His mother couldn't have kids. I agreed to give one of you away!
MICKEY: You. You! Why didn't you give me away? I could have been...I could have been him!

Related Characters: Mickey, Mrs. Johnstone (speaker),

Edward

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

In an attempt to save Eddie's life, Mrs. Johnstone at last confesses her sin to Mickey, telling him that he and Eddie are actually brothers. Her words, however, have the opposite effect that she intended. Rather than relenting, Mickey only becomes further enraged, believing that he could have had a completely different (and better) life, if only he'd been given away instead of Eddie. Long ago, the boys had longed to be like each other--it is only now, however, that Mickey realizes that he actually *could* have been Eddie.

Throughout the play, Mickey has been feeling increasingly powerless and out of control. It is only now, however, that he realizes just how devoid of agency he actually is. Only by chance, he believes, has he ended up unemployed and addicted to antidepressants. Had fate gone a different way, he could have been a prosperous politician like Eddie. This idea drives him beyond sanity, and eventually leads him to shoot his own brother.

> And do we blame superstition for what came to pass? Or could it be what we, the English, have come to know as class?

Related Characters: The Narrator (speaker), Edward, Mickey

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

As the twins lie dead before a distraught Mrs. Johnstone, the Narrator enters to sum up what has occurred. Throughout the whole play, he has blamed fate and superstition for the doom that the twins are facing. Now, however, he hammers home the true message of the play: that an unjust and merciless class system has caused the tragedy that we have witnessed.

It is easy, the narrator implies, to blame superstition and fate--things out of our control--for the injustices that take place in the world. Instead, he asserts, it is the stratified English class system that is to blame, and (more broadly) a pitiless society that doesn't help those who are down and out, like Mickey, and favors those who are wealthy and prosperous, like Eddie. No world in which two such similar people could go on to lead such different lives, he seems to tell us, could ever be fair--especially when it is this very disparity that led to a senseless and brutal tragedy.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1

As Act One opens, Mrs. Johnstone laments in song, begging the narrator and audience to "tell me it's not true." The Narrator, meanwhile, introduces the audience to the story of the Johnstone brothers, twins separated at birth, who found out the story of their origins only moments before they died. There is a brief tableau, during which the audience witnesses Edward and Mickey's deaths, after which the Narrator brings forth their mother, Mrs. Johnstone.

From the first moments of the play, the audience is intended to know that the narrative is going to end in tragedy. The figure of the Narrator will often return to remind us of the terrible doom of Mickey and Edward, creating a constant sense of fateful foreboding.

Mrs. Johnstone, a thirty-year-old woman who looks far older than her years, sings about her deadbeat husband. She remembers the days of their courtship, when he flattered her by saying that she was "sexier than **Marilyn Monroe**," and took her dancing. Things went downhill, however, when Mrs. Johnstone got pregnant. The pair had a shotgun wedding, after which she quickly became pregnant again. By the time she was twenty-five, Mrs. Johnstone had seven children and was pregnant again. Her husband, she tells us, then left her for a woman "who looks a bit like Marilyn Monroe."

Mrs. Johnstone sings about her past, emphasizing Russell's theme of how difficult it is to escape choices and actions that occurred years ago. Mrs. Johnstone also introduces the important symbol of Marilyn Monroe. The doomed starlet will return many times over the course of the play, her steep decline mirroring the unfortunate circumstances faced by several characters, especially Mickey.

The Narrator, now playing a Milkman, rushes in to demand that Mrs. Johnstone pay him for the milk she's ordered. She tells him that she can't pay now, but that she needs the milk because she's pregnant. The Milkman replies, "no money, no milk." Mrs. Johnstone then listens as her children complain that they are hungry. She tries to calm them by listing all the food they'll eat when she begins to earn money, and she tells them that one day they'll all go dancing, just like **Marilyn Monroe**.

Russell begins illustrating the desperate economic situation in which Mrs. Johnstone has found herself. Too poor even to buy her children adequate food, she's reduced to asking them to imagine meals instead. The Narrator, as we will see, is a physical character in the play, assuming different forms—but all of them ominous or bearing bad news.

The scene shifts, moving to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Lyons, where Mrs. Johnstone works as a cleaning lady. Mrs. Lyons enters with a parcel and greets Mrs. Johnstone, complaining about how big and empty the house feels—her husband, Mr. Lyons, is away on a nine-month business trip. As Mrs. Lyons unwraps her package, she laments the fact that she hasn't had any children. She says that her husband is against adoption, but she believes that "an adopted child can become one's own." Mrs. Johnstone jokes that while Mrs. Lyons can't have children, she can't *stop* having them. As they speak, Mrs. Lyons puts the contents of her parcel—a pair of new shoes—on the table. Mrs. Johnstone immediately reacts with alarm. Deeply superstitious, she believes that **shoes on the table** mean bad luck. Mrs. Lyons is amused, but agrees to put the shoes away. Then she exits.

In an immediate contrast with the terrible conditions of Mrs. Johnstone's home life, Russell now moves us to the grand mansion of the Lyons family. One of the main themes of the play will be how class and wealth affect one's life—and Mrs. Lyons and Mrs. Johnstone live in totally different worlds because of their economic status. A second, equally important theme also appears in this passage: superstition, which will soon come to control the characters' actions as the narrative progresses. Although Mrs. Lyons herself has not yet become superstitious, here she witnesses the power that this fear has on Mrs. Johnstone.

After Mrs. Lyons leaves, the Narrator enters. He lists various superstitions, from **shoes on the table** to spilling salt to breaking a mirror, creating a sense of foreboding for the audience. Mrs. Johnstone tries to reassure herself that she is not superstitious.

The Narrator's frequent return ensures that the audience keeps the idea of superstition and bad omens in their minds, just as Mrs. Johnstone does.

The Narrator reenters, this time playing the Gynecologist. He listens to Mrs. Johnstone's fetus' heartbeat, and she tells him that she thinks she's figured out a way to feed the new baby. She is appalled, however, when the doctor tells her that she is actually having twins.

Circumstances in Mrs. Johnstones' life now start to spiral completely out of control. Russell critiques the class system of the UK, but only through a tragic story of individuals, not with any political language.

We return to Mrs. Lyons' home, where the rich woman finds Mrs. Johnstone devastated by the idea of having two more children, even worrying that they will be taken away from her by the state. Mrs. Lyons is immediately intrigued—and the Narrator appears, commenting on how "quickly" Mrs. Lyons' idea has been "planted." As the Narrator exits, Mrs. Lyons begins to beg Mrs. Johnstone to give one of the twins to her. Mrs. Lyons realizes that Mrs. Johnstone is due right before Mr. Lyons gets home, meaning that she could pass off the pregnancy as her own. Excited, Mrs. Lyons pads her stomach with a pillow, but Mrs. Johnstone expresses disbelief that she's actually serious. Mrs. Lyons tries to convince Mrs. Johnstone to agree to the scheme, even telling her that she'll be able to see the child every day.

This moment is a pivotal one in the narrative, as the two women begin to discuss the idea of the fateful plan that will set all the play's future events in motion. Already in this moment, we witness the dynamic that will soon come to dominate their relationship: Mrs. Johnstone is hesitant and wary, while Mrs. Lyons is all too excited to get her way, without any thought for the consequences. The plan is also rooted in lies—it's not simply an adoption, but a deception on a fairly massive scale—and the Narrator will emphasize how these sins must be atoned for, even if it's years later.

Mrs. Johnstone asks if Mrs. Lyons is really that desperate for a child. Mrs. Lyons responds in song, explaining how she constantly imagines a fantasy son, but that he always "fades away." Moved, Mrs. Johnstone imagines what it would be like for a child of hers to be raised in the lap of luxury. Mrs. Lyons joins in, telling her cleaning lady about all the wonderful things the child would have. Together they picture his future as a wealthy, upstanding member of society. Once again, Mrs. Lyons promises that Mrs. Johnstone could see the child whenever she wanted, and she swears to take care of him. Mrs. Johnstone agrees, much to Mrs. Lyons' joy.

Although the character of Mrs. Lyons is generally an unsympathetic one, here we (and Mrs. Johnstone) witness a moment of vulnerability and pain from the wealthy woman. Her fantasy draws in Mrs. Johnstone as well, and the two begin to picture the future of Mrs. Lyons' imaginary son. This idea—that because of their class difference, Mrs. Lyons' son should have a better future than Mrs. Johnstone's—will become a crucial pattern as the play moves forward.

As she begins to plan the deception, Mrs. Lyons has Mrs. Johnstone swear on a Bible never to tell anyone about the bargain. The two agree, and the Narrator appears, telling them (and the audience) that it is now too late for the women to go back on their agreement, because the deal has been sealed. Mrs. Lyons leaves to shop for things for the baby as Mrs. Johnstone stays behind, shaken. The Narrator says that a deal is a deal, and that there is now a debt that must be paid.

The Narrator's appearance as the two women swear on the Bible emphasizes how crucial this moment is. The women have now committed a crime—deception—and as the Narrator will often remind us, one day they will need to pay the debt for this crime. For the superstitious Mrs. Johnstone, especially, she can now never go back on her promise.

The Narrator exits and the play moves to a hospital room, where Mrs. Johnstone has given birth to her two baby boys. As she returns home, a Catalogue Man and Finance Man descend upon her and begin to demand that she pay her bills, asking her why she orders things she can't pay for. More creditors enter, and they begin to remove Mrs. Johnstone's possessions from her house in order to pay her debts. As she watches, she begins to sing about the many debts that she's had to pay in her life—and the biggest debt of all is that she will have to give one of her sons to Mrs. Lyons. Mrs. Johnstone laments the fact that she will never know her son, and that her life will always be full of prices to pay.

Even during a moment that should be joyous—the birth of her children—Mrs. Johnstone is still beset by financial troubles. While Mrs. Johnstone sings about her woes, her real (monetary) debts become metaphorical ones, as she contemplates the idea of losing one of her children to Mrs. Lyons. The idea of debts, both real and symbolic, will run through the entire show, as characters struggle with how their actions in the past affect their lives in the present.

Mrs. Lyons enters, wearing fake pregnancy padding, and is upset that Mrs. Johnstone hasn't notified her about the twins' birth. Mrs. Johnstone begs to keep them both for a few days, but Mrs. Lyons says that her husband Mr. Lyons is due back tomorrow. She reminds Mrs. Johnstone that she swore on the Bible to keep their agreement. Upset, Mrs. Johnstone tells Mrs. Lyons to take one of the babies, and once again she sings about the debts in her life. Mrs. Lyons tells her to take a full week off before returning as a cleaning lady. Mrs. Lyons exits.

Mrs. Lyons again proves herself to be overeager and bullying as she demands that Mrs. Johnstone give her one of the boys immediately. She is manipulative as well, pushing Mrs. Johnstone into making the trade by playing off of her superstitions. Mrs. Lyons' "generous" gift of only a week for maternity leave also shows just how sheltered and privileged she is.

Mrs. Johnstone's children ask her what happened to the twin whom Mrs. Lyons just took. Mrs. Johnstone responds that he's gone to heaven, and tells them about all the wonderful toys that he will play with there. The children ask if they can have toys as well, and beg her to look in the catalogue with them.

Although Mrs. Johnstone is an honest, warm-hearted character, the deal she made with Mrs. Lyons forces her to lie to her children about the whereabouts of their own sibling.

A week later, Mrs. Johnstone returns to work at Mrs. Lyons' house. She stops for a minute at her baby's crib and plays with him. Seeing her, Mr. Lyons approaches, and he expresses pride in both his wife and his new son. Mrs. Lyons, however, reacts hostilely, and tries to keep Mrs. Johnstone from touching the baby. Hurt and confused, Mrs. Johnstone exits. Meanwhile, Mrs. Lyons tells her husband that she doesn't want Mrs. Johnstone touching the baby because she might give it a disease. She goes on to say that Mrs. Johnstone is bothering the baby, and is trying to act like the baby's mother. Mr. Lyons tries to comfort her, but Mrs. Lyons refuses, saying that she wants to fire Mrs. Johnstone. Her husband says that she should do whatever she wants, and he tries to leave for a meeting. Then Mrs. Lyons asks him to give her some money: fifty pounds. Though Mr. Lyons is confused and alarmed, he agrees.

We see that Mrs. Johnstone still has a bond with her son—this is part of Russell's theme of "nature vs. nurture," in which he suggests that blood relatives always have a special kind of connection, even if they have totally different upbringings. Unfortunately, Mrs. Lyons sees this connection as well, and it is here that her feelings of jealousy, guilt, and paranoia truly begin to take form, as she realizes that the bond that Mrs. Johnstone has with her baby boy can never actually be broken. As the narrative moves forward, Mrs. Lyons' negative feelings towards Mrs. Johnstone will become worse and worse, eventually consuming her completely.

Mrs. Lyons calls for Mrs. Johnstone and announces to her that she is no longer doing satisfactory work. She tries to give Mrs. Johnstone the fifty pounds, and tells her to leave for good. Shocked, Mrs. Johnstone says that she'll be taking her son with her, but Mrs. Lyons refuses. Growing more and more upset, Mrs. Johnstone threatens to call the police. Mrs. Lyons responds that Mrs. Johnstone is at fault because she essentially sold her baby. Horrified, Mrs. Johnstone throws away the money that Mrs. Lyons has given her. Mrs. Johnstone says that she still wants to see her son, and that she'll tell someone about what Mrs. Lyons has done. Mrs. Lyons, terrified by the threat, makes up a new superstition on the spot, telling Mrs. Johnstone that twins secretly parted who learn about their origins will both immediately die. Therefore, the twins must be raised apart, and must never know the truth.

In this scene we begin to see how Mrs. Lyons' jealousy quickly consumes her, eventually turning her into the villain of the play. The scene also reveals the origins of the superstition that the Johnstone twins eventually fulfill—that if they ever know their true origins, both will die. What we witness here is that the superstition is a complete fabrication on the part of Mrs. Lyons—but as the musical will go on to prove, people often carry out their own superstitions, and create their own bad luck. We can unwittingly bring about our own dooms by believing too strongly that those dooms are fated.

The Narrator enters and once again sings about all the various omens of bad luck. He tells Mrs. Johnstone that "the devil's got your number," and that eventually, he's going to find her and punish her for selling her son. The song ends as he threatens that the Devil is "knocking at your door."

The Narrator will return many times to remind both Mrs. Johnstone and Mrs. Lyons of their crime. He represents not only the forces of fate and superstition, but also the power of their own guilt.

The play moves seven years into the future, as the son whom Mrs. Johnstone kept, Mickey, knocks on his mother's door while carrying a toy **gun**. His mother comes out, relieved to see him, and embraces him. He begins to complain, saying that "our Sammy"—his older brother—has stolen his other gun. Mrs. Johnstone tries to comfort him, saying that Sammy only bullies his brother because he's the youngest. Mickey explains that they've been playing policeman and Indians. Then he pretends to shoot his mother, telling her that she's now dead. Mickey offhandedly mentions that they've been playing down by the big houses near the park. Alarmed and upset, Mrs. Johnstone tells him never to play in that area. Mickey protests that she lets Sammy play there, but she replies that Sammy is older than he is, and exits.

We now move on to a vital theme within the play: that of coming of age. As the youngest child in the Johnstone clan, Mickey longs to be older so that the other children will stop bullying him. Another crucial theme—violence—is introduced here as well. As we see here, the idea of violence begins rather innocently, with the children playing an imaginary game with toy guns. As the play moves forward, however, the violence will begin to increasingly escalate, until it finally becomes fatal. Guns are symbolic precisely for this reason—they are always a representation and foreshadowing of violence, even when they are just children's toys.

Frustrated, Mickey sings about how much he envies his brother Sammy. He complains that even though he himself is almost eight, everyone in his life treats him as a baby, bullying him and telling him what to do.

As a youngest child of many, Mickey wishes for a maturity that he doesn't yet have—although eventually, adulthood will prove to be nothing like what he imagines.

As Mickey sulks, Edward, Mrs. Lyons' son, emerges and greets him, saying that he saw Mickey playing by his house. Mickey says that he's not allowed to play up there anymore, and Edward replies that he's not supposed to play down by Mickey's house. When Mickey demands candy, Edward happily agrees, adding that Mickey can take as many as he wants. Confused by Edward's generosity and openness, Mickey tells him that in his world, people don't simply give things away for free. His brother Sammy, for instance, would urinate on a sweet before giving it to his younger sibling. Mickey curses, impressing Edward, and then teaches his newfound friend "the 'F'' word." Edward vows to look up the word in the dictionary. He then has to explain to a confused Mickey what exactly a dictionary is. The conversation turns back to Sammy, and Mickey explains that his older brother's mood swings are due to the plate in his head—left over from when his sister, Donna Marie, dropped Sammy on his head as a baby.

The force of fate emerges again, as the two brothers meet each other despite not knowing about their shared blood. Immediately, the differences in the boys' upbringings are apparent; Mickey is rough and suspicious, while Edward is open and generous. Russell clearly suggests that this is a result of their class difference—Mickey has been forced to protect what little he has, while Edward has always had plenty to spare. Despite these differences, the two boys immediately begin to get along, again bringing up the idea of a special connection between blood relatives. We're also reminded of the various misfortunes that have befallen the Johnstone family, and even get an explanation for Sammy's present (and future) delinquency—he was dropped on his head as a baby.

Awed by Mickey's streetwise talk, Edward asks the other boy if they can be best friends. Mickey agrees. The two exchange names, and realize that they're not only the same age, but have the same birthday. Because of this revelation, Mickey asks if Edward wants to be his "blood brother." The two cut their fingers and shake hands, pledging to defend and stand by each other, and to always share sweets.

The presence of fate seems even stronger as the two boys decide to become not just best friends, but "blood brothers." Of course, the idea of this relatively innocent childhood ritual also connects to the blood of violence at the play's end. Although the two boys have never even met each other, their shared origin ("nature") seems to create an immediate bond between them.

Sammy enters and interrupts the moment, holding a toy **gun**. He demands a sweet, and Edward agrees, even as Mickey frantically attempts to get his new friend to lie about having candy. Eventually Mickey hands over a sweet, but he also tries to get his gun back from Sammy. As the brothers squabble, Edward attempts to see the plate inside Sammy's head, before apologizing for his rudeness. Sammy mocks Edward as "poshy," but Mickey stands up for the other boy. The conversation moves on, and Sammy complains that all of his pet worms have died, and that he'll need to give them a funeral.

Sammy enters, already a representation of violence and chaos. His crudeness and rudeness only emphasize how similar the other two boys are in contrast. In this context, the honest and straightforward Mickey seems more like Edward than like the juvenile delinquent Sammy. Despite his bad temper and slow mind, Sammy still represents the pinnacle of maturity and wisdom to Edward and Mickey.

Mrs. Johnstone emerges from her house, and Mickey introduces Edward as his "brother." Mrs. Johnstone hears Edward's name and freezes with surprise. After a moment, however, she orders Sammy and Mickey to get into her house. Edward asks her if he's done something wrong, and Mrs. Johnstone asks him whether Mrs. Lyons knows where he is. Edward admits that his mother would be upset to learn where he is. Mrs. Johnstone orders him to head home, telling him to never come around her house ever again. If he does, she warns, the bogey man will get him.

In a moment of dramatic irony, Mickey and Edward don't fully understand the significance of their new "brotherhood," but Mrs. Johnstone does. Her superstition gets the best of her, however, and she still fears Mrs. Lyons' claim that if the twins find out the truth, they will both die. So despite her longing to see her son, she still orders Edward away. Her threat of the "bogey man" also signals her own fear about the situation, and her overall reliance on superstition.

As Edward leaves, Mrs. Johnstone sings a lament that her son will never recognize her.

Although Mrs. Johnstone mourns her estrangement from Edward, she recognizes that it was her choice to give him up.

We shift to Mr. and Mrs. Lyons' house. Mr. Lyons gives Edward the present of a toy **gun**, and then pretends to die. Mrs. Lyons begins to read her husband and son a story, but Mr. Lyons gets ready to leave before it is over. Edward reacts with disappointment, but Mr. Lyons explains that he must go to work. As Edward reads the dictionary, Mrs. Lyons complains that Mr. Lyons doesn't spend enough time with his family. Mr. Lyons is unmoved, however, and he exits.

Once again a toy gun makes an appearance, in a sinister mixture of innocence and violence. We see here how smothering and overprotective Mrs. Lyons is—although considering the detachment and absence of her husband, her anxiety is perhaps understandable. Even this wealthy family, it seems, has its own problems and discords.

With his father gone, Edward asks Mrs. Lyons how to spell the word "bogey man." Mrs. Lyons tells him that the bogey man is just a superstition of silly mothers.

Edward seems to have a stronger instinctual connection to Mrs. Johnstone than to his own "mother," in this case being influenced by Mrs. Johnstone's superstitions.

The doorbell of the Lyons house rings—it is Mickey come to see if Edward can play with him. The boys explain to Mrs. Lyons that they are blood brothers. Mrs. Lyons tries to usher her son off to bed, and then escorts Mickey out of her house. When she returns, she asks Edward how he met Mickey, and revealing that she knows Mickey's last name to be Johnstone. She scolds her son, telling Edward that he and Mickey are not the same. Edward says that he hates her, and that if she loved him she would let him spend time with Mickey, whom he likes more than he likes his mother. They continue to fight, until Edward calls his mother a "fuckoff." Incensed, she slaps him. After telling him never to mix with such horrible boys again, Mrs. Lyons abruptly apologizes, calling him her "beautiful son."

The bond between Mickey and Edward begins to cause trouble when Edward reveals their friendship to the paranoid and anxious Mrs. Lyons, who already feels a great deal of rivalry with and envy toward the absent Mrs. Johnstone. Edward, however, begins to show the same stubborn, rebellious streak as his brother, and even takes on some of his rough, foul language as well. We once again witness evidence of Mrs. Lyons' instability as she overreacts to her son's insolence with violence—before almost immediately exhibiting remorse.

Edward watches from his garden as the neighborhood children begin a series of battles with each other. Sammy is in one gang, while Mickey and his friend Linda are in another. The children sing about their game, celebrating when they beat each other, but all the while knowing that "it doesn't matter" because "the whole thing's just a game." Sammy is particularly violent and inappropriate, tormenting his little brother until Mickey tells him to "fuck off." The other children immediately turn on Mickey and Linda, telling the boy that he's going to die and go to hell for saying "the 'F' word." Mickey is upset by the taunts, and Linda attempts to defend him. Eventually the two are left alone onstage.

The theme of violence begins to expand as the neighborhood children play a game with toy guns. By including this sequence, Russell illustrates just how common violence is in the world, but also how naïve the children are about the full implications of their games. We also see how isolated Mickey is—like Edward, he doesn't quite belong to the world in which he lives. This sense of loneliness only cements the bond that will eventually form among Linda, Edward, and Mickey.

With the other children offstage, Linda comforts the upset Mickey. He cries that he doesn't want to die. She tells him that everyone must die eventually, and that in death he'll at last be able to see his twin again. Mickey brags that he's stolen Sammy's best **gun**, and tells Linda that they can play with it with Edward.

Here Russell begins to establish the importance of the relationship between Linda and Mickey. We also learn that Mickey still misses his twin, despite being told that he died at birth.

Mickey and Linda arrive at Edward's garden. The two boys share the fact that their mothers don't want them to play together, but decide to ignore their commands. Mickey introduces Edward to Linda, and the three decide to play together with Sammy's **gun** by trying to shoot at the "thingy" on the Peter Pan statue in the park. Edward is worried that they'll be caught by a policeman, but the other two children brag that they've been caught by policemen hundreds of times, and explain the various ways that they prank the unsuspecting lawmen. Edward is deeply impressed, and the trio exits.

Although Mickey and Linda are no more experienced or mature than Edward, they still use their street smarts to try to impress him. This sequence illustrates the vast difference between Linda and Mickey's world and Edward's privileged upbringing. The mention of Peter Pan, meanwhile, is a sly reference to the famous boy who never grew up—childhood, Russell implies, is an idyllic and all-too-fleeting time.

Mrs. Lyons enters, looking for Edward. The Narrator enters as well, and repeats his refrain, warning Mrs. Lyons that "gypsies" are going to come and take her baby away, and telling her that the devil has her number as well.

Here the Narrator represents Mrs. Lyons' barely suppressed fear and paranoia. Mrs. Lyons started out using superstition as a manipulative tool against Mrs. Johnstone, but now Mrs. Lyons seems equally superstitious—she has come to believe her own lies.

Mr. Lyons tries to calm a frantic Mrs. Lyons, who is terrified about where her son has gone. Mr. Lyons wonders if something is wrong with his wife's nerves. Mrs. Lyons tells him that she hates where they live, and wants to move far away before "something terrible" happens. She is disgusted by the children Edward is playing with, and worries that they are "drawing him away from me." As Mr. Lyons tries to placate her, he picks up a pair of Edward's **shoes and places them on the table**. Mrs. Lyons reacts with fright, sweeping the shoes off the table. As she does so, the Narrator enters, again listing his various bad omens, and adding that the devil is coming for Mrs. Lyons.

Mrs. Lyons hysteria reaches new heights as she begs her husband to move away from the area entirely. The depths of her paranoia, however, become apparent when she is terrified by shoes upon the table. A superstition that she previously scoffed at has now become horrifying to her, proof of her underlying fear and anxiety about her original deception. The narrator's appearance only underscores the feeling of foreboding within the scene, as he acts as an embodiment of Mrs. Lyons' fear and guilt.

The three children, meanwhile, are playing with their stolen toy **gun**. Only Linda hits the target, until Mickey declares that they aren't playing with the gun anymore, and they decide to throw stones through windows instead. Neither Mickey nor Linda is brave enough to do so, however, and so Edward volunteers. He throws a rock through a window, only to be caught by a policeman. Linda and Mickey are terrified, but Edward sasses the policeman, as he believes the other two often do. When Edward sees their negative reactions, however, all three children begin to cry. They exit, pursued by the policeman.

Once again the gun returns as a double-edged symbol, simultaneously symbolizing both violence and innocence. Innocence also crops up in the form of Edward, who naïvely attempts to prove his bravery and daring to Mickey and Linda. This scene also represents the first real illustration of the bond among Mickey, Edward, and Linda—the closeness of which at first seems ideal, but eventually proves deadly.

The policeman confronts Mrs. Johnstone, telling her that she and her children will get no more warnings—if Sammy or Mickey commit any more crimes, he will take Mrs. Johnstone to court. As he leaves, Mrs. Johnstone sings, imagining moving her family to a new place far away from their home and their troubles.

The policeman is rude and abrupt to Mrs. Johnstone, a signal of how many times he has already had to discipline her family (especially the unruly Sammy). Mrs. Johnstone's lament, meanwhile, symbolizes the regrets of her past, which always seem to follow her.

The policeman moves on to the Lyons' house, where he behaves in quite a different manner, drinking a glass of scotch with Mr. Lyons and telling him that Edward isn't really in trouble. He does, however, warn Mr. Lyons to keep Edward away from the poor neighborhood children.

In contrast to his rudeness at Mrs. Johnstone's house, the policeman is polite and fawning towards Mr. Lyons. Justice is supposed to be blind, but the Lyons' wealth makes the policeman hypocritical and unfair. Even though Edward was the one who actually threw the rock, it is the poor boys who are punished.

After the policeman leaves, Mr. Lyons asks Edward if he would like to move to the country, explaining that Mrs. Lyons has been ill. Edward protests that he wants to stay, but Mr. Lyons asks him to consider it.

Mrs. Lyons' paranoia has reached such a fever pitch that she is actually willing to uproot her life and her family in order to escape the Johnstones and her shameful past.

Edward leaves his house and goes to the Johnstones', where Mrs. Johnstone answers the door. She asks him if his mother looks after him, and he responds that she does. Mrs. Johnstone warns Edward not to come to her house again, and Edward says that he was just looking for Mickey, to tell his friend that he will be moving to the country the very next day. He begins to cry, saying that he wants to stay where Mickey is. Overcome with emotion, Mrs. Johnstone embraces Edward and says that he will soon forget Mickey, but Edward says that he'll never forget. Mrs. Johnstone observes that while Edward doesn't want to leave, she herself has been wanting to abandon her community for years. Edward asks her why she can't buy a house near his family's. In response, Mrs. Johnstone removes a **locket** from her neck with a picture of Mickey and herself in it. She gives Edward the locket so that he can remember Mickey, and tells him that he must keep it a secret. Encouraged by this gesture, Edward tells Mrs. Johnstone that he thinks she's "smashing."

Although Mrs. Johnstone's fear and superstition have thus far kept her from interacting with Edward, here her motherly instincts overcome her better judgment as she embraces and comforts him. Edward, meanwhile, once again displays his innocence, as he naïvely asks why the Johnstones can't just buy a house near his family. This moment is most vital, however, because Mrs. Johnstone gives Edward the locket containing the picture of her and Mickey. This object will not only become an important plot point, but is also a physical symbol of the familial bond among the three of them. Although Edward has no idea that he's related to Mrs. Johnstone, he still feels instinctively drawn to her, and in fact interacts with her much more easily than he does with his own mother.

Mickey and Edward say a wordless goodbye. Edward gives Mickey a toy **gun**, and then travels away with his parents.

In a grim moment of foreshadowing, the two boys exchange a gun (rather than a bullet, as they will in the deadly finale).

Edward is unenthusiastic about his new home in the country, although Mrs. Lyons tries to persuade him of how beautiful it is. He reacts with violent fear, however, when he sees a magpie, explaining that Mickey told him that the birds signify sorrow. Mrs. Lyons tells him to forget about Mickey, but Edward says that he's going to go inside and read. Mr. Lyons reassures Mrs. Lyons that children are adaptable, but she is not comforted.

Even though he's grown up in a rich and "rational" home, Edward has quickly taken on Mickey's superstitions, proof of the influence that the other boy has had over him. Mrs. Lyons, meanwhile, reacts hypocritically. Although she is paranoid and superstitious herself, she mocks superstition when her son displays it—perhaps because it reminds her of Mrs. Johnstone.

Mickey visits Edward's former home, but a strange woman answers the door. He asks where Edward has moved, but she doesn't know, and asks him to leave. Left alone on the street, Mickey begins to sing about how lonely it is to be bored and without your best friend on a Sunday afternoon. "Equally bored and alone," Edward sings the same song in his garden. They begin to sing about each other, with Mickey singing about how smart and generous Edward is, and Edward marveling at how strong and savvy Mickey is.

Despite his young age, Mickey shows persistence and loyalty in his quest to reunite with Edward. The two share a song, musical proof of how similar they are, and of their shared blood and temperaments. Although the two boys have no idea how deep the bond they share really is, they already sense how important each one is to the other.

Mrs. Johnstone appears clutching a letter, ecstatic. Donna Marie and Sammy enter, as do the Johnstones' neighbors, and Mrs. Johnstone announces that her family is being relocated to the country, where no one will know her family's reputation. She begins to imagine her family's life at their new address, with its garden and its fresh, country air. She orders her children to come help her pack, as all of her neighbors (and the Milkman) rejoice that the unruly family will finally be leaving. Mrs. Johnstone reenters, singing about all of the rickety old furniture that they're leaving behind. She even pictures the Pope visiting her in her new house. As she sings about this "bright new day," the scene transitions to the country, where the Johnstone children explore their new home. Act One ends.

As the first act reaches its conclusion, Mrs. Johnstone announces—as Mrs. Lyons did before her—that her family is moving to the country. The strange parallels between the lives of Mickey and Edward continue. By leaving the city, Mrs. Johnstone hopes to escape her sordid past, and to leave all the various unfortunate events in her life—from being abandoned by her husband to giving up her own child—behind her. This is a surprisingly upbeat note for this dark musical, but in the end, the idea of leaving behind the past turns out to be a deceptively optimistic one.

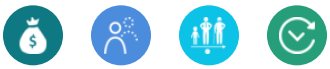
ACT 2

Seven years have passed. Mrs. Johnstone sings about her lovely new house. She pays her milk bill on time, and the milkman even takes her dancing, telling her that she has legs like **Marilyn Monroe**. Of course, Sammy has burned the school down, but Mrs. Johnstone manages to get him out of a punishment by flirting with the judge, who also tells her that she looks like Marilyn Monroe. Mickey, meanwhile, has turned fourteen, and has begun to notice girls, although he's very embarrassed about it. Donna Marie, just like her mother, is married and has several children already. Mrs. Johnstone prays that Edward is still all right, wherever he is (not like Marilyn Monroe, who has died).

Another seven year jump puts the idea of coming of age front and center, as Edward and Mickey are suddenly teenagers. Although it seems optimistic, Mrs. Johnstone's song has darker undertones. Not only has Sammy continued in his juvenile delinquency, but Mrs. Johnstone is still comparing her life to that of Marilyn Monroe, proof that she has not truly left the past behind. Making this point even more obvious is the fact that she still prays for Edward, despite having been absent from his life for seven years.

Mrs. Lyons enters, teaching Edward how to waltz. Edward has been at boarding school, and is about to go back for another term. Mrs. Lyons embraces her son tightly, asking him if he's had a good time at home, and if he feels safe in their home. The car horn honks, and Edward exits with Mr. Lyons.

In contrast to Mrs. Johnstone's dancing with the milkman, Mrs. Lyons' choice of dance is a waltz, emphasizing her poshness. Her clinginess towards Edward illustrates that her paranoia and anxiety continue even in the country.



Mrs. Johnstone enters, hurrying Mickey off to school, and telling him that she's been hearing him talk about Linda in his sleep. Linda enters, waiting at the bus stop, and Mrs. Johnstone continues to tease her son. As she does so, Sammy enters—he tells his mother that he's off to wait in the unemployment line for his latest check. Mrs. Johnstone allows him to go, and is amused by Mickey's obvious crush on Linda.

The theme of coming of age becomes even more apparent as we witness how Mickey's feelings for Linda have evolved. Sammy, meanwhile, continues his path towards unemployment and crime. Sammy's fate is a subplot for now, but it will eventually become crucial to the narrative, and Russell holds him up as an example of how poverty often leads to hopelessness and crime.

The conductor—played by the Narrator—tells the teenagers to get on the bus, but then turns to Mrs. Johnstone. He asks if she's happy, and whether she's forgotten the past. He reminds her that she can't escape eventually paying the price for her actions.

Shattering the fairly optimistic mood is the re-appearance of the Narrator who, as usual, acts as an ominous force of superstition and fate, reminding both characters and audience that there is a debt that must be paid.

The kids get on the bus. Mickey and Linda pay a reduced price because they're students, but Sammy attempts to pay the lower rate as well. When the conductor tells Sammy that he's too old, Sammy produces a knife, and attempts to rob the bus. The conductor stops the bus and Sammy runs away, pursued by two policemen.

Sammy's descent into a life of crime becomes more and more obvious as he attempts to rob a bus. His attraction towards violence, already clear when he was a young child, has clearly evolved, and will continue to do so as the play moves forward. The toy gun has become a knife, and soon it will become a real gun.

Linda and Mickey are left alone onstage, and Linda warns Mickey that Sammy's going to be put into prison. She says that Mickey had better not ever go bad like Sammy, or she won't love him anymore. Mickey tells her to stop saying that she loves him, but Linda retorts that she does, and that she doesn't care who knows. Embarrassed, Mickey hurries off to school, and Linda follows him.

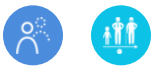
During this scene, Linda's true feelings for Mickey become clear, as she confidently and without embarrassment tells her friend that she loves him. Mickey, however, is still immature and unsure, and has no idea of how to react to her declaration or her advances.

Meanwhile, at Edward's school, a teacher confronts Edward about his secret **locket**, ordering him to take it off because it's not an appropriate accessory for a boy. Edward refuses repeatedly, finally telling his teacher to "take a flying fuck." The teacher, furious, threatens to have Edward suspended.

Again Edward demonstrates that he has a stubborn and rebellious streak similar to Mickey's. It is particularly significant since he uses the "f-word" that Mickey taught him seven years ago.

Back in Linda and Mickey's school, a teacher is teaching a group of students about the Boro Indians of the Amazon. Although a know-it-all student tries to answer the teacher's questions, the teacher decides to pick on Mickey, who hasn't even been paying attention. Linda defends him, but the teacher grows angry as Mickey becomes increasingly defiant (and as Linda declares that she loves him). At last, the teacher suspends Mickey and Linda, both of whom leave the class.

The parallels between Mickey and Edward's lives continue as Mickey experiences trouble at school at the same time as Edward does. Mickey's disciplinary issues, however, take place in a far rougher environment than Edward's do, a further illustration that while the boys share similar temperaments, they've had vastly different upbringings.



We move back to Edward, now with Mrs. Lyons, who is appalled that her son has been suspended. In an effort to explain, he shows her the **locket**, which she looks at without opening, believing it to be from a girlfriend. Teasingly, she opens it up, but is appalled to find the picture of Mickey and Mrs. Johnstone within it. She questions Edward about where he got it, but he responds that it's a secret. Edward asks his mother if she herself has any secrets, and then storms off to his room.

Edward displays the same stubbornness—but honesty—with his mother as he does with his teacher, even more proof that his Johnstone personality can still overcome his Lyons upbringing. The locket, meanwhile, fulfills Mrs. Lyons' worst fears. The past will follow her, no matter how hard she tries to escape it—and no matter how much she tries to make Edward hers, he still feels a bond with his biological mother and brother.

The Narrator enters, mocking Mrs. Lyons for feeling secure, and telling her that no amount of time can brush away the past. The devil, he warns her, still has her number, and will always know where to find her.

The Narrator again assumes the role of Mrs. Lyons' paranoia and anxiety. His frequent references to the devil make his presence even more ominous.

Mickey and Linda walk up a hill—Linda struggling in her high-heeled shoes. Her foot gets stuck, and she asks Mickey to put his arms around her waist and pull her out, but she soon begins teasing him. They can see the wealthy homes in the distance, and Mickey points out a boy looking out of his window that he sometimes sees from the hill. Linda, still teasing, begins to talk about how gorgeous the other boy is. She asks if Mickey is jealous, but he denies it. Frustrated, she storms off.

The flirtatious dynamic between Mickey and Linda continues, but ends with a disagreement. Although Linda clearly likes Mickey, he simply feels too awkward and unattractive to respond to her advances. That the boy in the window is actually Edward makes this scene a painful moment of dramatic irony, as well as foreshadowing of the "love triangle" that will form between the three later.

As Linda leaves, Mickey talks to an imaginary Linda, saying how much he wants to hold and kiss her, but that he can't because he's far too ugly and awkward. He sees the boy from the window—Edward, whom he doesn't recognize—walking towards him, and imagines what it would be like to be suave and debonair, as he imagines Edward to be. Edward, meanwhile, sings about how he longs for Mickey's freedom. The two boys duet, wishing for each other's looks, and referring to each other as "that guy."

The parallels between Mickey and Edward continue, but now a note of jealousy enters the bond between the two boys. Each envies the others' life, and this is proof both of their shared temperament, and of the very different environments in which they've grown up. The idea of envy between the two boys, first planted here, will become increasingly destructive as the play continues.

The two boys meet, and Mickey asks for a cigarette. Edward says that he doesn't have one, but that he could get some for Mickey if he wants. The two then realize each other's identities, and are ecstatic to be reunited. Edward asks who the girl he saw with Mickey is, and Mickey explains that it's Linda. The two discuss girlfriends, and Edward reveals that he doesn't have any. Mickey bluffs for a moment, saying that he has many girlfriends, but then caves, explaining that he's tried to ask out Linda many times, but every time he tries, he's unable to say the words. Edward tries to give Mickey advice about Linda, and then suggests that they go and see a pornographic film together for tips. Mickey agrees, saying that they'll need to stop at his home so that he can get money first. As the boys head off together, we realize that Mrs. Lyons has been watching the entire exchange. After a moment, she follows the pair.

That this interaction after seven years spent apart so closely mirrors their first interaction only further emphasizes the fact that the forces of fate seem to be bringing Edward and Mickey together. They quickly re-bond over their shared awkwardness around girls, and their desire to learn about the more adult elements of life. Though this exchange seems endearing and adolescent, a sinister note enters the proceedings in the form of Mrs. Lyons, who has now actually begun spying on her teenage son. Her paranoia has already become dangerous and destructive, and will only grow more so.

The two boys walk along as, unbeknownst to them, the Narrator follows them (along with Mrs. Lyons). Edward offers to lend Mickey money, but Mickey says that he will ask Mrs. Johnstone for some. Edward says that they need to move quickly, before his unstable mother sees them. They exit. The Narrator sings his refrain, mocking the idea of security, and adding that the past can never be locked away, that there will always be a debt to pay, and that the devil is waiting.

A pattern emerges, as Mickey and Edward's innocent teenage banter contrasts with the sinister forces of fate, jealousy, and superstition that are swirling around them. As usual, the Narrator embodies these darker ideas, but this time, Mrs. Lyons does as well, proof of how far gone she is on the road to destruction.

Mickey and Edward burst into Mrs. Johnstone's kitchen, with Mickey thrilled to reintroduce his mother to his old friend. Mrs. Johnstone is shocked but happy to see Edward, and she tells Mickey that he can take a pound to go see a movie. As Mickey goes to the other room for the money, Mrs. Johnstone asks if Edward still has the **locket** she gave him. Edward replies that he does. Slyly, Mrs. Johnstone asks the boys what movie they plan on seeing. Although they try to lie, Mrs. Johnstone catches them—but she is amused rather than angry. She tells them to leave, and as they exit, Edward marvels at how wonderful she is.

Even though she is poor, Mrs. Johnstone is generous with money when it comes to her son. Despite her surprise at seeing Edward, she instantly rekindles her old instinctual bond with him. In contrast to the paranoid Mrs. Lyons, Mrs. Johnstone here proves herself to be understanding and empathetic, even allowing her two teenage sons to go see a pornographic film. She understands the concept of growing up in a way that Mrs. Lyons never will.

With the boys gone, Mrs. Lyons emerges to confront Mrs. Johnstone, demanding to know how long the family has lived in the area. Becoming increasingly hysterical, she asks whether Mrs. Johnstone intends to follow her forever. Mrs. Lyons adds that Edward refuses to remove the locket with Mrs. Johnstone's picture. Mrs. Johnstone stammers that she only wanted him to remember her. Mrs. Lyons says that Edward will always remember Mrs. Johnstone, and will never truly be hers. She goes on, asking Mrs. Johnstone whether she's told Edward the truth. Mrs. Johnstone protests that she has not, but Mrs. Lyons admits that even when her son was a baby, she felt that on some level, he knew. Saying that Mrs. Johnstone has ruined her, she vows that Edward will not be ruined as well. She offers Mrs. Johnstone any sum of money she wants if she will leave the area. The poorer woman refuses, however, saying that Mrs. Lyons should move if she wants to. Mrs. Lyons responds that the Johnstones will follow her wherever she goes. Completely insane, Mrs. Lyons then tries to stab Mrs. Johnstone with a kitchen knife. Mrs. Johnstone disarms her, calling her "mad," and Mrs. Lyons curses her, calling her a witch, before at last exiting.

In this scene, the full extent of Mrs. Lyons' insanity finally emerges. She is so haunted by her past deception that she now puts all the blame on Mrs. Johnstone, believing that the other woman has "ruined" and "cursed" her. Although Mrs. Lyons believes that her son Edward does not really belong to her, this is a delusion that springs from her deep guilt, rather than an actual fact. Even in the midst of her emotional breakdown, Mrs. Lyons still believes that money can fix everything—Mrs. Johnstone, however, has very different ideas. Although she is terrified of the other woman, Mrs. Johnstone shows both courage and compassion here, hearing out Mrs. Lyons' ranting for as long as she can, and defending herself when Mrs. Lyons becomes violent. This scene completes Mrs. Lyons' transformation from a snobbish but sympathetic character into an outright villain.

The neighborhood children emerge, singing about a mad woman who lives high on the hill, and warning the audience never to interact with her.

Mrs. Lyons now becomes a figure of legend, a cautionary tale rather than an actual three-dimensional person.

Meanwhile Edward and Mickey emerge from the movie, dazed and impressed. They gasp at the idea of naked breasts, and as Edward begins a chant of "tits, tits, tits," Linda and a friend of hers exit the cinema as well. Edward tries to dance with the friend, who quickly exits. Linda, meanwhile, asks Mickey what he's doing in town. Mickey, embarrassed, lies (while Edward almost blurts out the truth). Linda, however, reveals that she was at the same pornographic movie.

Mrs. Lyons' breakdown contrasts with Edward and Mickey's adolescent awe over the pornographic film. We also get some comedic "coming of age" moments to lighten the mood. Linda, meanwhile, defies sexist expectations by freely admitting that she's just seen the same movie. Although she will eventually be caught in a love triangle, this female character is not a damsel in distress.

Edward continues his chant, eventually getting so excited that he jumps on top of a lamppost. A policeman enters, and the three adolescents use the same impertinent responses that they did as children. Linda distracts the policeman and the trio makes a run for it, with the policeman chasing after them.

As usual, Edward is innocent and exuberant, while Mickey and Linda are more cautious and streetwise. The adolescents fall into the same pattern they did seven years ago, again proving the lingering power of the past.

The three teenagers spend the summer together, as the Narrator illustrates (in song) the innocent, idyllic months that pass. The three go to a shooting range and play monkey-in-the-middle, while the Narrator warns that one day Linda will pay a price for being in between the two brothers. The Narrator comments that the adolescents don't care what's to come at the end of the day, and we see them grow from fourteen to eighteen, enjoying time at the beach together and taking photographs. In the last shot, the Narrator takes a picture of all three of them together, singing that at their age, you don't notice any of the bad things in life, because you're "young, free, and innocent."

The theme of coming of age becomes most dominant here, as several years go by during a single song. Though most of this sequence is filled with idyllic scenes of the trio's wonderful summers together, the Narrator makes sure to add an ominous note to the proceedings. The characters enjoy their youth, but the Narrator reminds us that childhood must end. He also specifically warns Linda about the heartbreak that the two brothers will cause her, meaning that yet another life will be ruined by Mrs. Lyons' and Mrs. Johnstone's fateful choice.

Edward waits by a streetlight as Linda teases him. Edward asks where Mickey is, and she replies that he's working overtime at a factory. Edward is miserable because he must go away to university the next day. He asks if he can write to Linda, but comments that Mickey might mind, since Linda is Mickey's girlfriend. Linda says that she isn't, because Mickey has never asked her out. Edward comments that if he were Mickey, he would have asked her years ago. He goes on to sing about the kind of relationship he would have with Linda, but finishes each chorus with, "I'm not saying a word." He assures her that he doesn't actually care for her, but implies that he is staying silent because of his loyalty to Mickey.

After years of unity, Edward and Mickey's lives now begin to separate, as Mickey heads off to work and Edward goes to university (something he can afford, and Edward cannot). More ominous is the fact that the two brothers seem to have fallen for the same woman. In this scene, however, we see the full extent of Edward's noble and honest nature. Although he can't resist telling Linda how he feels about her, he would never betray Mickey, preferring to keep his oath to his blood brother rather than pursue the girl he loves.

Mickey enters, disrupting the mood. He complains about his job at the factory, and Edward breaks the news that he'll be at university until Christmas. Edward asks Mickey to ask out Linda, as a favor to him. At last, Mickey unromantically asks Linda if she will go out with him. Although the proposal itself is awkward, the two do share a passionate kiss. Edward excuses himself, and Mickey promises that he'll put in lots of overtime at the factory so that the three of them can spend time together during Christmas. Linda says goodbye to Edward with a friendly kiss, before exiting with Mickey.

Edward's self-sacrifice continues, as he not only stands aside so that Mickey and Linda can be together, but actively convinces Mickey to pursue Linda. His status as a "third wheel" is made clear after he awkwardly exits while the two share a passionate kiss. This dynamic—a familiar one in adolescent relationships—will eventually become a fatal one.

As Mickey prepares to go to work, Mrs. Johnstone enters with his lunch. The Narrator enters briefly, explaining that it is a cold day in October, and ominously adding that the bogey man is in town. Mrs. Johnstone urges Mickey to head to the factory so that he's not late. A stunned Mickey reveals to Mrs. Johnstone that Linda is pregnant, and that he wants to marry her within the month. He asks if they can live with her for a while, and if she is angry at him. Mrs. Johnstone responds with warmth and affection, but apologizes for the limited life that Mickey has lived as her son. Mickey tells her that he's had a great life with her. Then he hurries off, anxious to keep his job at the factory.

Directly after their beautiful coming-of-age sequence, Linda and Mickey are forced to grow up—fast—when Linda becomes pregnant. This event mirrors Mrs. Johnstone's situation when she was young, as again the past repeats itself. The Narrator also appears in this passage to mention the proverbial bogey man. That he is equating this superstition with the class-based problem of industrial labor and unplanned pregnancy begins to create a parallel between bad omens and economic struggles.

The scene quickly changes to Mickey and Linda's wedding, although Mickey is still in his work clothes. As they celebrate, a Managing Director at Mickey's factory enters with his secretary, Miss Jones. His song consists of a series of letters in which he mechanically and mercilessly fires his employees. As he sings, we see Mickey go from his wedding to his work, only to be fired upon his arrival. The Managing Director explains that deflation, an economic crash, the price of oil, and the difficult times have contributed to this round of layoffs. The wedding guests become an unemployment line, which Mickey joins. The song ends with the Managing Director firing the faithful Miss Jones. The men waiting in the line try to comfort Miss Jones, who takes Mickey's place in line.

The downhill chain of events in Mickey's life occurs with lightning speed, illustrating how quickly society forces poor young people to grow up. Mickey's very personal ups and downs—from his wedding to his firing—contrast with the highly impersonal attitude of the Managing Director, a symbol of all that is greedy and wrong with the British economy. An unashamed capitalist who is putting thousands of people out of work, the Managing Director feels no guilt about his actions, although they will end up directly destroying the entire Johnstone family.

The men on the unemployment line narrate Mickey's decline, calling him "old before his time" and noting how aimless and isolated he is. They call it just "another sign of the times."

Little time has passed since the trio's idyllic summers, but Mickey has been forced to grow up fast. It's implied that an extended period of adolescence is a luxury not available to the poor.

It is now Christmastime, and a happy Edward returns, looking for Mickey. He jokes and asks Mickey when they will begin drinking and celebrating, and tells Mickey about all the wonderful parties he's attended and the people he's met at university. He asks how Linda is, and tells Mickey that he wants to invite some of his university friends over. At last, Mickey calls Edward a "dick head," and reveals to Edward that he is unemployed and depressed. He laments having lost his job, and describes the awful monotony of unemployment. Insensitively, Edward asks why Mickey needs a job when he can just get unemployment money. Mickey tells Edward that he doesn't understand anything, and Edward tries to make amends by offering him money so that they can go out with Linda and celebrate. Mickey, however, tells his friend to "piss off." When the confused Edward asks what happened to their blood brotherhood, Mickey calls their bond "kids' stuff," and claims that he has grown up, while Edward has not. He tells Edward to leave before he gets a beating.

In contrast to Mickey's various misfortunes, Edward has had a wonderful few months, making friends and partying in college. While before the two boys managed to bond despite their different economic circumstances, here the gap between Edward's privilege and Mickey's poverty at last becomes too much for Mickey to bear. When he tells Edward that blood brotherhood is just for "kids," only the audience understands the full irony of his words. Edward and Mickey's kinship can't be cast aside that easily, and furthermore, Edward could easily be in the same economic situation as Mickey, had the cards played out differently. The way that chance and fate has ruled the lives of these two is obvious in this sequence, and will become increasingly painful as the narrative progresses.

The two separate, and Sammy approaches Mickey, while Linda greets Edward. Edward asks Linda why she hasn't come to see him, and she replies that she didn't want to disturb him while he was with his friends. He protests that he would give up all of his friends if it meant seeing Linda.

Of these two parallel interactions, Edward and Linda's seems relatively harmless, while Sammy and Mickey's seems more ominous. Both, however, will prove equally fateful (and fatal) eventually.

On the other side of the stage, Sammy tries to convince Mickey to be a lookout during a burglary, promising that although he will be carrying a **gun**, it will not be violent.

Always a bad influence, Sammy has now graduated from toy guns to real guns, and is encouraging his brother to follow him in a life of crime.

Convinced that he will never see her again, Edward confesses his love for Linda, and then apologizes.

Edward has basically been "betrayed" by his blood brother Mickey, so he now carries out a small betrayal of his own.

Sammy tempts Mickey with the promise of fifty pounds, and Mickey agrees to go along with the plan.

It's easy to understand Mickey's choice, given his desperate financial situation.

Linda responds that she's always loved Edward "in a way," but when he proposes marriage to her, she reveals that she's only just married Mickey, and that they are expecting a baby together. As Edward's university friends call him from offstage, Linda says goodbye to him, and he exits.

Once again, chance is simply not in the characters' favor. Linda is torn between Mickey and Edward, not even realizing that the two men are connected not just through their love for her, but also by blood.

Excited, Mickey tells Linda that he's going to be out till eight o'clock, but that when he's back, they're going to celebrate the New Year by going out dancing together. He tells her to get dressed up, but refuses to tell her where the money will come from. As Sammy calls him from offstage, Mickey makes ready to leave, even as a suspicious Linda begs him not to go.

Mickey's desperation is clear as he tries to make Linda happy with the promise of money and fun, but he only succeeds in alarming and upsetting her. Already, the audience knows that this plan is not going to go well.

The Narrator refers to his usual list of bad omens, noting that Linda in particular is afraid of the price that Mickey will have to pay. Mickey keeps watch as Sammy argues with one of his partners over a **gun**. Abruptly, an alarm bell sounds and a shot is heard. Sammy tries to escape but Mickey is frozen, sobbing. The Narrator references the children's game from long ago, where even if you got shot, you could get back up again. Mickey is in shock as Sammy tries to hide the gun under a floorboard. We hear Linda calling offstage, and just as she enters, two policemen arrive. They capture a fleeing Sammy, and remove Mickey from Linda's embrace.

The Narrator's usual refrain only increases the audience's sense that this burglary is ill-fated. The difference between Sammy and Mickey's reactions illustrates a truth about nature vs. nurture—despite having grown up in the same household, Sammy is callous and rash, while Mickey is, at heart, sensitive and sweet. The reminder of the children's game, meanwhile, comes back to haunt the audience and bring the symbol of the gun full circle. While at first violence was just a game, it is now all too real.

As the policemen place Mickey in a cell, Mrs. Johnstone sings about what happens next: the jury sentences Mickey to seven years in prison, and like **Marilyn Monroe**, he falls into a deep depression. A doctor enters, and prescribes Mickey **antidepressants** (also like Marilyn Monroe).

The theme of the tragic starlet Marilyn Monroe comes back to illustrate Mickey's decline into drug addiction. Despite his honest, open nature, he is unable to overcome his unfortunate circumstances, and instead digs himself deeper and deeper into depression.

Linda visits Mickey and tells him that he'll be released soon. She begs him to stop taking the **antidepressants**, but he refuses. They argue, and Mickey admits that he can't function without the pills. The prison warder escorts Linda out.

Mickey has been utterly destroyed by an economic system that chewed him up and spit him back out. His pills symbolize his defeat, and his inability to cope anymore with a world that has rejected him. Russell portrays antidepressants in a wholly negative light (as they are a negative force for Mickey), but it's important to remember that these can be crucial and life-saving medications for many people.

Mrs. Johnstone continues to sing as Mickey comes home. She notes that her son feels fifteen years older, and that his speech comes slower than it used to. It is almost as if he is dead, just like **Marilyn Monroe**.

The theme of coming-of-age and adulthood has now become a negative one. One, so eager to grow up, now Mickey has grown up too fast.

Linda enters holding shopping bags, and approaches Mrs. Johnstone. The two women discuss what to do about Mickey, who is still addicted to the **pills**, and whose drug-induced apathy is keeping him from getting a job. Linda says that she has found herself, Mickey, and their child (Sarah) a place of their own, and has even procured Mickey a job. She mentions that she has done so by seeking help from "someone I know," adding that he is "on the housing committee."

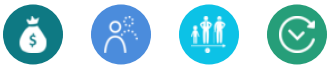
Linda, too, has been forced to grow up, although she is handling her situation with far more maturity and resourcefulness than Mickey is. It is of course ironic that while Linda believes Mrs. Johnstone doesn't know Edward (now Councilor Lyons), she is in fact talking about Mrs. Johnstone's own son.

Mickey and Linda are together in their new house as Linda sets out Mickey's work things. Mickey, however, is focused only on finding his **antidepressants**, which Linda has hidden. She protests that he doesn't need the pills, but he becomes violently angry, telling her about the terrible symptoms of withdrawal. When she tries to tell him about how much better their new life is going to be, he accuses to her of going to Edward—now a city councilor—for help. She doesn't deny it, but begs him not to take the pills, saying that she can't even see him when he takes them. He retorts that he takes them in order to be invisible. Defeated, Linda gives her husband the pills, and he exits.

In this scene we see just how far Mickey has fallen, as he almost becomes physically violent when denied his antidepressants. We also witness how his affection for Edward has curdled into something sour and destructive—jealousy. Even without knowing that they are related by blood, Mickey still feels threatened by and envious of Edward, who has become an upstanding "credit to society." Once so similar and close, the two young men have now been completely estranged by their economic circumstances.

Utterly alone, Linda moves to the telephone. As she does, the Narrator recounts her internal struggle in song, describing the "girl inside the woman" who longs for the past. Making a decision, Linda calls Edward. As she does so, Mrs. Johnstone enters, singing that the two (Edward and Linda) don't mean to be cruel, and that it's "just a light romance." She continues to narrate as Linda and Edward meet each other in a park, saying hello and staring at each other. At last, Edward pretends to shoot Linda, but "misses." Abruptly the two kiss, as Mrs. Johnstone sings about their "light romance."

Only within this scene do we at last see the toll that Mickey's decline has taken on Linda. Given the immense burden she has shouldered, with essentially no help from her husband, it is easy to understand her indiscretion with Edward. That she is attracted to both men is also a testament to the powers of nature over nurture—despite how different Mickey and Edward are, they are still similar enough to share the affections of the same woman.



Mrs. Johnstone continues singing, as we see Mickey deciding not to take his **pills** anymore, and Linda and Edward carry on their affair. Mrs. Johnstone reveals that the lovers will have to pay a price, and that they are following an old and well-worn pattern.

In yet another moment of tragic irony, Mickey finally finds the strength to stop taking his pills just as Linda begins her affair with Edward. Mrs. Johnstone acts like the Narrator here, predicting a sinister outcome to Edward and Linda's actions.

Out of nowhere, Mrs. Lyons enters. She shows Mickey Edward and Linda together, as Mrs. Johnstone ominously sings about "the price you're gonna have to pay." Enraged, Mickey pounds on his own door and calls for Linda. Then he races to his mother's house to pick up the **gun** that Sammy hid under the floor. As he runs out, Mrs. Johnstone sees him, and begins calling after her son.

Since we last saw her, Mrs. Lyons has become a blind force of destruction and venom. She is so intent on causing misfortune to the Johnstones that she sabotages her own son. Mickey, meanwhile, feels like he has nothing to lose anymore, and goes to grab a familiar symbol of violence—a gun.

Mickey roams the streets looking for the couple, as Mrs. Johnstone chases him. The Narrator tells the audience that a man has "gone mad in the town tonight," and that he's looking to "shoot somebody down." The devil, he says, has "got your number," and has finally arrived. Mrs. Johnstone arrives at Linda's house, warning her that Mickey has a **gun**. Terrified, Linda realizes that he must be looking for Edward at town hall. The Narrator reenters, telling Mrs. Johnstone that the devil is inside her, and that he's calling her number today. Terrified, Mrs. Johnstone runs off.

As the play approaches its climax, the characters begin to convene—including the Narrator. The proverbial devil that he has been warning us about throughout the play has finally arrived, ample evidence for the audience that something terrible is about to happen. The Narrator, like Mrs. Lyons, has now become a force of malevolence and doom, egging the play on to its violent and tragic conclusion.

The scene shifts to town hall, where Edward is giving a speech. Mickey abruptly appears, gripping his **gun** in shaking hands and screaming for everyone to "stay where you are." Edward calmly greets Mickey, who reveals that he's stopped taking his pills, and orders everyone else out of the hall. He continues speaking, saying that Linda was the one good thing he had left in his life, but that Mrs. Lyons has revealed the affair to him. Edward tries to deny it, but Mickey screams that Edward has betrayed him, reminding him that they used to be blood brothers. He even goes a step further, asking if Edward is the real father of his daughter. Edward says that he is not.

Edward's civilized words and impressive job contrast with Mickey's complete devolution, just as his calmness contrasts with his twin's mania. The two men, who started out so similar despite their economic circumstances, have now become polar opposites precisely because of those same economic circumstances. Their dual transformations are proof of the power of the class system, and of the ways that our environments can affect who we are.

A policeman calls through a megaphone, telling Mickey to put down the **gun**, and that there are armed marksmen outside. Mickey remarks that he fails at everything, even at shooting Edward—he doesn't even know if his gun is loaded. Suddenly Mrs. Johnstone enters the building, much to the dismay of the policemen. She begs Mickey not to shoot Edward, and reveals that the two are brothers, separated at birth. Mickey grows even more enraged, realizing that he could have had Edward's luxurious life. He demands to know why he wasn't given away. In his fury, he gestures at Edward with the gun, shooting and killing him. Immediately the policemen shoot and kill Mickey, as Linda runs down the aisle towards the two brothers.

At last, the climactic moment of the play arrives, and the two twins learn the truth about their origins. In the end, however, it is a combination of personal envy, economic misfortune, and plain bad luck that dooms both men, rather than any mystic force of fate—or Mrs. Lyons' original invented superstition that separated twins must die when they learn about each other. While policemen throughout the play have been emblems of incompetent authority, here they become all too deadly, shooting and killing Mickey the moment he shoots Edward, thus robbing Mrs. Johnstone of both of her twins.

The characters freeze as the Narrator emerges, asking if we should blame superstition for the deadly chain of events, or if we should blame the English class system. He again reminds us of the story of the Johnstone twins, separated at birth, who died on the same day. Mrs. Johnstone begs to be told that her sons' deaths are just a story, that it's "just a dream," or a scene from a movie with "**Marilyn Monroe**." She wonders if this has just been a clown show with two players who couldn't say their lines right, or a radio show that can be started over. She asks to be told that this is "just a game." As she laments, the other actors join in with her, asking the audience to tell them that this has all been pretend, just like "an old movie with Marilyn Monroe."

The Narrator's appearance hammers home a point that Russell has implied throughout his work: the Johnstone twins were not really doomed by fate, but by the class system, which designated one of them (Edward) as valuable and the other (Mickey) as disposable, completely by chance. The final reference to Marilyn Monroe helps to finish the arc of this particular symbol, illustrating to us that everyone—rich and poor—suffers from forces beyond their control. The actors addressing the audience also reminds us that these events are fictional, but with this reminder comes the knowledge that the play references realities that are all too real.

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