

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. Johnstone's 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.

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 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."