

Blood Brothers

ACT ONE

When the stage lights come up we see two seemingly dead bodies lying close to each other on the ground. A woman is crying over them as other shocked people stand nearby. We learn the tragic end of the story from the Narrator's opening lines.

So did you hear the story of the Johnstone twins?
As like each other as two new pins.
And did you never hear how the Johnstones died,
Never knowing that they shared one name.
Till the day they died, when a mother cried,
My own dear sons lie slain?

The Narrator goes on to ask a question about the boys' mother.

And did you never hear of the mother so cruel,
There's a stone in place of her heart?
Then bring her on and come judge for yourselves
How she came to play this part.

The lights darken and as they come on again we are at an earlier time in the lives of the characters. A woman (Mrs Johnstone) is singing about her marriage. She tells how, when she was young, she was fooled by a sweet-talking man she met at a dance.

He said my eyes were deep blue pools, my skin as soft as snow.
He told me I was sexier than Marilyn Monroe.

She sings about how, when they found that she was expecting his baby, they married and had a party.

We all had curly salmon sandwiches and how the ale did flow.
They said the bride was lovelier than Marilyn Monroe.

She then tells how, when more children came along, her husband no longer wanted to go out with her.

And though I still fancied dancing, my husband wouldn't go
With a wife he said was twice the size of Marilyn Monroe.

And finally how, when she started to look old before her time, he left her.

By the time that I was twenty-five, I looked like forty-two.
With seven hungry mouths to feed and one more nearly due.
My husband he walked out on me a month or two ago
For a girl they say who looks a bit like Marilyn Monroe.

At the end of the song we learn that Mrs Johnstone is finding it difficult to take care of her family alone. She lives on credit and has money trouble. She is also expecting another baby. The milkman tells her that unless she pays what she owes, he must cut off deliveries of milk. Her children complain about not having enough to eat.

She sings that things will soon get better, as she is starting a new job.

I know it's hard on all you kids, but try and get some sleep.
Next week I'll be earning, we'll have loads of things to eat.
When I bring home the dough, we'll live like kings.
Like bright young things, like Marilyn Monroe.

Her new job is house cleaning for Mr and Mrs Lyons, a rich middle-class couple. We learn that although the Lyons have a lot of money and live in a big house, Mrs Lyons is just as unhappy as Mrs Johnstone. She is unable to have children and Mr Lyons is often away from home for long periods on business. Her life is lonely and incomplete. She would like to adopt a child, but her husband will not agree.

We soon see that Mrs Johnstone is very superstitious. One day at work, she gets upset when she sees Mrs Lyons open a package and put a pair of new shoes on a table. There is an English saying that putting shoes on a table like this is a sign of coming death or tragedy.

A short time after this, Mrs Johnstone finds out that instead of expecting one baby she is going to have twins. The next day Mrs Lyons sees that there is something wrong with her and asks what it is.

"I had it all worked out," answers Mrs Johnstone. "We were just getting straight. With one more baby we could have managed but not with two. The child-welfare people have already been on to me. They say I can't control the kids I've already got. They say I should put some of them into care. But I won't. I love the bones of every one of them."

"Twins? You're expecting twins?" says Mrs Lyons, and then more quietly, "Give one to me".

At first Mrs Johnstone thinks this is a joke. However, Mrs Lyons explains how her husband is away on business and not due to return until after the babies are born. She wants to pretend that it is their own baby and raise it as her own. "You said yourself, you had too many children already," she reminds Mrs Johnstone.

"Yeah, but I don't know if I wanna give one away," says Mrs Johnstone.

"Already you're having problems with the child-welfare people," replies Mrs Lyons. "With two more children how can you possibly stop some of them being put into care? Surely, it's better to give one child to me. Look, at least if the child was with me you'd be able to see him every day, as you came to work."

Mrs Johnstone looks around at the room she is in. "If my child was raised in a palace like this one," she says to herself, "he wouldn't have to worry where his next meal was coming from."

The two women then sing of the advantages to the child of growing up in the Lyons' family.

He'd have all his own toys and a garden to play in.
He could make too much noise without the neighbours complaining.
Silver trays to take meals on. A bike with both wheels on.
And he'd sleep every night in a bed of his own.
He wouldn't get into fights. He'd leave matches alone.
And you'd never find him effin' and blindin'.
And when he grew up he could never be told
To stand and queue up for hours on end at the dole.

“I would still be able to see him every day, wouldn’t I?” asks Mrs Johnstone.

“Of course,” answers Mrs Lyons.

It is clear from Mrs Johnstone’s actions that she is not totally sure about giving up a baby. However, she is weak willed and finally agrees. Mrs Lyons begins to make all sorts of plans about how to make people think she is really going to have a baby. She then pushes Mrs Johnstone into making the agreement stronger by promising while holding the Bible.

When Mrs Johnstone returns home from the hospital with the two new babies, she sees a number of men at her house. They are removing furniture and other items. She bought these on credit and is behind on her payments. They are taking them back to the store.

Mrs Lyons arrives to collect one of the twins. Mrs Johnstone is having second thoughts about giving one of them up. However, Mrs Lyons forces the issue. “We made an agreement,” she says. “You promised on the Bible.”

Unable to decide which twin should go, Mrs Johnstone tells Mrs Lyons to choose the one she wants. She then tells her other children that the other baby has died and gone to heaven.

Mrs Johnstone sees a lot of her lost baby when she cleans at the Lyons’ house. She pays him a lot of attention, which makes Mrs Lyons jealous. Finally, Mrs Lyons gives her what looks like a lot of money and tells her she can no longer work there. In bitterness, Mrs Johnstone says that she will take her baby with her.

When Mrs Johnstone goes near the baby, Mrs Lyons pulls her away. Mrs Johnstone says she will go to the police, but Mrs Lyons tells her she will be locked up for giving her baby away. Mrs Johnstone then throws the money on the ground and says that she will tell someone.

Thinking quickly and remembering how superstitious Mrs Johnstone is, Mrs Lyons makes up a story. “You know what they say about twins secretly parted, don’t you?” she says. “They say that if either twin learns that he is one of a pair, they shall both immediately die. You won’t tell anyone about this, Mrs Johnstone. Because if you do, you will kill them.”

At this point, the Narrator gives a list of other things which have happened in the house that superstitious people believe will bring bad luck. His comments end with some lines that create a further sense of coming tragedy.

Now you know the devil’s got your number.
You know he’s gonna find you.
You know he’s right behind you.
He’s standing on your step.
He’s knocking at your door.

The next time we see the characters is when the twins are aged seven – nearly eight. Mickey Johnson is complaining to his mother that his older brother Sammy has taken one of his toy guns. Mrs Johnstone tells him to go out and play, but not to play in what she calls “the rough end” of town. On his way out, Mickey says, “We’re down at the other end, near the big houses in the park”.

“Mickey! Come here,” says Mrs Johnstone angrily. “What have I told you about playing up near there? Don’t you ever go up there. Do you hear me?”

“Yeh. But you let our Sammy go up there. Why...” says Mickey.

“Just shut up. Never mind why. You don’t go up near there” shouts Mrs Johnstone. “Now go on, get out and play. But you stay outside the front door where I can see you.”

Mickey sits outside alone and unhappy. He sings how he wishes he was like his brother Sammy, who is ten years old. Sammy has a lot more freedom, but is always doing bad things and getting in trouble.

I wish I was our Sammy, you wanna see him spit,
Straight in your eye from twenty yards, and every time a hit.
He’s allowed to play with matches, and he goes to bed dead late.
And I have to go at seven, even though I’m nearly eight.

As the song ends Edward Lyons, his unknown twin brother, appears and starts talking to him. Edward says that he has seen Mickey before, playing with other boys near his house in the park. They become immediate friends.

Mickey would like to have many sweets and toys like Edward. Edward would like to have naughty adventures and know many rude words like Mickey. Both long to be in the other’s shoes. Finding that they share the same birthday, they decide to become ‘blood brothers’. This is done by making a small cut on each of their right hands and holding them together tightly to mix the blood.

Mrs Johnstone comes out and sees them. Knowing immediately who Edward is, she sends Mickey inside and tells Edward to go home. As Edward goes, he asks if could come and play with Mickey again. She answers angrily, “Don’t you ever come around here again. Ever!”

Later the same day, Mickey rings the bell at Edward’s house. Mrs Lyons knows who he is and sends Mickey away, saying that it is Edward’s bed time. She says to Edward, “I’ve told you never to go where that boy – where boys like that live. You’re not the same as him.” She and Edward argue on the subject, and Edward says some bad words to her. Mrs Lyons hits him and immediately is sorry for her reaction. She realises that he has learned these words from Mickey.

Both mothers try to stop the children meeting. However, their friendship is too strong. The boys don’t do as they are told and continue to meet each other and Mickey’s friend, Linda.

As a sign of things to come, all the games they play with other children involve guns and killing. The children pretend to shoot, get shot and die. Like all children, they don’t take death and dying seriously.

One day Mrs Lyons calls her husband at work and asks him to come home urgently. He is upset when he finds that it is simply because she hasn’t seen Edward for over an hour.

She tells him she wants to move away from the area. “If we stay here I feel that something terrible will happen, something bad. It’s ...these people that Edward has stated mixing with. Can’t you see how he’s drawn to them? They’re ...drawing him away from me. ...I’m frightened. I’m frightened for Edward.” As Mrs Lyons is speaking, her husband picks up a pair of children’s shoes from the floor and places them on the table. She runs quickly to the table and throws them back onto the floor.

The same afternoon the boys and Linda are caught by a policeman when about to throw stones through a window. Mickey is returned home with warnings about court and prison. Edward is taken home with a smile, and the policeman explains that it was just childish fun. “But, one thing I would say,” he says, “is I wouldn’t let him mix with the likes of them in the future. Make sure he keeps

with his own kind ... he's a good lad".

Mrs Lyons is becoming increasingly scared that her made up superstition will come true. It is starting to affect her mind and her husband finally agrees to move away to the country. When Edward comes to say goodbye to Mickey, Mrs Johnstone gives him a locket. Inside is a picture of herself and Mickey to remember them by.

ACT TWO

As a poor family, the Johnstones live in a local government (council) house. All the council houses around where they live are very old and in poor condition. There is also much crime. Mrs Johnstone learns that the whole area is to be redeveloped. She and her children are to be moved to a new council housing area outside the city, which happens to be near the Lyons' new home.

Mrs Johnstone sings about their new life.

The house we got was lovely,
and the neighbors are a treat.
They sometimes fight on Saturday night,
but never in the week.

Since I pay the bills on time,
the milkman insists I call him Joe.
He brings me bread and eggs,
says I've got legs like Marilyn Monroe.

I know our Sammy burnt the school down,
but it's very easily done.
Thank God he only got probation.
The Judge was old and slow.
Though it was kind of him,
said I reminded him of Marilyn Monroe.

And that other child of mine,
I haven't seen for years, although
each day I pray he'll be OK,
not like Marilyn Monroe.

Mickey and Edward are now fourteen but go to different schools.

Edward goes to a private school. One day, he is sent home for refusing to give up Mrs Johnstone's locket to a teacher.

Mickey and Linda go to a public school. He has strong feelings for her, and she is obviously interested in him. However, he does not know how to act with her. On the same day that Edward is sent home, they are sent home for being rude to a teacher.

When Mrs Lyons finds out about Edward's locket, she makes him show it to her. She sees a picture that she thinks is of Edward and Mrs Johnstone. This makes her very upset. Then she learns that it is not of Edward, but Mickey and Mrs Johnstone. She asks Edward where he got it but he will not tell her. He says that it is a secret, and that surely she understands as she must have secrets too. This makes her even more upset.

That afternoon Edward and Mickey meet by accident in a field. They soon realize who the other is. They talk about girls and Mickey tells Edward how he wants to make Linda his girlfriend but doesn't know what to do. Edward suggests going to see an adult movie to learn more about girls and courting. They hurry off to Mickey's house so that he can get some money, not knowing that Mrs Lyons is following Edward.

Mrs Johnstone is very happy to see Edward again. Mickey and Edward try to make her think they are going to watch a regular movie. However, they give different answers about which movie and theatre they are going to. She soon guesses what they are planning, but laughs and sends them on their way.

After they have gone Mrs Lyons enters. Mrs Johnstone is shocked to see her. She looks at Mrs Johnstone for a moment and then speaks angrily. "How long have you lived here? Are you always going to follow me?" she asks. "You have destroyed me," she says, "but you won't destroy Edward! Is it money you want? Thousands... I'm talking about thousands if you want it."

"I don't want your money," says Mrs Johnstone. "I've made a life out here. It's not much of a one maybe, but I made it. I'm staying here. You move if you want to."

During this conversation Mrs Lyons has secretly taken a long knife from a kitchen drawer. She tries to kill Mrs Johnstone but is not successful. As Mrs Johnstone shows her out of the door she cries, "I curse the day I met you. Witch! I curse you."

From this point we see scenes of the boys and Linda doing things and enjoying their time together over the next few years. It can be seen that both boys have feelings toward Linda, but both are too shy to say anything.

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 for just being there?

When they are eighteen, the boys' friendship finds itself tested. Mickey has a job he hates in a local factory, and Edward goes away to university. They agree to meet up again the following Christmas.

Mickey finally asks Linda to be his girlfriend. She agrees, and soon after learns that she is going to have his baby. They marry quickly and live with Mrs Johnstone. But then there are problems in the economy and Mickey loses his job. He looks for another job but can't find one.

Edward returns at Christmas ready to have fun. He tells Mickey how great his time at university has been. He also mentions that some of his friends have come to stay for the New Year party. Mickey is not interested in joining them. "Christmas?" he says. "I'm sick to death of Christmas and it isn't even here yet. See, there's very little to celebrate, Edward. Since you left I've been walking around all day, every day, looking for a job."

"If I couldn't get a job, I wouldn't worry," says Edward. "I'd draw the dole and live how I pleased. So you are not working? Why is it so important?" Edward then offers Mickey some money which he angrily refuses.

Mickey realizes that they are now very different people. "You're still a kid," he says to Edward. "And I wish I could be as well. I wish I could still believe in that blood brother stuff. But I can't, because when no one was looking I grew up. And you didn't because you didn't need to. And you make me sick, right? That was all just kids stuff and I don't want to be reminded of it. Right? So

just take yourself away. Go and see your friends and celebrate with them. Go on... beat it before I hit you.”

Instead of spending time with Edward, Mickey gets in with his criminal older brother Sammy. He takes part in a robbery during which Sammy shoots someone. They are caught and Mickey is sent to prison for 7 years. When in prison, he suffers depression.

And when we went to visit him,
He didn't want to know.
It seems like jail's sent him off the rails,
Just like Marilyn Monroe.

The prison doctor treats Mickey with pills, which he later finds he cannot live without.

And now the tears have stopped
He sits and counts the days to go
And treats his ills with daily pills
Just like Marilyn Monroe.

When Mickey comes out of prison, he is a broken young man. He is depressed, lifeless and dependent on pills.

But he's feeling fifteen years older
And his speech is rather slow.
And the neighbours said, you'd think he was dead
Like Marilyn Monroe.

Mickey turns away from Linda, who does not know what to do. Having nobody else to go to, she asks Edward for help. While Mickey was in prison, Edward had returned from university to a good job and become a member of the local Council. He arranges for them to get their own council house and helps to get a job for Mickey. During this time, Linda becomes aware of the fun she has missed in her married life. She and Edward fall in love.

There's a girl inside the woman who's waiting to get free.
She's washed a million dishes and she's always making tea.
There's a girl inside the woman, and the mother she became.
And a half remembered song comes to her lips again.
The girl would sing the melody but the woman stands in doubt,
And wonders what the price would be for letting the young girl out.

One day, Mrs Lyons sees Edward and Linda together and tells Mickey about it. Mickey becomes very angry. He takes the gun that Sammy hid after the attempted robbery and storms down to the Council building.

Linda is very scared of what may happen. She runs to tell Mrs Johnstone, who sets off to find Mickey. As they run around looking for Mickey, the Narrator sings.

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.

Edward is speaking at a Council meeting when Mickey runs in with the gun. Mickey tells everyone

to leave so that he and Edward are alone.

“I stopped taking the pills,” says Mickey. “I had to start thinking again. Because there was one thing I had left, Eddie – Linda. And I wanted to keep her. But it was too late. We were friends, weren’t we? Blood brothers, wasn’t it? Remember?”

“Does my child belong to you as well as everything else?” adds Mickey.

“No, for God’s sake!” shouts Edward.

Armed police arrive and tell Mickey to put down the gun. Mickey takes no notice of the police. “What am I doing here, Edward?” he asks. “I thought I was gonna shoot you. But I can’t even do that. I don’t even know if this thing’s loaded.”

Mrs Johnstone arrives and walks toward Mickey. “Mickey. Don’t shoot Edward. He’s your brother,” she says. “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 now thinks that everything in his life is wrong. He becomes uncontrollable with anger. “Why didn’t you give me away!” he says. “I could have been him!”

As he says “him” he waves the gun at Edward to show who he is talking about. The gun accidentally goes off and kills Edward. The police immediately shoot Mickey dead. The story made up by Mrs Lyons has come true.

At the beginning of the play, the Narrator asked the following....

And did you never hear of the mother so cruel,
There’s a stone in place of her heart?
Then bring her on and come judge for yourselves
How she came to play this part.

As the stage lights darken, he asks another question...

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

The lights come on again and the play ends with Mrs Johnstone singing.

Tell me it’s not true,
say it’s just a story.
Something on the news,
tell me it’s not true.
Though it’s here before me,
say it’s just a dream.
Say it’s just a scene
from an old movie of years ago.
From an old movie of Marilyn Monroe.