

A View from the Bridge



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Manhattan. In the stock crash of 1929, his father's clothing business failed and the family moved to more affordable housing in Brooklyn. Miller was unintellectual as a boy, but later decided to become a writer and attended the University of Michigan to study journalism. There, he received awards for his playwriting. After college, he worked for the government's Federal Theater Project, which was soon closed for fear of possible Communist infiltration. He married his college sweetheart, Mary Slattery, in 1940, with whom he had two children. His first play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* opened in 1944, but Miller had his first real success with [All My Sons](#) (1947). He wrote [Death of a Salesman](#) in 1948, which won a Tony Award as well as the Pulitzer Prize, and made him a star. In 1952, Miller wrote [The Crucible](#), a play about the 1692 Salem witch trials that functioned as an allegory for the purges among entertainers and media figures by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Miller testified before this committee, but refused to implicate any of his friends as Communists, which resulted in his blacklisting. He wrote *A View from the Bridge* in 1955. In 1956 he married the film actress Marilyn Monroe. They were divorced in 1961. His third wife was the photographer Inge Morath. Miller continued to write until his death in 2005.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The play is set in the 1950s, at a time when there were significant immigrant populations in New York City, especially from Italy, who often lived together in particular neighborhoods such as the one in which Eddie lives. Miller's play is set in this time and environment, with its particular tensions of American and Italian identity.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While not directly modeled on or related to any particular literary works, the play deals with American ideals of working hard to better one's social position and of the United States as a land of opportunity. This kind of "American dream" was crystallized and epitomized in the books of Horatio Alger, Jr. in the late 19th century, and the realism of Miller's immigrant characters can be read as a response to the idealism of Alger's.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *A View from the Bridge*

- **When Written:** 1955
- **Where Written:** Roxbury, Connecticut
- **When Published:** 1955
- **Literary Period:** Realism
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** Red Hook, Brooklyn, in the 1950s
- **Climax:** There are in effect two climaxes. Eddie's conflicting desires come to a climax when he grabs Catherine and kisses her in front of Rodolpho, and then immediately kisses Rodolpho in front of Catherine. But the matters of personal honor and justice come to a head at the end of the play, when Marco and Eddie confront each other and fight, and Marco ends up killing Eddie.
- **Antagonist:** Eddie is the antagonist to most of the other characters and even to himself, as he is harmed by his own confused desires and behavior.

EXTRA CREDIT

Two Acts. Miller originally wrote *A View from the Bridge* as a one-act play, and the production was not very popular. After this, Miller revised the play, adding a second act, and it is this more successful version that most contemporary readers and audiences know.



PLOT SUMMARY

A middle-aged lawyer named Alfieri introduces the audience to the Brooklyn neighborhood of Red Hook in the 1950s, populated mostly by Italian-American immigrants. Alfieri says that the people of the neighborhood are "quite American," and that "justice is very important here." Alfieri points out Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman who works on the docks. Eddie is returning home from work, and sees his niece Catherine, whom he looks after like a daughter. He tells his wife Beatrice that her cousins from Italy have arrived. (They are sneaking into the country as illegal immigrants and will stay at Eddie's apartment.) At dinner, Catherine tells Eddie that she has gotten a job as a typist, but Eddie is reluctant to let her go to the job. Beatrice chides him, and he relents and lets her accept the job. He says that she will eventually move out and see him less and less often, and jokes that he "never figured on" Catherine growing up. Beatrice's cousins, Marco and Rodolpho, arrive at the apartment. They thank Eddie for allowing them to stay at his home, and are excited at the prospect of work. They can find no jobs in their hometown in Italy, and have come to America to work and send money back to their families. Catherine begins to be fascinated by Rodolpho, who says that he wants to stay in the United States and become a rich American. He sings a song

called “**Paper Doll**” for Catherine until Eddie tells him to be quiet, so the neighbors don’t realize anyone is staying with them and report them to the Immigration Bureau.

Alfieri tells the audience that as time went on with Rodolpho and Marco living in the apartment, “there was a trouble that would not go away.” A few weeks after their arrival, Eddie waits anxiously at night for Rodolpho and Catherine to return from a movie. He tells Beatrice that Rodolpho is “weird,” and sings so much that the other longshoremen have nicknamed him **Paper Doll**. Eddie talks to two neighbors, Mike and Louis, who laugh about Rodolpho and call him “humorous,” though they seem to imply something more. Rodolpho and Catherine enter, and Eddie talks to Catherine alone. He warns her that Rodolpho doesn’t respect her and just wants to use her to get an American passport through marriage. Catherine is upset and insists that Rodolpho really loves her. Beatrice talks to Catherine and encourages her to make her own decisions, and to stop acting like a young child in front of Eddie.

Alfieri tells the audience that Eddie then came to see him in his office. We see Eddie go to Alfieri’s office and ask if there’s anything he can do, legally speaking, to keep Rodolpho and Catherine apart. Alfieri says that Rodolpho has done nothing illegal, but Eddie continually insists that Rodolpho “ain’t right,” seemingly questioning his masculinity and heterosexuality. Alfieri advises Eddie to let Catherine be with Rodolpho, and says that sometimes love “goes where it musn’t.” He tells Eddie that sometimes “there is too much love for the daughter, there is too much love for the niece.” Eddie leaves the office and Alfieri tells the audience that he knew something bad was going to happen, but was powerless to stop it.

Back at Eddie’s apartment, Eddie confronts Rodolpho about going out with Catherine without asking his permission first. Rodolpho assures him that he respects Catherine. Catherine puts on a record of the song “**Paper Doll**,” and she and Rodolpho dance. Eddie asks if Rodolpho has ever boxed, and offers to teach him. The two spar, and Eddie punches Rodolpho directly in the face. Marco is troubled by this, and asks Eddie if he can lift a chair with one hand. He can’t, and then Marco lifts the chair until he is holding it over his head, facing Eddie almost threateningly.

In Act Two, the play jumps forward to the 23rd of December. Catherine and Rodolpho are alone in Eddie’s apartment, and Catherine asks if he would be willing to live with her in Italy. He says that it would be foolish to return to Italy where there are no jobs, but promises that he is not interested in Catherine merely in order to become an American citizen. Rodolpho asks why Catherine seems so frightened of Eddie, and Catherine says that he has been kind to her and she doesn’t want to upset him. Rodolpho tells Catherine that she has to leave Eddie, and she starts to cry. They go into a bedroom. Eddie arrives at the apartment and is furious when he sees Rodolpho and Catherine come out of the same bedroom. He tells Rodolpho to

pack up and leave, and then grabs Catherine and kisses her. Rodolpho is shocked and attacks Eddie, and Eddie pins his arms back and kisses him forcefully.

Alfieri tells the audience that he next saw Eddie on the 27th. Eddie comes into Alfieri’s office and asks if he can call the police or do something. He says that Rodolpho “ain’t right” and didn’t try to break free of his kiss. Alfieri says that there is nothing Eddie can legally do and that Catherine is free to make her own decisions. Frustrated, Eddie leaves Alfieri’s office and goes to a payphone. He calls the Immigration Bureau and reports Marco and Rodolpho. When he gets home, Beatrice has moved Rodolpho and Marco into an apartment upstairs with two other illegal immigrants living with the Lipari family. Eddie is upset with Beatrice and says that she doesn’t respect him. He tells her that he doesn’t want to talk about “what I feel like doin’ in the bed and what I don’t feel like doin’,” and continues to say that Rodolpho “ain’t right.” Beatrice tells Eddie that Rodolpho and Catherine are getting married in a week. Catherine enters and asks Eddie to attend the wedding. Eddie tells her that he’ll let her go out at night and meet men, just as long as she doesn’t marry Rodolpho. Catherine tells him that she loves Rodolpho.

Two officers from the Immigration Bureau arrive and search Eddie’s apartment. Not finding anyone, they decide to search the rest of the building. They find Rodolpho, Marco, and the other two illegal immigrants. Beatrice asks Eddie, “My God, what did you do?” as Catherine tries to persuade the officers that Rodolpho is American. The officers take the immigrants outside, and Marco shouts out that Eddie has betrayed him. Eddie claims this is false, but Lipari, Mike, and Louis ignore and shun him. Eddie shouts that he will kill Marco if he doesn’t take back his accusation.

Later, at a prison, Alfieri tries to convince Marco to promise not to take revenge on Eddie by killing him, so that he can be freed on bail. Marco says that it would be unjust not to take revenge, but grudgingly agrees to the promise. The play then jumps to the day of Catherine’s wedding. At Eddie’s apartment, Beatrice tries to convince Eddie to attend. Eddie tells her that he wants her respect as a wife and that he won’t go to the wedding unless Marco apologizes to him. Catherine is upset and calls Eddie a rat. Rodolpho enters, apologizes to Eddie for having disrespected him, and says that Marco is coming. Eddie says he wants Marco to apologize to him in front of the whole neighborhood. Beatrice says an apology is not what he really wants, and says that she knows what he wants and “you can never have her!” Catherine and Eddie are both shocked at this. Marco arrives outside the apartment, and Eddie goes to meet him. He calls Marco a liar and tells him to apologize. Marco hits Eddie and calls him an animal. The two fight and Eddie pulls out a knife. He lunges at Marco but Marco grabs him and turns the knife on Eddie, stabbing him. Eddie falls over and dies in Beatrice’s arms. Alfieri closes the play by telling the audience that although Eddie behaved wrongly, he was still a pure

person, “not purely good, but himself purely.” He says he mourns him and regards him “with a certain . . . alarm.”



CHARACTERS

Eddie Carbone – The tragic protagonist of the play, Eddie is a hard-working man who supports his wife Beatrice and his niece Catherine, whom he has raised like a daughter. He begins the play as a well-liked member of his neighborhood community, and has a strong sense of honor. His fatherly feelings for Catherine are gradually revealed to be an extreme, oppressive form of love: he doesn’t want her to grow up and has misgivings about her leaving the house. As the play develops, his affection for Catherine begins to seem more and more like an incestuous desire, as Beatrice hints several times, and then blurts out toward the end of the play, telling Eddie that he can’t have Catherine. When Beatrice’s illegal immigrant cousins move into his apartment, Eddie feels threatened and fears being pushed out of his position in his own home. In addition to his taboo desire for Catherine, Eddie may have other repressed desires. He is fixated on Rodolpho’s sexuality, constantly telling Beatrice and Alfieri that Rodolpho “ain’t right,” and in a (misguided) attempt to prove this, he forcefully kisses Rodolpho in front of Catherine. The real motivations behind this action are unclear, but given that Beatrice complains of Eddie not sleeping with her, there is a real possibility that Eddie is harboring other desires than for Catherine. By the end of the play, Eddie loses the respect of his own family and his neighborhood after reporting Marco and Rodolpho to Immigration Bureau, but is granted a modicum of dignity in his tragic death when Alfieri ends the play by assuring the audience that he still loves and mourns Eddie.

Beatrice – Eddie’s wife, who is suspicious about Eddie’s feelings for Catherine and who tries to encourage Catherine to become more independent. Eddie feels that Beatrice doesn’t respect him because of how much she disagrees with him. But later in the play, Beatrice actually defends Eddie when Catherine finally yells at him and calls him a rat. Despite what misgivings she may have about their marriage and about Eddie’s feelings toward Catherine, she still loves her husband, as can be seen at the end of the play when she holds Eddie as he dies.

Catherine – Catherine is Eddie’s niece, but he has raised her like a daughter, and she looks up to him as a kind of father figure. She is poised on the threshold of adulthood as the play begins, and Eddie continually tries to hold her back from the adult world and treats her as a child. Despite this, Catherine progressively matures over the course of the play and becomes more independent, securing a job and then pursuing her romantic interest in Rodolpho. Catherine is still heavily influenced (and maybe even manipulated) by other characters like Beatrice and Rodolpho, but shows signs of real independence when she justifies her closeness with Eddie to

Rodolpho and when she berates Eddie late in the play even more than Beatrice thinks is appropriate.

Alfieri – An Italian-American lawyer and a sort of narrator for the play, who guides the audience through the story. Eddie visits Alfieri to see if there is any legal action he can take to keep Catherine and Rodolpho apart, but Alfieri advises him to let Catherine make her own decisions. Alfieri tells Eddie that Rodolpho has not broken any law, so there is nothing that Eddie can do. Near the end of the play, he helps bail Marco out of prison and tries to convince Marco not to seek revenge on Eddie, as this would be against the law. Through Alfieri’s advice about the extent and limitations of the law, we see that what is legal is not always what is just, and what is illegal is not always what is unjust.

Marco – One of Beatrice’s cousins from Italy, who immigrates illegally to the United States and lives in Eddie’s apartment. He is more hard-working and traditionally masculine than Rodolpho and therefore Eddie respects Marco more than Rodolpho. However, when Eddie reports Marco and Rodolpho to the Immigration Bureau, Marco spits in Eddie’s face and publicly accuses him of betrayal. Marco has a strong sense of personal honor and justice, and feels obligated to seek some form of revenge on Eddie. In the physical struggle with Eddie at the end of the play, Marco ends up stabbing Eddie with Eddie’s own knife, killing him.

Rodolpho – The other one of Beatrice’s cousins from Italy, who stays at Eddie’s apartment. Unlike Marco, Rodolpho spends his money lavishly on clothes and other things, and enjoys himself out in the city. He sings in a high-pitched voice, cooks, and can sew. Because of this, Eddie is very suspicious of him, and thinks that he may be homosexual, repeatedly saying that he “ain’t right.” Rodolpho ends up falling for Catherine, and the two prepare to get married. Eddie warns Catherine that Rodolpho may simply be seeking a way to become an American citizen, but Rodolpho vehemently denies this. While he may truly love Catherine, his behavior toward her is at times not so different from Eddie’s, as he calls her a little girl at one point, and repeatedly tells her what to do.

Mike and Louis – Two of Eddie’s neighbors, who more or less stand in for the entire neighborhood in which the play is set. Early in the play, they are Eddie’s friends, and they joke about how strange Rodolpho is. At the end of the play, they shun Eddie for betraying his own family members and getting both his and Lipari’s relatives taken away.

Lipari – A butcher who lives in the same apartment building as Eddie. He has two illegal immigrants, his family members, staying with him, and then Beatrice has Marco and Rodolpho move into his apartment, as well. When the immigration officers find Marco and Rodolpho, they also find his illegal immigrant relatives. Afterwards, Lipari ignores and shuns Eddie, thinking that he turned the immigrants in.

Immigration Officers – The officers who come late in the play to arrest Marco and Rodolpho, after Eddie calls the Immigration Bureau. The officers are agents of the law who illustrate the difference between justice and the law, as in following the law and imprisoning Marco and Rodolpho they do not necessarily carry out real justice.

While Eddie tries to maintain his home, Catherine tries to find one of her own. She is oppressed by Eddie, and moving out of Eddie's apartment signifies the possibility of her having an independent life and home of her own. She must in a sense "immigrate" from Eddie's home to one of her own. In this manner, all the characters of the play—and perhaps all people—must undergo forms of immigration during their lives, whether literally leaving one country for another or moving out of a family home to one's own, or transitioning from one stage in life to another. Everyone is simply seeking a place where he or she can comfortably belong.

This pervasive idea of immigration is symbolized in the setting of the play, which takes place in Brooklyn and whose title alludes to the Brooklyn Bridge. Brooklyn is part of New York City, but separated from the more affluent Manhattan. The bridge represents an in-between space; it doesn't fully belong to either of the shores it connects. The title of the play thus captures the way that its characters are all on bridges of sorts, straddling two different worlds (whether Italy and the United States, or childhood and adulthood), exemplifying the double-life of the immigrant experience that may form a part of all our lives.



THEMES

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



IMMIGRATION, HOME, AND BELONGING

The play takes place in an immigrant community—a neighborhood full of Italian immigrants both legal and illegal—and is a vivid portrayal of the immigrant experience in the United States, an immigrant nation founded by those who left their homes in Europe but one that has not always been welcoming to foreigners. As seen in *A View from the Bridge*, immigrants often come to America because it is, famously, supposed to be the land of opportunity. Rodolpho and Marco come to New York in search of jobs that are lacking in their Italian hometown, and are overjoyed at the money they can make working on the docks. But this doesn't mean that immigrating to America is necessarily an entirely good thing. They have to live in hiding and are constantly in fear of being sent back to Italy (moreover, Marco plans to return to Italy eventually). In addition, Rodolpho and Marco have to deal with missing their original home, as can be seen when Rodolpho talks of the fountains in every town in Italy and, in an outburst, tells Catherine that America is not as great as she thinks it is. Through both Rodolpho and Marco, we see the ambivalence and difficulty of the immigrant experience. And through all the play's characters, we see the gradual process of assimilating into a new nation. Alfieri, for example, begins the play by both invoking the Italian heritage of the neighborhood and insisting that its inhabitants are all thoroughly American now.

But the play does not simply depict the experiences of immigrants. Miller uses the topic of immigration to make larger points about the idea of home and a sense of belonging. Eddie takes pride in the home he works hard to maintain and is irritated when Rodolpho and Marco intrude on his place as master of his home. Throughout the play he struggles to maintain control over his home as a place where he belongs, but is gradually excluded from it as he drifts away from Catherine and Beatrice. By the end of the play, he hardly belongs in his own home, or even in his own neighborhood, as his neighbors shun him for betraying Marco and Rodolpho.



LOVE AND DESIRE

Love—of one kind or another—is the main motivator of Miller's characters in this play, and drives the major events of its plot. Catherine's love for Rodolpho and Eddie's intense love for Catherine lead to the central problems of the play. But even before this, it is Marco's love for his family that motivates him to come to America, and it is Beatrice's love for her extended family that causes her to have Marco and Rodolpho stay in her home. Beyond this, though, *A View from the Bridge* especially explores the way in which people are driven by desires that don't fit the mold of normal or traditional forms of familial and romantic love. For one thing, Eddie's love for Catherine is extreme and hard to define exactly. He is very overprotective, and to some degree is a father figure for her. However, as Beatrice subtly hints several times, his love for Catherine often crosses this line and becomes a kind of incestuous desire for his niece, whom he has raised like a daughter. This repressed, taboo desire—which Eddie vehemently denies—erupts to the surface when Eddie grabs Catherine and kisses her in front of Rodolpho.

Eddie may also have other repressed desires. Directly after kissing Catherine, he kisses Rodolpho, as well. He claims that this is to prove that Rodolpho is homosexual (an accusation he constantly implies but never says outright), but as he is the one to restrain Rodolpho and forcefully kiss him, his motivations are dubious. Throughout the play, Eddie is disproportionately obsessed with proving that Rodolpho "ain't right," and this fixation on Rodolpho's sexuality (combined with the fact that he does not have sex with his wife Beatrice) may suggest that

there are other motivations behind Eddie's kissing him.

Eddie is a mess of contradictory, half-repressed desires that are difficult to pin down or define, perhaps even for him. Through this tragically tormented and conflicted character, Miller shows that people are often not aware of their own desires, and reveals the power that these desires can exert over people. Eddie's suffocating love for Catherine becomes a desire to possess her. He even claims that Rodolpho is stealing from him, as if she were an object he owned. His obsession with Catherine drives him apart from his family and leads him to betray Beatrice's cousins, thereby effectively ostracizing himself from his friends and neighbors. Through the tragic descent of Eddie, *A View from the Bridge* can be seen not only as the drama of a family, or of an immigrant community, but also as the internal drama of Eddie's psyche, as he is tormented and brought down by desires he himself doesn't even fully understand.



RESPECT, HONOR, REPUTATION

One of Eddie's main concerns in the play is his honor and the respect (or lack thereof) he gets from those around him. Other characters are also concerned with these issues, as matters of personal honor and reputation are of great importance in the close-knit community of Red Hook. But these issues are explored most fully through the character of Eddie. Eddie works hard to support his family and has a proud sense of personal honor. At the beginning of the play, he is a respected, well-liked member of his community. But the play follows his tragic demise as he loses the respect of others and his good reputation. He constantly worries about being disrespected or dishonored by Catherine, Beatrice, Marco, and especially Rodolpho. Closely related to the concepts of honor or respect is the idea of reputation, which can be understood as a more social form of honor. In addition to Eddie's personal sense of honor, he is greatly concerned with his reputation amongst his neighbors. He is infuriated when Marco spits on him and accuses him of turning him in to the Immigration Bureau (even though Eddie really did do it) because these actions are disrespectful and dishonor Eddie, but especially because they occurred in public, in front of the neighborhood. After Eddie's reputation is tarnished, his neighbors Lipari, Louis, and Mike ignore and ostracize him.

While Eddie does lose the respect of others around him, part of the problem with his obsession with respect and honor is that he has a rather warped idea of the concepts. Whenever Beatrice or Catherine disagrees with him, he interprets this as a sign of disrespect. Furthermore, he thinks that Rodolpho disrespects and dishonors him merely by spending time with Catherine. In the end, Eddie loses the respect of his family and community precisely because he is so overly concerned and defensive regarding his own honor and reputation. He interprets all sorts of things as affronts to his personal honor

and lashes out against those who he thinks are disrespecting him. Then, ironically, this very habit of overreaction causes Catherine, Beatrice, Rodolpho, and Marco to lose actual respect for him gradually. Nonetheless, even after Eddie's self-destructive decline, Beatrice and Catherine show some respect for him, when he is stabbed by Marco. And Alfieri ends the play by affirming that he still mourns Eddie respectfully, granting Eddie some vestige of a positive reputation after all.



JUSTICE AND THE LAW

The fact that the audience's guide through the events of the play is Alfieri, a lawyer, suggests that issues of law and justice have a central importance in *A View from the Bridge*. Specifically, many aspects of the play raise the question of whether the law is an adequate or ultimate authority on what is right and wrong. Throughout the play, the law fails to match up with various characters' ideas of justice. From the beginning, the presence of illegal immigrants questions the justness of strict immigration laws that force Marco and Rodolpho to hide in Eddie's apartment, after making a perilous journey to America in the hopes of honest work. As Eddie grows suspicious of Rodolpho, he asks Alfieri for help, but Alfieri tells him he has no legal recourse as Rodolpho has done nothing illegal. Eddie is then upset because he feels that Rodolpho's behavior simply isn't right, and that he should have some way of getting justice for Catherine and himself. When Eddie finally turns on Rodolpho and Marco, he is behaving legally, and helping the Immigration Bureau enforce the law. But, in doing so, he is also betraying his own family, and in this way not delivering justice. After Marco is put in prison, he wants his own form of justice through revenge, but Alfieri warns him not to violate the law and appeals to a higher form of justice when he tells Marco that he should leave the question of justice to God. For Marco, the law is in conflict with his idea of natural justice, and so he goes on to stab Eddie. If Eddie chooses the law over justice in turning Marco and Rodolpho in, Marco chooses his own form of justice over the law in killing Eddie.

As these examples suggest, the play can be read as displaying the failures of the law to guarantee real justice. Alfieri describes himself as powerless several times, emphasizing his inability as a man of law to stop the tragic events of the play. However, those who try to take action on behalf of their own ideas of justice regardless of the law end up causing themselves and others harm. When he has no legal recourse to separate Rodolpho and Catherine, Eddie turns Rodolpho and Marco in, setting off a chain of events that ostracizes him from his family and neighborhood (and also leads to his own death). And Marco's attempt to find justice by killing Eddie results in only more pain for his family, with Eddie's tragic death at the end of the play. The play can thus be seen as rather ambivalent about the relationship between justice and the law: the law does not

necessarily cover all issues of right and wrong adequately. Not all that is legal is right, and not all that is illegal is always wrong. But at the same time, the play cautions against taking justice into one's own hands, which both Marco's and Eddie's actions reveal to be a dangerous, not to mention ineffective course of action.



MATURITY AND INDEPENDENCE

If *A View from the Bridge* is the story of Eddie's tragic decline, it is also the story of Catherine's attempted ascent into maturity and adulthood. Over the course of the play, Catherine grows, matures, and attempts to carve out her own independent life, while Eddie struggles to keep her under his control—and his roof. Catherine gradually matures, as she finds a job and begins to assert herself with the help of Beatrice, who tells her not to act like a child anymore. Eddie misjudges Catherine's maturity and continues to see her as a young girl; because of this, he denies her independence. But she is not the only one whose maturity he misjudges. He underestimates Rodolpho, repeatedly referring to him early in the play as “just a kid.” And, given his own childish jealousy and behavior, Eddie perhaps overestimates his own maturity, as well.

Eddie is sad to see Catherine grow up, and tries to hold onto her as she matures and becomes more independent. But even late in the play, it is questionable to what degree Catherine really achieves independence. For one thing, she still greatly cares what Eddie thinks, and tries to get him to come to her wedding. Moreover, she first begins to assert her independence mainly because Beatrice advises her to. Catherine thus ironically learns to think for herself by listening to someone else's advice. And finally, in moving away from the control of Eddie, she at least partially comes under the control of Rodolpho, who calls her a little girl and whom she begs in tears to teach her. Given the play's setting in the 1950s, in a traditional Italian immigrant community, it would be difficult for a woman to achieve absolute independence. Thus, even if Catherine still depends on others and her actions are partially dictated or influenced by others, this should not negate the fact of the immense growth and maturation in her character, as she gradually becomes more of her own person, and learns to assert herself against the controlling, oppressive figure of Eddie.



SYMBOLS

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



THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

While it is never mentioned explicitly during the play, the Brooklyn Bridge is alluded to in Miller's title and is to be imagined in the background of Eddie's Brooklyn neighborhood. An important symbol of New York that connects Brooklyn to Manhattan, the bridge is a liminal, or in-between space, not fully belonging to either Brooklyn or Manhattan. In this way, it comes to represent how many of the characters in the play are similarly on “bridges” of sorts in their lives, caught between two worlds or two stages of life. As illegal immigrants, Marco and Rodolpho are caught between Italy and the United States. Catherine, meanwhile, is caught between childhood and adulthood, as well as between her relationships with Eddie and with Rodolpho. On a broader level, all the Italian immigrants in Red Hook—even those who are relatively acclimated to their lives in America—must still balance and reconcile their Italian past with their American present.



“PAPER DOLL”

When Rodolpho tells Catherine that he can sing, she asks him to sing the song “Paper Doll” for her. He ends up singing the song repeatedly throughout the play, and apparently sings it so much while working that he earns the nickname Paper Doll. As a popular song, “Paper Doll” is something that the young Rodolpho and Catherine share together, and which Eddie is therefore jealous of. He is irritated when they dance together to the song near the end of Act One, as bonding together over the song has drawn Rodolpho and Catherine closer together. In addition, the title and lyrics of the song are symbolically significant. The idea of the paper doll is important as Rodolpho's nickname because of its connotations of fragility. The nickname is a result of Rodolpho's odd behavior on the docks, including singing in a high voice, and makes Eddie uncomfortable because it suggests that Rodolpho is effeminate, and potentially not heterosexual. In terms of lyrics, the song says, “I'm gonna buy a paper doll that I can call my own, a doll that other fellows cannot steal.” The idea of having a woman completely under one's control and in one's possession, like a paper doll, is eerily similar to Eddie's ideal relationship with Catherine. His love for her is so possessive and oppressive that he treats her more like a doll he wants to control than a family member.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *A View from the Bridge* published in 2009.

☞ But this is Red Hook, not Sicily. This is the slum that faces the bay on the seaward side of Brooklyn Bridge. This is the gullet of New York swallowing the tonnage of the world. And now we are quite civilized, quite American.

Related Characters: Alfieri (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

The play opens with a monologue by Alfieri, a lawyer who immigrated to Red Hook from Italy when he was 25 years old. Throughout the play, Alfieri acts as a one man "Greek chorus" who frames and comments on the actions of the characters and the nature of the neighborhood.

In this quote, he sets the scene for the stage of Red Hook, Brooklyn, a neighborhood largely populated by poor but proud Italian immigrants. Many of the men who live here are longshoremen, or dock workers who load and unload shipments from around the world. They literally "swallow" the "tonnage of the world" by relying on the tons of goods from around the world to support their livelihoods. Though these Brooklynites have escaped the hunger and unemployment that plagued them in their countries of origin, or their parents' country of origin, their view of the ocean and their attachment to the sea is a constant reminder of where they came from, and for illegal immigrants, where they could very easily end up. Alfieri's invocation of the Brooklyn Bridge is a metaphor for the bridge between wealthy New York and the American Dream, as it connects poor Brooklyn to shiny Manhattan—an important image, and one that contributes to the play's title.

☞ Listen, you been givin' me the willies the way you walk down the street, I mean it.

Related Characters: Eddie Carbone (speaker), Catherine

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Eddie, a longshoreman, comes home one day and warmly

greet his niece, Catherine, who is equally pleased to see him.

The two are very close, to an extent that becomes a source of discomfort later on in the play. Eddie is very protective of Catherine, and in this quote, he complains that her new skirt is too short and that she walks "wavy," or in a suggesting manner with her hips, when she walks down the street. Eddie disapproves of Catherine's "wavy" walk because it attracts the attention of men. Even though Catherine is seventeen years old and on the cusp of womanhood, Eddie is still thinks of her as "his" little girl. It is important to note in this quote that while Eddie doesn't like the attention Catherine gets due to her walk, he has clearly noticed it, too, revealing feelings for Catherine that go beyond that of a protective uncle and niece, and which are eventually noticed by Alfieri and Beatrice.

☞ Katie, I promised your mother on her death-bed. I'm responsible for you. You're a baby, you don't understand these things.

Related Characters: Eddie Carbone (speaker), Catherine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Catherine is an orphan whose parents died when she was young. Eddie and Beatrice, Catherine's aunt, promised the girl's parents that they would take care of her. A childless couple, they raised Catherine as if she were their own.

Eddie is a very proud man who is insistent on his promises to people. In this quote, he tells Catherine that he knows what's best for her, and that he needs to protect her to the extent that he promised her mother on her death-bed. In this case, it means that he wants her to change the way she dresses and walks, because she's attracting the attention of men. Though Eddie urges Catherine that he knows best and doesn't want her to begin dating under the guise of his love as an uncle, it becomes clear throughout the play that he wants her to stay at home due to subconscious feelings of ownership and, to an implied extent, romantic love.

☞ Listen, they'll think it's a millionaire's house compared to the way they live. Don't worry about the walls. They'll be thankful.

Related Characters: Eddie Carbone (speaker), Rodolpho, Marco

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Two of Beatrice's cousins, Marco and Rodolpho, arrive a week early on a ship from Italy. Beatrice is surprised at their early arrival, and is upset that she did not have time to cook and clean as she had planned.

In this quote, Eddie assures her that the two immigrant men will not notice that the walls haven't been scrubbed sparkling clean. Instead, they will be grateful to have landed in a land of opportunity, and to have a roof over their heads. It is worthy to note that before even meeting Rodolpho and Marco, Eddie has a sense that they are indebted to him because his home is sheltering them while they live and work illegally in America, in order to send money back to their families. Eddie knows that the men came to America only because they felt they had no other choice but to leave Italy and find work across an ocean. In a way, he takes advantage of their desperation, and approaches the men living in his home with the attitude that he, not America, is giving them the opportunity for a better life.

●● Look, you gotta get used to it, she's no baby no more.

Related Characters: Beatrice (speaker), Eddie Carbone, Catherine

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

When the family sits down for dinner, Catherine breaks the news to Eddie that she has been offered a job as a stenographer at a plumbing company, where she will earn \$50 a week. Eddie immediately objects for a variety of reasons: that Catherine should stay in school (even though the principal set her up with the job, and would still allow her to take the exam to finish her courses at the end of the year), that the neighborhood in which she will work is too dangerous (even though it is one block from the subway, and no more dangerous than Red Hook, where they live), and that Catherine is too young to go to work (even though she is almost eighteen years old, and would bring home \$50

a week, a significant sum of money for the family working to make ends meet).

In this quote, Beatrice sticks up for Catherine, and eventually convinces Eddie to let Catherine go to work. She knows firsthand how overprotective Eddie is of his niece, and also knows that she is Catherine's only advocate in achieving her freedom outside of the home. Beatrice also senses Eddie's affinity for Catherine, one that goes beyond the bond of uncle and niece, even one between an uncle who has been the father figure for a niece. Beatrice's insistence that Eddie allow Catherine to work and get out of the house is, to an extent, self-serving; if Catherine is not around as much, and works to make Eddie see she is no longer "his baby," then Beatrice can be the number one woman in Eddie's life for the first time in years.

●● Eddie:

There was a family lived next door to her mother, he was about sixteen—

Beatrice:

No, he was no more than fourteen, cause I was to his confirmation in Saint Agnes. but the family had an uncle that they were hidin' in the house, and he snitched to the Immigration.

Catherine:

The kid snitched?

Eddie:

On his own uncle!

Catherine:

What, was he crazy?

Eddie:

He was crazy after, I tell you that, boy.

Beatrice:

Oh, it was terrible. He had five brothers and the old father. And they grabbed him in the kitchen and pulled him down the stairs—three flights his head was bouncin' like a coconut. And they spit on him in the street, his own father and his brothers. The whole neighborhood was cryin'.

Related Characters: Beatrice, Catherine, Eddie Carbone (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 17-18

Explanation and Analysis

Prior to Marco and Rodolpho arriving at the house, Eddie and Beatrice tell Catherine the cautionary tale of a boy who informed Immigration officers that there was an illegal immigrant, his uncle, living in their house. They do so in order to warn her not to do anything to bring attention to the two illegal Italian immigrants they are soon to have live in their home. This story illustrates the pride that Red Hook residents have in their blood relatives, and the collective horror and shame that the neighborhood feels when someone betrays one of their own. Though the concept of justice is palpable throughout the neighborhood, as Alfieri notes in his opening monologue, it is a kind of vigilante justice rather than one that aligns with the actual law (which would approve of the arrest of an illegal immigrant). This anecdote illustrates how protective each family feels for its members, and the shame and disappointment thrust upon anyone, even a young boy, who betrays it (as Eddie himself will later).

☞ Me, I want to be an American. And then I want to go back to Italy when I am rich, and I will buy a motorcycle.

Related Characters: Rodolpho (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Marco and Rodolpho, Beatrice's Sicilian cousins, arrive at the Carbone home and marvel at the "Americanness" of the house and of Brooklyn. Marco notes that he hopes to stay in America for a handful of years, send money back to his wife and children, and then return to Italy to establish a more stable life for his family.

In this quote, Rodolpho, Marco's younger and unmarried brother, notes that he has more superficial aspirations: to become an American, and then return to Italy wealthy, where he will buy a motorcycle. From the moment he steps foot in America, Rodolpho has the American aesthetic, rather than the American dream, in mind: with no family to take care of, he quickly spends his earnings on new clothing and trips to the movies. Rodolpho wants a better life for

himself, and as a young, unattached man, this life is one of beautiful things and entertaining pursuits. It is this carefree spending, seemingly antithetical to the hard work Eddie has put in to provide for Beatrice and Catherine for the last twenty years, that eventually makes him suspicious that Rodolpho is courting Catherine only to earn his American citizenship, and then to leave her as soon as he can. To Eddie, Rodolpho's pursuits in America are all self-serving and frivolous, in opposition to the thrifty work ethic immigrants are supposed to have when arriving in the land of opportunity at last.

☞ I'm gonna buy a paper doll that I can call my own, A doll that other fellows cannot steal.

Related Characters: Rodolpho (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Marco and Rodolpho tell Eddie, Beatrice, and Catherine about the lack of opportunities in their town in Italy--there is plenty of beauty, but absolutely no employment. Rodolpho proudly recalls the day that a famous opera singer set to perform at a hotel got sick, and being a singer himself, Rodolpho took over and entertained the visitors for hours. He romanticizes the memory mostly due to the fact that he claims "thousand lira" tips rained down from the crowd, and that he and his brother were able to live for six months off of that night (though Marco refutes the claim and states it was more like two months). Catherine implores him to sing, and in this quote, he sings a few bars of the song "Paper Doll."

Eddie quickly becomes angry and tells Rodolpho to stop singing, even though Beatrice and Catherine want him to continue--he has a beautiful, high tenor voice. Eddie claims he wants Rodolpho to stop because the neighbors may become suspicious if they suddenly hear singing from a house where previously no such voice came from. However, it is also likely due to the content of the song that Eddie becomes paranoid. The lyrics are about keeping a woman away from other men, as if she were a "paper doll" that could be kept in a pocket for "safekeeping." Eddie views Catherine like his own paper doll, a child that will be his forever. He can already sense that Catherine's allegiance to

him is waning in light of her enchantment with Rodolpho, and it is the combination of the content of the song and annoyance at Rodolpho's talent that prompts Eddie to shut up his houseguest.

●● Beatrice:
The girl is gonna be eighteen years old, it's time already.

Eddie:
B., he's taking her for a ride!

Beatrice:
All right, that's her ride. What're you gonna stand over her till she's forty?

Related Characters: Eddie Carbone, Beatrice (speaker), Rodolpho, Catherine

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

Rodolpho and Catherine frequently stay out late at the movies, a new development that makes Eddie upset. He claims he worries for her safety, but Beatrice knows it is due to his unusual affinity for Catherine.

In this quote, Beatrice repeats her refrain to Eddie that Catherine is a grown woman, and is allowed to make her own choices, including what men she associates with and where she spends her evenings. Eddie refutes Beatrice's claim that Catherine is perfectly safe with Rodolpho, and states that he believes Rodolpho is only expressing a passing interest in Catherine until he marries her and acquires American citizenship. Beatrice tells Eddie that that is Catherine's choice. This is clearly true, but as a statement it's likely also self-serving for Beatrice: if Catherine marries Rodolpho, then she will be out of the house, and Eddie will be forced to stop doting upon her. This will make Beatrice less uncomfortable about Eddie's interest in his niece, and will also shift Eddie's attention back to her, his wife.

●● It means you gotta be your own self more. You still think you're a little girl, honey. but nobody else can make up your mind for you any more, you understand? You gotta give him to understand that he can't give you orders no more.

Related Characters: Beatrice (speaker), Catherine

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Eddie becomes upset about the amount of time Rodolpho and Catherine have been spending together. For years, she has been his "little girl," always doting upon him when he comes home from work, but ever since Rodolpho arrived, they stay out until late at night seeing movies. Eddie confronts Catherine to tell her that he thinks Rodolpho is up to no good, meaning that he is only seeking a green-card marriage. This upsets Catherine, who goes to Beatrice and tells her that while she wants to get married and leave the house one day, she worries about how Eddie will react.

In this quote, Beatrice tells Catherine that if she wants Eddie to treat her like a grown woman, she has to start acting like one. Eddie and Catherine are very close, since he has been the father figure in her life since she was very little. Their relationship, it seems, has not evolved as she matured into an adult, a stunted growth that has caused tension as Catherine prepares to leave the house in pursuit of marriage and a career. Though Beatrice does not explicitly say that the nature of Catherine and Eddie's relationship makes her uncomfortable, she doesn't only urge Catherine to act more mature for own Catherine's benefit; as Eddie's wife, it also makes Beatrice uncomfortable how much attention her husband pays to their niece. If Eddie cannot learn to treat Catherine like a grown woman, then it is in Beatrice's best interest to urge Catherine to act like one.

●● Alfieri:
Is there a question of law somewhere?

Eddie:
That's what I want to ask you.

Alfieri:
Because there's nothing illegal about a girl falling in love with an immigrant.

Related Characters: Eddie Carbone, Alfieri (speaker), Catherine, Rodolpho

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Fed up with his inability to convince Catherine that Rodolpho is up to no good, Eddie goes to Alfieri to see if the law can intervene in what seems to be the impending marriage of Catherine and the immigrant.

In this quote, Alfieri fails to give Eddie the answer he seeks. He informs Eddie that there is nothing illegal about Rodolpho and Catherine falling in love with each other. The only way in which the law can object to the situation is that Rodolpho is an illegal immigrant, although, of course, by marrying Catherine, he would be able to apply for citizenship. Though "sham marriages" are illegal, from every angle except for Eddie's suspicions, Catherine and Rodolpho are genuinely smitten with one another. Eddie's only recourse to split up Catherine and Rodolpho would be to give up Rodolpho's name to Immigration--an act that, in *Red Hook*, is considered to be one of merciless betrayal.

☝☝ We all love somebody, the wife, the kids—every man's got somebody that he loves, heh? But sometimes . . . there's too much. You know? There's too much, and it goes where it mustn't. A man works hard, he brings up a child, sometimes it's a niece, sometimes even a daughter, and he never realizes it, but through the years—there is too much love for the daughter, there is too much love for the niece. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?

Related Characters: Alfieri (speaker), Catherine, Eddie Carbone

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

During their talk, Alfieri tries to steer Eddie's emotions towards letting go of Catherine, rather than seeking legal action in order to break up the immigrant and his niece.

In this quote, Alfieri subtly, though more explicitly than Beatrice, tells Eddie that his love for Catherine borders on inappropriate behavior. In plain terms, he is implying that Eddie's interest in Catherine goes beyond the love of an uncle who has been a father figure to his niece, and into the uncomfortable realm of romantic feelings for a younger female family member. Though Eddie has always claimed that his feelings of ownership for Catherine are really paternal instincts of protection, the fact that he is seeking legal recourse in order to separate her from a potential husband is concerning to Alfieri. Even as a third party who is

not a part of the family, Alfieri can tell that Eddie's feelings for Catherine broach inappropriate--and potentially illegal--sentiments.

Act 2 Quotes

☝☝ Do you think I am so desperate? My brother is desperate, not me. You think I would carry on my back the rest of my life a woman I didn't love just to be an American? It's so wonderful? You think we have no tall buildings in Italy? Electric lights? No wide streets? No flags? No automobiles? Only work we don't have. I want to be an American so I can work, that is the only wonder here—work!

Related Characters: Rodolpho (speaker), Catherine

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

One day while home alone, Catherine confronts Rodolpho about his intentions. With the idea placed into her head by Eddie, she asks him if he is only interested in her to acquire U.S. citizenship. Rodolpho angrily rebuts her accusation, and in this quote, he says that he is in America to work, not to have a sham marriage for citizenship. He is interested in Catherine only because he loves her. Unlike his brother, he is not desperate for work, since he does not have a family to personally support. Implicit in this quote as well is a critique of America, and of the common idea that America is inherently greater than all other countries. As Rodolpho states here, the only thing America has that Italy doesn't is jobs—so if he wasn't working, and he didn't really love Catherine, he'd rather be in Italy.

☝☝ Don't, don't laugh at me! I've been here all my life. . . . Every day I saw him when he left in the morning and when he came home at night. You think it's so easy to turn around and say to a man he's nothin' to you no more?

Related Characters: Catherine (speaker), Eddie Carbone, Rodolpho

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

When Rodolpho tells Catherine that she should no longer care what Eddie thinks of her, Catherine feels wounded. Beatrice and Eddie raised her as if she were their own when her parents died, and she feels indebted to them.

In this quote, she feels insulted that Rodolpho would be so dismissive of Eddie, who similarly took in two Italian immigrants that he had never met before. Though overly protective of Catherine to an uncomfortable degree, neither can deny that Eddie is hardworking and welcoming--at least, when his guests comply to his demands. Eddie is the only father Catherine has ever known, and though his doting upon her seems strange to outsiders, she has always been complicit in their bond. She feels confused about this budding relationship with a new man, especially since the only other man she has ever had such a bond with--Eddie--so vocally disapproves of the courtship. While Catherine longs to spread her wings and go out on her own, she feels massive guilt (largely due to Eddie's words) about denying the man who has given everything to her. It is due to this guilt and reluctance to leave that the separation between Eddie and Catherine is so painful and difficult for all members of the family.

☝ Catherine. If I take in my hands a little bird. And she grows and wishes to fly. But I will not let her out of my hands because I love her so much, is that right for me to do?

Related Characters: Rodolpho (speaker), Catherine

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Rodolpho, like Beatrice and Alfieri, has noticed that Eddie is overly protective of Catherine. Though Catherine expresses her worry about how Eddie will feel if she leaves the house to marry Rodolpho, he assures her that she has the license to make her own way in the world once she is grown.

In this quote, Rodolpho uses the metaphor of a baby bird to symbolize Catherine's situation with Eddie. Even though Eddie has raised her, Catherine still has the right to leave the home now that she is fully matured. Rodolpho, a romantic man who loves all things beautiful, works his way into Catherine's heart with flowery language such as in this quote. Here, he quite literally tells Catherine that if you love something, set it free--though in this case he is referring to the fact that her uncle should set her free from the chains of

his love for her, so that the two young people can be married.

☝ This is my last word, Eddie, take it or not, that's your business. Morally and legally you have no rights, you cannot stop it; she is a free agent.

Related Characters: Alfieri (speaker), Eddie Carbone, Catherine

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

After confronting Catherine and Rodolpho--and kissing both of them, to prove his ownership of Catherine and his belief that Rodolpho is a homosexual--Eddie goes to Alfieri, to beg him to find a reason to use the law to separate Catherine and Rodolpho. Much like their previous conversation, Alfieri refuses. In this quote, he firmly tells Eddie that Catherine is old enough to make her own decisions, and that Eddie has no agency over whom or when she marries. Eddie longs to find some way to prove that Rodolpho is a homosexual, and that he is only interested in using Catherine to get a green card, but Alfieri says there is no way the law can intervene in these suspicions. It is this conversation that prompts Eddie to take matters into his own hands, and to invoke the law the only way he can think of: calling the Immigration Office and informing them of two illegal immigrants living in his apartment. This is an act of desperation that comes from a place of extreme hopelessness and lack of control, and though it is "right" from a legal perspective, on any other level it is an act of betrayal.

☝ The law is only a word for what has a right to happen. When the law is wrong it's because it's unnatural, but in this case it is natural and a river will drown you if you buck it now. Let her go. And bless her.

Related Characters: Alfieri (speaker), Catherine, Eddie Carbone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, Alfieri insinuates that the only way the law might intervene in the case of Catherine is if Eddie does something drastic to act upon his feelings for her. Even though he is not a part of the family and has not seen firsthand how attached to Catherine Eddie is, Alfieri can tell that Eddie's feelings of ownership for Catherine come from a place of romantic, not just paternal, love. Alfieri's hands are tied: he anticipates that something tragic will happen, and all he can do is to urge Eddie to let Catherine live her life as she pleases. He warns Eddie that these feelings of attachment and rage will only serve to hurt him, not hurt those whom he has hatred for. And by hurting himself, he will end up scarring those that he loves--namely, Catherine.

☞ That one! I accuse that one!

Related Characters: Marco (speaker), Eddie Carbone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

After Eddie's outburst, Rodolpho and Marco move to an upstairs apartment in the same building, thanks to Beatrice's quick arrangements. Eddie realizes too late that two other immigrants are also living in the flat, and therefore will be caught by the Immigration Officers. The officers arrive and take the four immigrants away. No one is in doubt that it is Eddie who did this, and as Marco is being dragged away, he spits in Eddie's face. In this quote, he accuses Eddie of tattling on the immigrants in front of the whole neighborhood. As we know from Eddie's previous anecdote about the young boy who gave up a relative to Immigration, to betray family members squatting in the neighborhood in order to find work and send money back to their families is an unforgivable crime. By resorting to his last hope to involve the law in separating Catherine and Rodolpho, Eddie has in fact committed the worst crime that a Redhook citizen can commit in the eyes of vigilante law: betrayal.

☞ Alfieri:
To promise not to kill is not dishonorable.

Marco:
No?

Alfieri:
No.

Marco:
Then what is done with such a man.

Alfieri:
Nothing. If he obeys the law, he lives. That's all.

Marco:
The law? All the law is not in a book.

Alfieri:
Yes. In a book. There is no other law.

Marco:
He degraded my brother. My blood. He robbed my children, he mocks my work. I work to come here, mister!

Alfieri:
I know, Marco—

Marco:
There is no law for that? Where is the law for that?

Alfieri:
There is none.

Related Characters: Marco, Alfieri (speaker), Eddie Carbone, Rodolpho

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

After being arrested by the Immigration officers, Alfieri meets with Marco and Rodolpho to discuss their options--of which, really, there are none. Alfieri agrees to bail them out on the condition that they don't immediately seek revenge on Eddie.

In this quote, Alfieri's conversation with Marco mirrors his conversation with Eddie, in that he tells both men that there is no law to appease their hatred: Eddie for Rodolpho's courting of Catherine, Marco for Eddie's betrayal. The kind

of justice that these men seek is the right to retain their pride, to retain something of which they, legally, have no right (Eddie's feelings of ownership over Catherine's life, Marco's residency in the United States as an illegal immigrant). The fervent sense of justice that the residents of Red Hook feel is one of pride and vigilante law. Alfieri, as a lawyer, is legally obligated to tell his clients what the law can or cannot do; as an immigrant and member of the Red Hook community for 25 years, he urges his clients not to commit crimes for the sake of revenge and pride. The robbery that both men claim is not a motive that would stand up in a court of law, nor should it fuel violence on the streets of Brooklyn. And yet, citizens of these streets often feel that when the law fails their needs, they must take matters into their own hands.

☛ This is not God, Marco. You hear? Only God makes justice.

Related Characters: Alfieri (speaker), Marco

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

Though Marco seeks revenge for Eddie's betrayal, he has no legal recourse whatsoever. As an illegal immigrant, he is not allowed to be living or working in Brooklyn, and in the eyes of the law, Eddie has done the right thing. However, in the eyes of community and family justice, Eddie has committed an unforgivable act of betrayal. In this quote, Alfieri urges Marco not to act on his vengeful feelings, no matter how angry he is. Alfieri knows that Marco is desperate: when he is sent back to Italy, his starving family will be awaiting his return. The U.S. was his only chance for a livelihood. Without any work, he and his family will continue to suffer. To Marco, Eddie has stripped him and his family of their entire future. Alfieri knows that this desperation and hopelessness might drive Marco to murder Eddie. In this quote, he urges Marco not to murder his betrayer, since while he feel like he must make his own justice, God will know that he has sinned, and he will one day pay the ultimate price.

☛ Eddie:
Didn't you hear what I told you? You walk out that door to that wedding you ain't comin' back here, Beatrice.

Beatrice:
Why! What do you want?

Eddie:
I want my respect. Didn't you ever hear of that? From my wife?

Related Characters: Eddie Carbone, Beatrice (speaker), Beatrice

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

After Catherine and Rodolpho move out of Eddie's bottom-floor apartment and into a neighbor's flat upstairs, Eddie refuses to speak to them. On their wedding day, he refuses to attend as well, and forbids Beatrice to go. In this quote, Beatrice, fed up with Eddie's irrational anger, says she is going to go anyway. More than space from the couple, Eddie wants his pride back. By losing Catherine, whom he has come to see as his property over the years, he feels as if a part of himself has been "stolen" by Rodolpho. He has no reason for not wanting Beatrice to attend, except out of spite. He knows how much Catherine cares for them, but he feels that her love for him is not enough—if she truly cared for him, she would never leave the house, and would stay as his "paper doll" forever.

☛ Catherine:
How can you listen to him? This rat!

Beatrice:
Don't you call him that!

Catherine:
What're you scared of? He's a rat! He belongs in the sewer!

Related Characters: Beatrice, Catherine (speaker), Eddie Carbone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

When Eddie refuses to attend Catherine and Rodolpho's wedding until Marco apologizes--and forbids Beatrice to attend as well--Catherine becomes very angry.

In this quote, she calls Eddie a "rat" in an outburst, referring to the fact that he "ratted" on Marco and Rodolpho to Immigration due to his jealousy for Rodolpho's relationship with Catherine. Though Catherine has thus far been reluctant to break ties with Eddie, due to the bond that they have had for the majority of her life, the Red Hook ideals of justice give her license to denounce her uncle in the wake of his betrayal. Just like with the anecdote of the boy who ratted out an uncle at the beginning of the play, the only time that it is communally acceptable to denounce and publicly shame a family member is if they betray another family member.

Beatrice, though initially encouraging of Catherine to become less close with Eddie, is very quick to defend her husband. This defense reveals the self-serving nature of Beatrice's conversations with Catherine, when she told her to grow up and encouraged her to get a job, get married, and leave the house. Beatrice has clearly felt competition with the young girl for Eddie's affection for years. Though she does not approve of Eddie's betrayal, the love and allegiance she feels for her husband will always come before anything--even the vigilante law that pervades Red Hook, and even before the niece she raised as if she were her own child.

☝ I want my name! He didn't take my name; he's a punk. Marco's got my name—and you can run tell him, kid, that he's gonna give it back to me in front of this neighborhood, or we have it out.

Related Characters: Eddie Carbone (speaker), Rodolpho, Marco

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Rodolpho tells Eddie that Marco is coming to the house, insinuating that it is in search of revenge. Though Rodolpho acknowledges that he, to an extent, disrespected Eddie by not asking him for permission for Catherine's hand in marriage, he also acknowledges that Eddie greatly betrayed him and his brother by giving them up to the police.

In this quote, Eddie states that beyond refusing to accept

Rodolpho's apology--or apologizing for his own actions--he wants Marco to apologize to him in front of the neighborhood. When Eddie says he "wants his name," he means that he wants his reputation back. In Red Hook vigilante law, betraying one's own relatives to the police is unforgivable. Eddie, however, feels as if something even more unforgivable has been done to him: the loss of Catherine. Despite feeling that he has been justified in his actions, here, Eddie wants Marco to publicly acknowledge that he and Rodolpho have done him wrong, so that the neighborhood won't think that he is a "rat" and treat him as such.

☝ Maybe he come to apologize to me. Heh, Marco? For what you said about me in front of the neighborhood? . . . Wipin' the neighborhood with my name like a dirty rag! I want my name, Marco.

Related Characters: Eddie Carbone (speaker), Marco

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

As Eddie previously mentioned to Rodolpho, when Marco arrives at the house while on bail, Eddie tells him that he wants Marco to "give him his name"--to apologize to him publicly, so that his reputation can be restored. As news travels quickly in the community, all of Red Hook knows that Eddie Carbone gave up his relatives to the police--an unforgivable act that others will assume was done spitefully for the government payoff. Of course, the members of the Carbone household know that it was done vengefully so that Catherine would not marry Rodolpho, and thus escape from Eddie's clutches. In this whole ordeal, Eddie has not only lost Catherine and her trust to another man, but he has also lost his pride--something he wants Marco to give back to him. However, he knows that the furious Marco will not comply, and ends up provoking him into a physical fight.

☝ I confess that something perversely pure calls to me from his memory—not purely good, but himself purely, for he allowed himself to be wholly known and for that I think I will love him more than all my sensible clients. And yet, it is better to settle for half, it must be! And so I mourn him—I admit it—with a certain . . . alarm.

Related Characters: Alfieri (speaker), Eddie Carbone

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 86

Explanation and Analysis

As the framing device and "Greek chorus" of the play, Alfieri closes the play with a monologue, just as he opened it. After Marco kills Eddie with the knife that Eddie hoped to stab him with, Alfieri reminisces on the kind of man that Eddie was. Prior to the betrayal, he was commonly known as a good, hardworking man. Alfieri notes that Eddie was

"himself purely"--though it was not good of him to have such strong feelings for Catherine, and to do what he did to Marco and Rodolpho, everything mad that he did was done for the passion of the love he felt. Alfieri insinuates that he will "love him more" than all of his "sensible clients," because though Eddie ultimately brought about his own death, his actions were largely fueled by too much love--until they were funneled into hatred. This closing commentary by Alfieri highlights the nuances of Eddie's character, as both the protagonist and the villain of the play--the man whose love ended up killing him.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

ACT 1

The play is set in the Brooklyn neighborhood of Red Hook in the 1950s, near the small apartment of a man named Eddie. A middle-aged lawyer named Alfieri comes on stage and addresses the audience directly. He says that the people of this neighborhood distrust lawyers, just as their Sicilian ancestors always have. Describing Red Hook, he says that all the Italian immigrants there are “quite civilized, quite American,” and says, “justice is very important here.”

Alfieri says that he has mostly dealt with simple, petty cases during his career, but occasionally finds a serious case that some ancient lawyer in Italy “in some Caesar’s year” would have dealt with. Eddie enters, and Alfieri introduces him to the audience as Eddie Carbone, a longshoreman who works on the docks. Eddie is returning home after work, and sees his niece Catherine.

Eddie notices that Catherine is well dressed and has made her hair look nice. He asks where she’s planning on going, and she says that she has news for him. Eddie says her skirt is too short, but Catherine disagrees. Eddie tells her that she should change how she walks down the sidewalk, because she’s drawing the attention of men.

Catherine begins to get upset, and Eddie reminds her that he promised her mother as she was dying that he would watch over Catherine. He tells Catherine that she is a “baby” and doesn’t “doesn’t understand these things.” Eddie calls for his wife, Beatrice, and says that her cousins have arrived from Italy. Beatrice enters and is surprised that they have come early. She worries that the house is not ready for them yet, but Eddie tells her that the cousins will “think it’s a millionaire’s house compared to the way they live.”

Beatrice is nervous for her cousins’ arrival, but Eddie says that it will be fine, as long as the cousins “know where they’re gonna sleep.” He’s worried that Beatrice is so generous she’ll give them her bed and Eddie and Beatrice will end up sleeping on the floor. He tells Beatrice she has “too big a heart.” Beatrice calls Eddie an angel for letting her cousins stay with them.

The opening of the play explicitly establishes the importance of the topic of justice, while also contextualizing the events of the play amid an immigrant community that balances its American identity with its collective Italian heritage.



The reference to “some Caesar’s year” asserts continuity between the community’s Italian (i.e. Roman) past and American present, even after the momentous changes of immigration.



Eddie is overprotective of Catherine, and thinks of her as a young, immature girl who doesn’t realize what kind of male attention she is drawing. But what kind of attention is Eddie himself giving to Catherine’s short skirt or way of walking?



Again, Eddie claims that Catherine is immature and not old enough to make independent decisions. He is sure that Beatrice’s cousins will admire his apartment, because he is convinced that America is a more prosperous land of opportunity than places people immigrate from.



Eddie is allowing his cousins to stay at his apartment, but is already wary of his position as the respected head of the household being threatened by these new arrivals.



As the three prepare to eat dinner, Catherine shares her news with Eddie. She has gotten a job as a typist at a plumbing company, having been picked as the best student in her typing class. Catherine is excited, but Eddie is hesitant and doesn't want her to be "with a lotta plumbers." He says he doesn't want Catherine to go to the neighborhood where the company is. Beatrice tries to persuade Eddie that Catherine would be safe there, and asks him, "you gonna keep her in the house all her life?"

Eddie tells Catherine her hair makes her look like "the madonna type." He relents and tells her she can take the job. Catherine is ecstatic and talks about what she'll buy with her first paycheck. Eddie says Catherine will probably move out soon, and "come visit on Sundays, then once a month, then Christmas and New Year's, finally." He tells Catherine not to trust people and to be cautious.

The three eat dinner, and then conversation returns to the topic of Beatrice's cousins. Eddie reminds her of the importance of not saying anything to anyone about the cousins, since they are staying in the apartment illegally and are not legal immigrants. He says that the Immigration Bureau has people paid off in the neighborhood to report on illegal immigrants.

Eddie and Beatrice tell Catherine the story of a nearby boy who "snitched to the Immigration" about his illegal immigrant uncle. The boy's family was so enraged by this betrayal that they "pulled him down the stairs," beat him, and "spit on him in the street." Catherine promises not to say a word about Beatrice's cousins.

Catherine says she is supposed to start work the next Monday, and Eddie wishes her luck, with tears in his eyes. He jokes that he "never figured on" Catherine growing up. Catherine goes to get Eddie his cigar, and Eddie asks Beatrice why she is mad at him. She says she isn't, and that he is the one who is mad. As this dinner scene comes to an end, Alfieri comes on stage and tells the audience that Eddie was a good, hard-working man. He says that around ten o'clock that night, Beatrice's cousins arrived.

A man escorts Beatrice's cousins, Rodolpho and Marco, to Eddie's apartment. Marco and Rodolpho enter the apartment and meet Beatrice and Eddie. Marco thanks them for letting Rodolpho and him stay and says that as soon as Eddie wants them out, they will leave. Catherine notices and remarks on Rodolpho's light blond hair.

Catherine is excited at this opportunity to begin to make her own independent life, but Eddie wants her to remain in the house and dependent on him, using fatherly concern as an excuse for his resistance. Beatrice stands up to Eddie on behalf of Catherine, a habit that Eddie finds disrespectful, as he will later tell her.



Eddie's compliment to Catherine also hints that he wants her to remain chaste, like the Madonna (the virgin Mary). He is worried not only about losing control over Catherine in his household, but also about losing Catherine entirely, as she begins to move toward her own life.



Eddie and other inhabitants of Red Hook have a complicated relationship to the law. They have a higher sense of familial duty and justice that contradicts the law's mandates about immigration, so that they are forced to hide their illegal family members in their homes.



The story about the boy highlights the conflict between a familial sense of justice and the law. In obeying the law, the boy betrayed his family, who sought their own form of justice in violent revenge.



At this point, Eddie's overprotective love for Catherine seems like that of a father-figure sad to let her go. But his feelings toward Catherine will gradually be revealed to be more complicated—and problematic. Alfieri informs the audience of Eddie's good reputation as an honorable, hard-working man.



Marco and Rodolpho are respectful of Eddie's home and don't want to intrude. As they cannot consider Eddie's apartment their real home but have left theirs in Italy, they are temporarily without a home, a place where they feel they belong.



Eddie tells Marco and Rodolpho about the work they will have, on the docks. They talk about how there are no jobs where they are from in Italy, and people struggle to make money, pushing taxis up hills for example. Marco describes his wife and children, whom he has left back in Italy and to whom he is going to send back money as he works here. He and Rodolpho are excited at the opportunity to make money in the U.S. and are delighted when Eddie tells them they could make thirty or forty dollars a week.

Catherine asks if Rodolpho is married. He isn't, and he says he wants to stay in the U.S., become a rich American, and then one day return to Italy with a motorcycle. Rodolpho talks about what a status symbol a motorcycle is in Italy, and then says that he is also a singer, and once made money singing at a hotel. Catherine is intrigued and wants to hear him sing. He sings a song called "**Paper Doll**."

The lyrics of the song talk about being disillusioned with love, and say "I'm gonna buy a paper doll that I can call my own, a doll that other fellows cannot steal." Eddie tells Rodolpho to stop singing, as it will alert neighbors that someone new is staying in the apartment. Marco tells Rodolpho to be quiet. Eddie notices that Catherine is wearing high-heeled shoes, and tells her to go into her room and change them.

As this scene comes to a close, Alfieri comes on stage and says that, 'as the weeks passed . . . there was a trouble that would not go away.' The play resumes following Eddie and his family a few weeks in the future. Eddie is waiting impatiently for Catherine and Rodolpho to return from seeing a movie. He tells Beatrice that Rodolpho is supposed to stay inside when he isn't working, to avoid getting caught. Beatrice tells him to stop worrying.

Eddie asks Beatrice if Catherine has said anything about Rodolpho, and Beatrice says that Rodolpho is "a nice kid." Eddie disagrees, and Beatrice says he's jealous of him. Eddie thinks this is ridiculous, and is displeased at the idea of Rodolpho and Catherine being together. He says that Rodolpho sings while working, so that the other longshoremen have nicknamed him **Paper Doll**. He says Rodolpho is "weird" and has "wacky hair."

Marco and Rodolpho's motivation in coming to America is to find work. They are ecstatic at the opportunities available in New York, though they will later find that immigrating brings with it perhaps as many problems as opportunities. Marco is also motivated out of love for his family, and a desire to provide for them by sending money back home.



Unlike Marco, Rodolpho has somewhat more naïve ambitions of wealth and prestige in immigrating. Catherine is quickly becoming infatuated with Rodolpho, a budding love that will greatly trouble the overprotective Eddie.



The lyrics echo Eddie's attempt to control and possess Catherine, like a paper doll. Catherine's high-heeled shoes trouble Eddie because they suggest that she is a mature woman and also because they hint that she is trying to impress or capture the attention of Rodolpho.



Eddie pretends to be merely concerned with Rodolpho getting caught for being an illegal immigrant, but is clearly concerned about his relationship with Catherine, whom he doesn't want to see grow up and whom he doesn't want to see develop a relationship with any man other than him.



Beatrice's suggestion that Eddie may be jealous hints that Eddie's overprotective affection for Catherine may edge into a kind of incestuous desire. Eddie hints that he has doubts about Rodolpho's masculinity and sexuality, but he himself seems particularly fixated on Rodolpho's appearance.



Eddie says that Marco “goes around like a man,” in contrast to Rodolpho. He says he didn’t bring Catherine up for someone like Rodolpho. Beatrice changes the subject and asks, “When am I gonna be a wife again, Eddie?” She says it’s been months since they’ve slept together, and Eddie says he doesn’t want to talk about it. He goes back to the subject of Catherine, and Beatrice says that Catherine is eighteen and old enough to make her own decisions.

Eddie goes outside and talks with two neighbors, Mike and Louis, about Marco and Rodolpho. They compliment Marco’s strength and work ethic, but then say that Rodolpho “has a sense of humor,” and seem to suggest that something is strange about him. They say that Rodolpho is “just humorous,” though they seem to be implying something more, as they laugh about Rodolpho. Mike and Louis leave, just as Rodolpho and Catherine enter.

Eddie asks where Catherine and Rodolpho have been, wanting to make sure they haven’t gone to Times Square. Catherine says that Rodolpho has been telling her about Italy, where there are fountains in every town and orange and lemon trees. Eddie tells Rodolpho that he wants to talk to Catherine alone. Rodolpho leaves, and Eddie says that he never sees Catherine anymore. He says she used to always be there when he got home, but now she is “a big girl,” and he doesn’t know how to talk to her.

Eddie asks Catherine if she likes Rodolpho. She says she does, and he warns her that Rodolpho doesn’t respect her, and hasn’t asked his permission to “run around” with her. Catherine insists that Rodolpho respects both her and Eddie. Eddie says that Rodolpho is trying to use Catherine to become an American citizen through marriage. He says that he is suspicious because Rodolpho hasn’t sent his money back to Italy, but has used it to buy “snappy new” clothes.

Catherine is upset, and insists that Rodolpho loves her. She runs into the apartment and Eddie follows her. Inside, Beatrice angrily tells Eddie to leave Catherine alone. Eddie walks outside, and Beatrice talks to Catherine. She tells Catherine that she is no longer a baby, and asks what she wants to do. Catherine says she wants to get married but is worried because Eddie is so against it. Beatrice tells her that no man would be good enough for Catherine in Eddie’s eyes.

Eddie is uncomfortable with Rodolpho, but perhaps more generally with the idea of Catherine leaving him for another man. He doesn’t accept, as Beatrice does, that Catherine is an independent, mature person. Beatrice’s question to Eddie potentially raises questions about his sexual desires.



Mike and Louis represent the backdrop of the neighborhood against which the play’s family drama takes place. Eddie worries about his and Rodolpho’s reputation among his neighbors. Given Eddie’s earlier concerns about Rodolpho’s appearance, one can guess that Mike and Louis are hinting at Rodolpho’s questionable sexuality.



While Rodolpho has abandoned Italy for the opportunities of America, Catherine is fascinated and intrigued by Italy, partially because she is oppressed and stifled by her own home. Eddie is upset that Catherine is growing more independent, and is also confused by his own complicated feelings toward her now that she is “a big girl.”



Eddie masks his attempt to sabotage Catherine’s relationship with Rodolpho as fatherly concern, when he simply wants her under his own watch and control. Marriage would potentially offer Rodolpho a way to solidify his immigration and truly become an American.



Beatrice stands up for Catherine, as Catherine is still not independent enough to stand up for herself. Beatrice suggests that Eddie’s problem is not with Rodolpho but with Catherine seeing any man, but does not specify whether this is out of paternal concern or romantic jealousy.



Beatrice tells Catherine, “you gotta be your own self more,” and encourages her to make her own decisions and not let Eddie order her around. Beatrice tells Catherine to stop acting like a little girl around Eddie, “talkin’ to him when he’s shavin’ in his underwear,” and throwing herself at him when he comes home, “like when you was twelve years old.”

Ironically, if Catherine were to follow Beatrice’s advice in being more her “own self,” she would just be allowing someone else to dictate her behavior. Regardless, Catherine is caught on the threshold of adulthood; she is in the midst of her own process of “immigration” from childhood to maturity.



Beatrice tells Catherine that she needs to act differently and tell Eddie not to order her around, because if Beatrice tells him this, he will only think she is jealous of Catherine. Catherine is astonished and asks if Eddie said Beatrice was jealous of her. Beatrice says no, and that she isn’t jealous. Beatrice tells Catherine that she is a woman now, and Catherine promises to behave more like an adult.

The idea that Beatrice might be jealous of Catherine suggests that Eddie has a taboo desire for Catherine. Note that Beatrice’s advice that Catherine be more independent is also a bit self-serving, as it would get Catherine out of the house and separate her from Eddie.



Alfieri comes on stage and tells the audience that around this time, Eddie first came to him. He says that when Eddie came to his office, he looked passionate and upset. Alfieri goes to his office, where Eddie is sitting. He asks Eddie what he wants him to do, since there is nothing illegal about Catherine falling in love with Rodolpho.

Eddie feels that the way Rodolpho has courted Catherine is simply not right, and that he should therefore have some recourse in the law. But Alfieri is bound by the specificities of the law, which don’t address every instance of right and wrong.



Eddie says that Rodolpho is only interested in Catherine in order to become an American citizen, but Alfieri says there is no proof of this. Eddie says that Rodolpho isn’t saving his money but is spending it on all sorts of things, which is very suspicious because most illegal immigrants are only in New York to work and save up money to send back home.

Eddie is suspicious about nearly all aspects of Rodolpho, and doubts that he has any intention of ever returning to Italy, but again nothing in Rodolpho’s behavior or spending habits is illegal.



Eddie then tells Alfieri that Rodolpho “ain’t right.” Alfieri tries to get Eddie to be more specific, and Eddie says that Rodolpho has bright blond hair and is skinny and weak. He describes how Rodolpho sings and hits very high notes with an almost womanly voice. He says that recently Catherine had a dress that was too small for her, and Rodolpho took it apart and sewed it up into a new dress for her.

Eddie hints that Rodolpho may be homosexual, an accusation he never explicitly specifies. But Eddie himself again seems curiously preoccupied with Rodolpho’s sexuality. As with Catherine, there may be more to Eddie’s feelings about Rodolpho than he realizes.



Eddie says that people on the docks call Rodolpho “**Paper Doll**” and “Blondie,” and laugh at him. Alfieri again tells Eddie that there is no legal action he can take. Eddie reiterates that Rodolpho “ain’t right,” but Alfieri says the only legal matter here is the fact that Rodolpho is an illegal immigrant. Eddie says he’d never report Rodolpho to the Immigration Bureau.

The title of the song suggests fragility and femininity. Eddie is worried that Rodolpho’s reputation among the dock workers may affect his own reputation. Alfieri reminds him, though, that none of Eddie’s suspicions point to anything illegal. Eddie still has too much respect for his own honor and his familial duty to turn Rodolpho in.



Alfieri tells Eddie that sometimes there's simply too much love in a man's life and "it goes where it musn't." He says that sometimes a man works so hard to bring up a child that "he never realizes it, but through the years—there is too much love for the daughter, there is too much love for the niece." Eddie doesn't quite get Alfieri's point, and Alfieri tells him that children have to grow up and advises him to let Catherine go.

Alfieri tries to get Eddie to realize that his feelings for Catherine are problematic, that he has mixed up fatherly affection with romantic desire and cares too much for Catherine. When Eddie doesn't take this hint, Alfieri encourages him to recognize Catherine's independence and maturity as a young woman.



Eddie gets up to go, and talks about how hard he has worked, going anywhere he could find jobs, just to support Catherine and raise her. He angrily talks about how he has taken Rodolpho in and given him shelter, and now he "puts his dirty filthy hands on her like a goddam thief!" He shouts that Rodolpho is stealing from him. Alfieri tells Eddie that Catherine wants to get married, and says she can't marry Eddie. Eddie is shocked and asks what Alfieri is talking about. Alfieri tells Eddie to stop worrying about Catherine and Rodolpho.

Eddie sees Rodolpho's taking Catherine as a kind of assault on his honor, after he has worked so hard to support and raise Catherine. His calling Rodolpho a thief suggests that he sees Catherine as an object that he possesses and has ownership of. Alfieri once again hints at the extent of Eddie's real desire for Catherine, which Eddie is still unaware of and denies.



Eddie leaves, and Alfieri tells the audience that he knew then what would happen, but was powerless to stop it. Back at Eddie's apartment, Catherine tells Beatrice about how Rodolpho and Marco once went to Africa on a fishing boat. Marco and Rodolpho talk about working on fishing boats in the ocean. Catherine is fascinated by the idea of traveling all over on a boat, and talks about the orange and lemon trees Rodolpho says are in Italy.

Through the character of Alfieri, Miller displays how the law is often powerless to right every wrong or prevent every tragedy, because it doesn't always line up perfectly with justice. Having been somewhat oppressed by Eddie and kept within her home, Catherine is fascinated by the idea of travelling to exotic places.



Marco talks about how much money he has been able to save and send back to his wife in Italy. Eddie jokes that there must be "plenty surprises sometimes" when people return home to Italy and find more children there than when they left. Marco says, "the women wait, Eddie," and Rodolpho says it's "more strict" in Italy and "not so free" as it is in America. Getting upset, Eddie says it "ain't so free here either," and says one wouldn't "drag off some girl without permission" in America.

Marco and Rodolpho show two different examples of the complex immigrant experience: Marco is completely dedicated to working and maximizing his economic chances in the U.S. Eddie implies that Rodolpho's going out with Catherine is an act of disrespect toward him and thinks that he has the right to dictate who Catherine sees.



Rodolpho assures Eddie that he has respect for Catherine and asks if he has done anything wrong. Eddie says that Rodolpho has come home late with Catherine, and Marco tells Rodolpho to get home early from now on. Eddie says that Rodolpho shouldn't go out so much, as he risks getting caught, and that if he came to "make a livin'" for his family, he should spend his time working.

Marco is wary of offending Eddie in his own home, and respectful of Eddie as a family member who has helped him, and thus tells Rodolpho to listen to Eddie. Eddie acts as if he is simply concerned about Rodolpho getting caught, when he clearly has ulterior motives in not wanting him to go out with Catherine.



Catherine puts on a record, playing the song "**Paper Doll**," and asks Rodolpho if he wants to dance. Rodolpho and Catherine dance, and Beatrice asks Marco about the fishing boats he worked on. Marco talks about the kitchen on the boat, and says that Rodolpho was a very good cook. Eddie sarcastically says, "It's wonderful. He sings, he cooks, he could make dresses."

The song is something shared between Catherine and Rodolpho, and her dancing to it in front of Eddie is a deliberate act of defiance, the first example of her standing up to him, if subtly. Eddie implicitly questions Rodolpho's sexuality, which he is again concerned with.



Eddie says that the docks aren't the place for Rodolpho to be working, and says he would work somewhere else if he could make dresses, like a dress store. Eddie asks Marco if he wants to go see a boxing fight, and then asks Rodolpho if he has ever boxed. He offers to teach him, and Rodolpho and Eddie stand up to practice boxing. He starts to show Rodolpho some boxing moves, and then asks Rodolpho to try to hit him.

Rodolpho grazes Eddie's jaw, and Eddie tells him to try to block his punch now. Eddie lands a blow on Rodolpho, and Marco stands up in protest, but Rodolpho says he's fine. Eddie says he'll teach Rodolpho again sometime. Catherine and Rodolpho dance again to "Paper Doll."

Marco places a chair in front of Eddie and asks if he can lift it with one hand, from one of the chair's legs, while kneeling on the ground. Eddie can't. Marco gets on the ground and lifts the chair with one hand. He stands up so that he is holding the chair above his head, face to face with Eddie. He gives Eddie a look of warning that then turns into "a smile of triumph."

ACT 2

Alfieri says that it is now the 23rd of December. Marco and Eddie are working, and Catherine and Rodolpho are alone at the apartment. Catherine asks Rodolpho what he would think about living with her in Italy, instead of in America, since it is so beautiful there. Rodolpho says it would be crazy to go back to Italy with no money or job. He says there are no jobs in Italy.

Catherine tells Rodolpho she doesn't want to stay here because she is afraid of Eddie. Rodolpho says they will move out once he is a citizen. Catherine asks if he would still want her if they had to live in Italy. He says he wouldn't, and says he wants her to be his wife in America.

Starting to get mad, Rodolpho says he is not desperate enough to "carry on my back to the rest of my life a woman I didn't love just to be an American." He says that America is not really that much better than Italy, that the only thing they have that Italy doesn't is work. Rodolpho asks why Catherine fears Eddie, and Catherine says that he was always kind to her, and she doesn't want to upset him. She wants him to be happy with her decision to marry.

Eddie again questions Rodolpho's masculinity and, implicitly, his sexuality. Feeling as though his place of dominance in his own home is being challenged, he uses the excuse of teaching boxing as a way of establishing his honor and power over Rodolpho.



The tensions between Eddie and Rodolpho play out in their sparring, as Eddie tries to reestablish his honor, and Marco nearly steps in to defend Rodolpho's. Catherine again subtly defies Eddie in dancing to "Paper Doll."



Marco now displays his own strength and sense of honor in lifting the chair. Marco's "smile of triumph" suggests that he is beginning to see Eddie as something of a bully, and that he sees himself as having successfully challenged Eddie's power in his own home. Yet, still, the rebellion here is a quiet one, still within the family.



Catherine wants to make sure that Rodolpho really loves her, and doesn't simply want to marry into American citizenship. Catherine is fascinated by a romanticized view of Italy, whereas Rodolpho has a more practical awareness of the lack of jobs there, the reason for his illegal immigration to the U.S.A.



Eddie's fatherly concern and affection is so extreme that Catherine actually fears him. Leaving his apartment is like a kind of immigration for her, and she imagines even leaving for Italy with Rodolpho, getting far away from Eddie.



Rodolpho speaks out against the idea that America is necessarily better than his homeland. He values the opportunities for work in the U.S., but has no illusions about his new country as some kind of utopia. Catherine has complicated feelings toward Eddie, who she loves and appreciates as a father-figure, but also fears.



Catherine tells Rodolpho that she's lived with Eddie her whole life, and asks, "You think its so easy to turn around and say to a man he's nothin' to you no more?" She talks about how well she knows Eddie, and says she doesn't want to "make a stranger out of him." Rodolpho asks if it would be right for him to hold a little bird in his hands and not let her fly just because he loves her so much. He tells Catherine that she must leave Eddie.

Not only is Catherine breaking free from Eddie, but she also stands up to Rodolpho, asserting that she has good reason to be fond of Eddie. Rodolpho's image of the bird shows how constricting and oppressive Eddie's "love" is. But in practically commanding Catherine to leave Eddie, he is also ordering her around.



Catherine starts to cry and embraces Rodolpho. She tells him, "I don't know anything, teach me, Rodolpho, hold me." Rodolpho takes her into a bedroom. Eddie enters the apartment, drunk. He calls for Beatrice, and Catherine enters the room from a bedroom. Rodolpho appears in the bedroom doorway and says that Beatrice is out shopping for Christmas presents. Eddie is shocked to see that Rodolpho and Catherine have been in the bedroom together, and tells Rodolpho to pack up and leave.

In leaving Eddie for Rodolpho, Catherine risks trading one authority figure for another, as she asks Rodolpho to teach her. Eddie is offended because he feels that Rodolpho is taking Catherine from him, because he may desire Catherine himself, and because he feels that Rodolpho is disrespecting him in his own household.



Catherine tells Eddie that she has to leave, and Eddie says that she will stay, and that Rodolpho is the one who should leave. Catherine says she can't stay in Eddie's apartment, but promises she'll see him around the neighborhood. Eddie tells her, "You ain't goin' nowheres," and she responds that she's "not gonna be a baby any more." Suddenly, Eddie grabs Catherine and kisses her.

Catherine is oppressed and under Eddie's control in her own home, and thus has to "immigrate" in a sense, and leave her childhood home behind. Eddie tries to maintain his control over Catherine in a physical manner, and his repressed desire for her comes to the surface in his shocking kiss.



Rodolpho is shocked and tells Eddie to stop. He says that Catherine will be his wife, and then lunges at Eddie. Eddie restrains Rodolpho and then suddenly kisses him. Catherine attacks Eddie until he lets Rodolpho go. Eddie tells Rodolpho to get out of his apartment, without Catherine. Catherine says she is going to go with Rodolpho, and Eddie tells her not to.

Rodolpho stands up for Catherine, but is also claiming her as his own. Eddie's kissing Rodolpho has unclear intentions. He could be trying to dishonor Rodolpho or imply that Rodolpho wanted such a kiss, but may also be motivated by his own half-repressed desire for Rodolpho.



Alfieri comes on stage and says that he next saw Eddie on the 27th. Eddie came into his office and Alfieri says his eyes "were like tunnels." He says he kept wanting to call the police, "but nothing had happened." In Alfieri's office, Eddie says that his wife is planning to rent a room in an apartment above them for Marco and Rodolpho. Alfieri tells Eddie that he hasn't proven anything about Rodolpho, but Eddie insists that "he ain't right." He says that if Rodolpho wanted to, he could have broken free of his kiss.

Again, Alfieri is powerless to take action, because the law has no answer for Eddie's problems, and no laws have been violated. Eddie continues to be fixated on Rodolpho's sexuality, and claims that his kiss proves Rodolpho's homosexuality, when it may actually suggest that he himself has some homoerotic desires.



Eddie says that Rodolpho "didn't give me the right kind of fight," and tells Alfieri that he kissed Rodolpho so Catherine would see what Rodolpho really is. Eddie asks what he can do about Catherine and Rodolpho's engagement, and Alfieri says that there is nothing he can do "morally and legally," as Catherine is "a free agent."

Eddie again insists that he kissed Rodolpho to prove Rodolpho's homosexuality, though this is not entirely convincing. Alfieri is again caught in a position of powerlessness as an agent of the law. He emphasizes that Catherine is a free, independent person.



Alfieri tells Eddie that someone was going to marry Catherine eventually, and says he should let her go. Eddie leaves and goes to a public phone. He calls the Immigration Bureau and reports two illegal immigrants living in his apartment. He goes to his apartment and asks Beatrice where Marco and Rodolpho are. They have already moved into an apartment upstairs.

Alfieri tries one last time to convince Eddie that he should let Catherine be her own person, to no avail. Eddie can't allow such a thing, and in helping to carry out the law to report illegal immigrants, he is betraying his own relatives, something he earlier wouldn't even consider doing, as it was so dishonorable.



Eddie says he doesn't want Catherine to move in with Rodolpho and Beatrice gets upset. Eddie says, "this is my house here not their house." He says he wants respect and tells Beatrice he doesn't like how she talks to him. Beatrice asks why he kissed Rodolpho, and he says Rodolpho "ain't right." He demands Beatrice's respect, and then says he doesn't want anymore conversations about "what I feel like doin' in the bed and what I don't feel like doin'."

Eddie wants Catherine to stay in his apartment both because he has a controlling love for her and because he feels consistently disrespected by Catherine and Beatrice disregarding his wishes. Eddie's own sexuality is now in question, even as he continues to obsess over questioning Rodolpho's.



Eddie says that a wife should believe her husband, and insists that Rodolpho "ain't right." He says that Catherine is a baby and doesn't know what she's doing with Rodolpho. Beatrice replies that Eddie "kept her a baby." She tells Eddie that Rodolpho and Catherine are going to get married in a week. She advises him to support Catherine and wish her good luck. She asks Eddie to tell Catherine that he'll go to the wedding.

Eddie demands respect from Beatrice, but has an understanding of respect only as obedience. He rather implausibly insists on Catherine's immaturity, and Beatrice accuses him of trying to keep her "a baby." His strange feelings for Catherine involve both a desire to protect her as a child and to be with her as a woman.



Eddie starts to cry, and Catherine enters. Beatrice encourages Catherine to ask Eddie a question. Catherine tells him that she is going to be married in a week, on Saturday, in case he wants to attend. Eddie tells her he "only wanted the best" for her. Desperate, Eddie tells Catherine that she can go out at night if she wants to now, and maybe meet another man, someone other than Rodolpho. Catherine says she is settled on Rodolpho.

Catherine has asserted her independence from Eddie, but still has some respect for him and his opinion, as shown by her wanting him to come to her wedding. Eddie's dislike of Rodolpho may have something to do with his own problematic desire for or infatuation with him.



Eddie learns from Beatrice that two other illegal Italian immigrants are staying upstairs in the same apartment as Rodolpho and Marco. Eddie worries that these two other immigrants might get caught, and lead the authorities to Marco and Rodolpho. Eddie tells Catherine to move Rodolpho and Marco to a different apartment building. Two Immigration Bureau officers knock on the door, and Eddie sends Catherine to go up the fire escape to go and try to get Rodolpho and Marco to escape.

Eddie has betrayed Rodolpho to the Immigration Bureau, but still values the sense of justice held by his community over the law, and worries about unintentionally getting other illegal immigrants caught. He now regrets his rash, dishonorable decision in calling the Bureau.



The immigration officers come in and look around. Eddie tells them, “we got nobody here.” The immigration officers go to search the other apartments in the building. Beatrice is terrified and asks Eddie, “My God, what did you do?” The immigration officers come down the stairs of the building with Marco, Rodolpho, and two other immigrants. Catherine tries to say that Rodolpho is American and was born in Philadelphia.

Catherine and Beatrice plead with the officers, but they carry the immigrants away. Marco breaks free, runs up to Eddie, and spits in his face. Eddie lunges at Marco, but the officers break them up. Eddie screams that he’ll kill Marco. The officers take the immigrants outside. A butcher named Lipari, whose apartment Marco and Rodolpho had moved into, sees the other two immigrants, his family members. He and his wife kiss them goodbye.

As the officers take the four immigrants away, Marco points at Eddie and says, “That one! I accuse that one!” Eddie tells Lipari that Marco is crazy, but Lipari walks away, not believing him. Eddie tries to talk to Mike and Louis, who ignore him and walk away. Eddie shouts that he’ll kill Marco if he doesn’t take back his accusation.

Later, at a prison, Alfieri and Catherine visit Marco and Rodolpho. Alfieri says that Marco can be bailed out until his immigration hearing, but only if Marco promises not to seek revenge on Eddie. Marco says that in Italy Eddie would be dead by now for what he did. Catherine and Rodolpho try to persuade Marco not to try to harm Eddie.

Marco says he cannot promise not to kill Eddie, as this would be dishonorable. Alfieri says that as long as Eddie obeys the law, “he lives,” and tells Marco, “To promise not to kill is not dishonorable.” Marco counters that “all the law is not in a book,” and emphasizes how Eddie has dishonored and wronged him. Alfieri says Eddie has broken no law, and tells Marco that “only God makes justice.” Marco finally promises not to harm Eddie.

Eddie prioritizes his neighborhood's idea of justice over the law in lying to the officers, and acts surprised to see them, though Beatrice has guessed his dishonorable act of betrayal. Marco and Rodolpho now face the prospect of being forced to return to the home they love, but left behind.



Marco realizes what Eddie must have done, and though he earlier had been careful to respectful now in response to Eddie's betrayal offers the deepest act of disrespect. Dishonored in front of the entire neighborhood, Eddie becomes furious. While the immigration officers are behaving legally in taking away the immigrants, they are not necessarily behaving justly, as they forcefully separate Lipari from his relatives.



Marco's public accusation attacks Eddie's reputation among his neighbors, and his neighbors (Lipari, Mike, and Louis) quickly shun him for turning his back on his family and his community. Eddie is willing to kill over his reputation and honor, even though he actually did what he is being accused of doing.



Alfieri, Catherine, and Rodolpho try to persuade Marco to defer his sense of personal justice to the law. Eddie has betrayed his family, but has technically done nothing illegal, showing again the gap between justice and law.



For Marco, to behave according to the law would violate his own sense of justice and honor, which demands that he get revenge on Eddie. There is a distinction being made here, perhaps, between the United States and the Old World of Italy. In the United States, the law rules. In Italy, honor and retributive justice do. While Alfieri concedes that the law does not cover all instances of right and wrong, he tries to calm Marco by appealing to God as the only source of real justice.



The play then jumps to the day of Catherine's wedding. At Eddie's apartment, Beatrice is getting ready for the wedding and tries to convince Eddie to attend. Eddie tells Beatrice he wants her respect as his wife. Eddie insists that unless Marco apologizes to him, nobody from his home is going to the wedding. Catherine suddenly bursts out and shouts at him, "Who the hell do you think you are?" She says that Eddie has no right to dictate what she or Beatrice does.

Catherine calls Eddie a rat and says he belongs in the sewer. Beatrice tells Catherine to stop saying this, and shows some sympathy for Eddie. Rodolpho comes in, and tells Eddie that Marco is coming. Beatrice tries to get Eddie to leave the apartment with her, but Eddie says that it is his home and he won't leave it. Rodolpho apologizes to Eddie for disrespecting him in not asking his permission to see Catherine, but says that Eddie has also insulted him.

Rodolpho tries to tell Eddie that they can still be "comrades," and Eddie says he wants Marco to apologize to him in front of the whole neighborhood. Referring to his reputation, he says, "I want my name!" Beatrice tries to reason with Eddie, and asks what if an apology from Marco is what he really wants. She says that Eddie wants something else, and then tells him, "you can never have her!" Catherine and Eddie are both shocked at this.

Beatrice says she is just telling the truth, as Marco arrives. Eddie goes outside to meet him. Rodolpho begs Marco not to kill Eddie, and Beatrice tells Eddie to get back in the house. Eddie asks if Marco has come to apologize for humiliating him, after he let Marco stay in his own home. He tells Marco to "gimme my name." A crowd of neighbors has now congregated to see what is going on.

Eddie approaches Marco and calls him a liar. Marco hits Eddie and calls him an animal. Eddie falls over, and Marco is about to stomp on him when Eddie pulls out a knife. He again calls Marco a liar and lunges at him. Marco grabs his arm and turns the knife on Eddie, stabbing him. Eddie falls over, and Catherine exclaims that she never meant to hurt him.

Beatrice is still trying to get Eddie to attend the wedding, but Catherine appears to have grown completely independent and does not care about Eddie's opinion. She now stands up for herself and Beatrice, whereas Beatrice earlier had to stand up for Catherine. Eddie feels that both characters' independence is a form of disrespect to him.



Catherine has changed so much that it is now Beatrice who must restrain Catherine's anger at Eddie, when she formerly had to encourage Catherine to defy his authority. Rodolpho apologizes, but still maintains that Eddie, so concerned with his own honor, has disrespected him.



Eddie does not want Rodolpho's apology, and only wants Marco to reestablish his reputation in the neighborhood with a public apology. Beatrice finally explicitly says what she has long suspected—that Eddie secretly wants Catherine for himself, romantically. Eddie is not even aware of this desire himself, and is as shocked as Catherine to hear the idea.



Marco and Eddie now must face each other over their respective reputations and senses of honor. It is important that they meet publically, in front of the close-knit neighborhood community, whose opinion crucially determines the reputation of each man.



Desperate to salvage his reputation, Eddie calls Marco a liar when it is ironically he who is the real liar. Marco ends up committing murder in order to carry out his own idea of justice. Eddie's own knife being turned against him is in some ways a metaphor for his fall in the play, as it is he himself who has caused his own fall. Despite her recent outburst, Catherine still has love and concern for Eddie.



Eddie calls out for Beatrice, and Beatrice and Catherine hold Eddie up. He dies in Beatrice's arms. Alfieri comes forward and addresses the audience. He says that even though Eddie behaved wrongly, he still thinks of Eddie as a pure person—"not purely good, but himself purely." He says that for this he will always love Eddie, and mourn him, while regarding him "with a certain . . . alarm."

Eddie behaved wrongly, and yet he is the one who has obeyed the law. Beatrice and Catherine show love for Eddie in his dying moments, though it is worth noting that Eddie seemed to care more about respect than love. This, along with Alfieri's closing speech, grants Eddie a measure of a positive reputation both among the neighborhood and among the audience of the play.





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