
Conflict

The doctors, the hospital, cost me everything I had . . . And everything I didn't have . . . And finally it cost me everything I was *going* to have . . . I was broke and I went into debt . . . Into hock . . . Only I

didn't have anything left to hock . . . So I went to a man . . . A Shylock, they call him . . . A loan shark . . . A moneylender . . . I couldn't go to a bank because they don't let you put up heartbreak and pain as collateral . . . You know what collateral is, Arty? . . . If you want to borrow ten dollars, you have to give them something to hold that's worth *eleven* dollars . . . That's for their interest . . . A Shylock doesn't need collateral . . . His collateral is your desperation . . . So he gives you his money . . . And he's got a clock. And when you get your money, the clock starts . . . And what it keeps time of is your promise . . . If you keep your promise, he turns off the clock . . . and if not, it keeps ticking . . . and after a while, your heart starts ticking louder than his clock . . . This man becomes a cloud that darkens your life wherever you go . . . Understand something. This man kept your mother alive . . . It kept that tree outside her window . . . It was his painkillers that made her last days bearable . . . And for that I'm grateful . . . Jay! Remember what I taught you about taking things from people?

JAY (*He nods*) Never take because you'll always be obligated.

EDDIE So you never take for yourself . . . But for someone you love, there comes a time when you have no choice . . . There's a man in New York I owe a lot of money to . . . Nine thousand dollars . . . I don't have nine thousand dollars . . . I could work and save four more years and I won't have nine thousand dollars . . . He wants his money this year. To his credit, I'll say one thing. He sent flowers to the funeral. No extra charge on my bill . . .

JAY Pop—

EDDIE Let me finish . . . There is no way I can pay this man back . . . So what'll he do? Kill me? . . . Maybe . . . If he kills me, he not only loses his money, it'll probably cost him again for the flowers for *my* funeral . . . Don't look worried. I'm not going to die . . . I wouldn't tell you all this if there wasn't a happy ending . . . I needed a miracle . . . And the miracle happened . . . This country went to war . . . A war between us and the Japanese and the Germans . . . And if my mother didn't come to this country thirty-five years ago, I could have been fighting for the other side . . . Except I don't think they're putting guns in the hands of Jews over there . . . And if I didn't marry your mother and have two children to support, I'd be fighting for this side . . . I'm too old. So neither side needs me and neither side wants me . . . Except the man with the ticking clock . . . Let me tell you something. I love this country. Because they took in the Jews. They took in the Irish, the Italians, and everyone else . . . Remember this. There's a lot of Germans in this country fighting for America, but there are no Americans over there fighting for Germany . . . I hate this war, and God forgive me for saying this, but it's going to save my life . . . There are jobs I can get now that I could never get before . . . And I got a job . . . I'm working for a company that sells scrap iron . . . I thought you threw scrap iron away. Now they're building ships with it . . . Without even the slightest idea of what I'm doing, I can make that nine thousand dollars in less than a year . . .

JAY That's great, Pop.

EDDIE Don't say it till I finish . . . The factories that I would sell to are in the South . . . Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, even New Mexico. Places that I never thought I'd see in my lifetime . . . I'd be gone about ten months . . . Living in trains, buses, hotels, any place I can find a room . . . We'd be free and clear and back together again in less than a year . . . Okay? . . . So now comes the question, where do you two live while I'm gone?

(There is a deafening silence as JAY and ARTY turn and look at each other)

ARTY *(Wiping his brow)* . . . God, it's so hot in here.

JAY Please, Pop, don't make us live here . . . That's what you're thinking, isn't it?

EDDIE I have no choice, Jay. I don't know where else to turn.

JAY *(To EDDIE)* Why can't we stay where we are?

EDDIE I gave the apartment up. I told the landlady yesterday.

ARTY *(Astonished)* You gave it up?

EDDIE She raised the rent. *Everybody's* looking to make money out of this war. And the truth is, by the end of the year, it'll be eleven thousand. While I'm away, the clock doesn't stop ticking.

JAY Grandma wouldn't be happy with us. We're slobs. We leave everything on the floor. Arty's always breaking things.

ARTY *(To EDDIE)* Remember when I broke the good water pitcher? And the ink stains on the sofa. All mine! . . . I'm dangerous, Pop.

EDDIE Listen to me, both of you. It took me an hour and a half to convince her. It's not that she doesn't like you. But she's old. She's set in her ways. And she's worried about people being around Bella.

ARTY Me too.

EDDIE She hasn't even said positively yet. She's thinking about it. She'll come out. She'll talk to you. She'll see how it goes. It's up to us to convince her that you two won't be any trouble . . . That's why I want you both looking so neat. Don't you see how important this is?

JAY And what if she *did* take us in? Then you'd be obligated, Pop. Don't you think you have enough obligations now?

EDDIE I'm not asking for myself. I'm asking for my boys. For my boys, I'll be obligated . . . There's nothing to discuss anymore . . . It's up to Grandma now . . . And it's up to you. *(He crosses to GRANDMA'S bedroom door)* I'll see if she's ready. *(He turns back to them)* If she says no, I can't take this job. I can't pay back the man I gave my promise to . . . You're good kids, both of you. Just show Grandma what a terrific present she's getting to have you boys live with her . . . Fix your tie, Jay.

Straighten your collar, Arty . . . Stand straight, both of you . . . *(They stand straight. He nods)* That's my boys.

(He goes into GRANDMA's room. The boys look at each other)

JAY Oh, my God. What if Grandma says "Yes"?