

BEST FRIENDS

by

Donald E. Baker

60 Minutes

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CHARACTERS (2M)

EDDIE and DANNY

Two blue-collar guys, age 25 in Act I; age 35 in Act II.

SETTING

Act I: The front seat of Danny's car/pickup truck, implied by two chairs (or a car seat) and possibly a steering wheel.

Act II: The rathskeller of a local bar, implied by two chairs and a table.

TIME

Act I: 1975, early fall, night.

Act II: 1985, early fall, afternoon.

SYNOPSIS

Eddie and Danny's lifelong relationship comes apart under the stress of deception, sexual fear, and self-loathing. Can the threat of AIDS reunite them?

The two are a couple of blue-collar guys. As teenagers they engaged in a little sexual exploration with each other. After graduation they stayed in their small hometown, married their high school sweethearts, and had kids.

In Act I (1975), Eddie questions his sexuality and is overcome with religious guilt after an encounter in a public restroom. When he turns to his best friend Danny for help, their lifelong relationship is destroyed when its toxic nature is revealed.

Act II takes place ten years later (1985). Danny's wife has divorced him after finding him *in flagrante* with a man. Eddie, though still married, has arranged a night with a gay friend in an attempt to resolve his sexual conflicts once and for all. Now both men discover they may have been infected with HIV/AIDS. Are they capable of confronting this devastating reality together?

WARNING

This play uses common four-letter words when referring to sexual practices.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

The two characters are rural small-town guys and would most probably be white. However, there is no reason the actors have to be.

Towns mentioned in the script are places in Indiana. Productions elsewhere may change the town names to bring the play closer to home.

ACT I

SETTING: 1975. The front seat of DANNY's car, implied by two chairs facing the audience and possibly a steering wheel.

AT RISE: EDDIE and DANNY enter. They are both 25 years old. They wear bowling shirts and carry bowling bags. DANNY opens the passenger side door for EDDIE, who has had a few too many beers.

DANNY

Watch your head there.

EDDIE flops into the seat. He looks like he could be ill.

EDDIE

I'm okay

DANNY stows the bowling bags, then gets into the driver's side.

DANNY

You sure? Julie'll kill me if she gets in the car tomorrow and it smells like puke. Roll your window down. Get some fresh air in here.

Eddie does so while Danny pantomimes starting the vehicle and driving.

EDDIE

Why'd you and the other guys keep buyin' pitchers of beer and fillin' my glass up? I lost track of how many I had.

DANNY

It was a celebration! Bobby of all people bowled three hundred. If any of us was gonna put up a perfect game/

EDDIE

Robert.

DANNY

What?

EDDIE

When he came back to town and opened up his law practice he asked us to start callin' him Robert. You're the only one still calls him "Bobby."

DANNY

I been callin' him Bobby since first grade. Don't see any reason to stop now just 'cause he put up a fancy sign sayin' "Robert Horatio Nelson the *Third*, Esquire, Attorney-at Law."

EDDIE

You only do it to piss him off.

DANNY

Just 'cause he's a friend of mine don't mean I hafta put up with him bein' a pompous little shit. And if anybody was pourin' beer into your glass it was you.

EDDIE

I don't think so. You know I can't handle it. It'd be just like you to get me drunk just to see what'd happen.

DANNY

Not when I'm drivin' Julie's car. What's goin' on? You been touchy and preoccupied all night.

EDDIE

I got a lot on my mind lately.

DANNY

Everythin' okay at home? Michele feelin' alright?

EDDIE

This pregnancy's on the same schedule the other two were. Which means she's got to where she looks in the mirror and hates what's happenin' to her body and starts rantin' that it's all my fault.

DANNY

Well. You're the father, ain't you?

EDDIE

What's that supposed to mean?

DANNY

Back off, man. You are in a mood.

EDDIE (urgently)

You better stop the car.

DANNY

Jeez! Don't do it in here.

Danny pulls the vehicle over and stops. Eddie gets out as quickly as he can and throws up. Danny gets out and comes around.

DANNY

Just stand outside here and take deep breaths 'til you're certain it ain't gonna happen again. ... Try to take your mind off it. ... You was tellin' me 'bout Michele.

EDDIE

When she gets this way she doesn't want me to touch her. Can't even be in the same bed with her. I'll be sleepin' in the guest room 'til the baby comes.

DANNY

Julie's just the opposite. When she gets pregnant she craves pickles. Especially mine.

EDDIE

You're a lucky man.

DANNY

So for a coupla months you just hafta take matters into your own hands.

EDDIE (sarcastic)

I'm all out of Juergens lotion. You got some I can borrow? You keep a bottle hid behind your furnace like you did back in your parents' basement?

DANNY

How do you/

EDDIE

Don't try to play innocent with me. You showed me that hidey-hole when we were fifteen and I was supposed to be helping you with your algebra homework.

DANNY

Okay, so we use to do a little horsin' 'round.

EDDIE

Which always ended up with you bringin' out the lotion.

DANNY

After I found out my cock was good for somethin' b'sides peein', I couldn't keep my hands off it. The Juergens kept it from getting' all red and sore from too much use and 'buse. But what brought that up? That what your mind does when you're feelin' a little deprived? Starts diggin' up ancient history?

EDDIE

They say you never forget your first sexual experience.

DANNY

A coupla teenagers sharin' a hand job was not a "sexual experience."

EDDIE

'Til Michele came along it was all I had to go by.

DANNY

Ever'body experiments at that age. It's not like we was the only ones.

EDDIE

What're you talkin' about?

DANNY

Some of us'd have circle jerk parties. Billy and Joey. Jerry of course.

(Eddie reacts to Jerry's name. Danny doesn't notice and continues.)

One or two of the other guys. Just horny teenagers lettin' off a little steam. It was fun. I 'member we had contests. Who could cum the fastest. Who could shoot the farthest. Jerry could make it fly halfway 'cross the room. And you'll never guess who else was there one night. Robert

Horatio Nelson the *Turd*. 'Course he didn't know what he was gettin' into. I had Billy and Joey tell him they was comin' over to play ping-pong or somethin'.

EDDIE

You didn't have a ping-pong table.

DANNY

He didn't know that. When all of us dropped trou, you shoulda seen his face. 'Course bein' the self-righteous church kid he was back then/

EDDIE

I was a church kid, too.

DANNY

Which is what made it such a fun challenge to see what it'd take to get you to yield to temptation. Turns out it didn't take much.

EDDIE

No. To my eternal shame it didn't.

DANNY

Didn't take much for Bobby neither. He started in goin' off 'bout how in the Bible God smited Onan, whoever *he* was, 'cause he spilled his seed on the ground. But when the rest of us all started spillin' our seed only took him 'bout five seconds to whip it out and spill his right 'long with us.

EDDIE

You think we're all here just for your amusement or somethin'?

DANNY

What else're friends for?

EDDIE

You tell all those guys they were your best friends, too?

DANNY

You know me. I'm ever'body's best friend. But you was always my *best* best friend.

EDDIE

You are such a bullshit artist.

DANNY

When the guys come over, the rule always was, look but don't touch. What you and me was doin', that was special.

EDDIE

I don't believe that for a minute. After you managed to pass algebra you barely paid attention to me anymore.

DANNY

Nothin' to do with passin' algebra. I got my driver's license and started datin' Julie. That's the way it works, right? Once you start playin' 'round with girls you can stop playin' 'round with boys. But, c'mon, it was fun while it lasted, wasn't it?

EDDIE

Just 'cause somethin' feels good doesn't mean it feels right.

DANNY

Your teenage hormones was spikin' just like ever'body else's. Don't make it out to be somethin' important. It ain't like it meant anythin'.

EDDIE

(Beat) You ever wonder what it'd feel like to have somebody go down on you?

DANNY

Not since my first date with Julie. Hasn't Michele ever...?

EDDIE

I asked her to once. She didn't like it. But I meant another guy. Like, you and me maybe goin' a step beyond handjob?

DANNY

Best friends or not, givin' each other a blowjob woulda crossed a line. What the fuck's gotten into you?

EDDIE

I was drivin' back from Elmwood coupla weeks ago. You know that little rest area off the highway?

DANNY

The place where the queers hang out? Don't tell me ...

EDDIE

I only stopped 'cause I had to piss real bad. Honest! Guy at the next urinal made eye contact and then reached over and grabbed my dick. I didn't say "what the hell do you think you're doin'!" I didn't shove him away. And when he got down on his knees/

DANNY

No.

EDDIE

I let him.

DANNY

Whoa. ... What'd it feel like?

EDDIE

I'm confessin' to this terrible thing's been tearin' me up inside and *that's* the first question comes outta your mouth? If you must know it was intense. Real intense. I swear my eyes rolled back in my head. And when I came I had to grab the wall to stay upright.

DANNY

Man. Julie's good but she ain't that good. So if it was so great what's your problem?

EDDIE

That *is* the problem. If I'm straight I'm not supposed to let somethin' like that happen. I'm supposed to get the hell outta there.

DANNY

Maybe punch him a time or two on your way out.

EDDIE

What if I got caught? The highway patrol arrests guys in there ever' so often and they put their names in the paper for ever'body to see. Not to mention I coulda got some disease and taken it home to Michele. I coulda lost ever'thin'. Wife, kids, house, job. My whole life woulda been gone.

DANNY

Eddie, you're buildin' this all outta proportion. You didn't get caught did you? Chalk it up to experience and move on.

EDDIE

But I'm carryin' such a loada guilt I dunno if I can handle it. Ever' night I pray for God to forgive me. Just like ever' time you and me jacked each other off I promised God I'd never do it again. Those promises didn't work then and I'm scared they won't work now. I gotta drive past that rest area coupla times a month!

DANNY

So you keep on drivin'. You don't stop.

EDDIE

All my life I thought I was straight. Even down there in your basement I thought I was straight. But what if I've been a queer this whole time and I didn't know it? And if I am what's next? Lettin' some guy stick his dick up my ass?

DANNY

Good God, Eddie, pull yourself together. You're as normal as I am. That one moment of weakness in a roadside john makes you a dumbass but it does not make you a faggot. Look. You said so yourself. You ain't been gettin' any at home lately.

EDDIE

That's no excuse for bein' unfaithful to my wife.

DANNY

You wasn't unfaithful. There wasn't 'nother woman involved so it don't count. You needed to get your rocks off and the opportunity presented itself. *He* went down on *you*, right? You didn't return the favor?

EDDIE

No.

DANNY

So there you are. That's where the line is and you, did, not, cross it. So man up. Get back to your old routine and stop makin' yourself miserable.

EDDIE

(Pause) It was Jerry.

DANNY

Who was?

EDDIE

The guy at the rest stop. It was Jerry. Shoot-it-across-the-room Jerry from your circle jerks. That Jerry.

DANNY

Why the hell didn't you say so? I thought you been with some stranger. Jerry's a good guy. Even if he is a cocksucker.

EDDIE

You knew?

DANNY

Didn't you never connect the dots? Hell, Eddie. All through school Jerry never dated girls. He's the only one of the old gang never got married. He dresses like a hippie and he owns a flower shop. Wake up and smell the roses.

EDDIE

Well you wanna know what Jerry said to me after he showed me just what a good cocksucker he is? He said, "I figured I'd catch you in here sooner or later. If you ever want a repeat performance someplace a little less public, you know where I live." You been tryin' to convince me I'm not queer. But see? I got a second opinion. And apparently Jerry's an expert at knowin' a faggot when he sees one. *(Beat)* I gotta get home. Michele's prob'ly wonderin' where I am. I can walk from here. It's just three or four blocks.

DANNY

You are not gonna try walkin' home in the shape you're in carryin' a sixteen-pound bowlin' ball. Plus, what're you gonna tell Michele if she asks why I didn't drop you off at the door like I always do?

Eddie pauses, then gets back in the vehicle.
Danny gets in, starts it, and pulls out.

EDDIE

You gonna tell anybody?

DANNY

'Course not. I figure a lot of what you was sayin' was just the beer talkin'.

EDDIE

Yeah. The beer I kept drinkin' 'cause you kept pourin.'

DANNY

Best friends keep each other's secrets, remember? Haven't we always?

EDDIE

You told me about the other guys. You ever tell 'em about me? That why Jerry thought/

DANNY

No! No. I wouldn't do that to you. C'mon Eddie. You gotta believe that.

EDDIE

Right this minute I dunno what to believe about anythin'.

Danny pulls over and stops. Offstage illumination implies the porch light of Eddie's house.

DANNY

Looks like Michele left the porch light on for you as usual. You ever drive past Jerry's house? At night I mean.

EDDIE

I guess. Why?

DANNY

Sometimes his porch light's on. Sometimes it ain't.

EDDIE

So?

DANNY

So if it's off he's got a visitor. If it's on he don't. Get it?

EDDIE

How do you know that?

DANNY

One time after Julie and I had one of our fights, I went into his shop to get her some flowers so I could try and make it up to her. That's when he told me 'bout his porch light code. Said I should stop in if I ever needed somebody to help relieve the tension. Same reason I'm tellin' you.

EDDIE

Have you ever? Dropped in on Jerry?

DANNY

I'm just sayin' there's nothin' wrong with knockin' on his door if that's what you need once in a while. Go in, unzip your pants, and five minutes later you're on your way back home. No lines crossed, and it'll be all nice and private. Just between you and him.

EDDIE

And God. Me, Jerry, and God. *(Beat)* You're doin' it again, aren't you? Throwin' temptation in my path just to see what I'll do.

DANNY

You're my friend and I thought you wanted my help.

EDDIE

Friend, hell. You're a bully, Danny. You don't leave bruises anybody can see, but you still hurt people. Lyin' to 'em. Seein' how far you can push 'em. Messin' with their heads. Well right now my head's messed up enough thank you. I'll just hafta see what I can do to get myself straightened out. *(Bitterly)* So to speak. And you know what? I don't think I'll be able to do that and still be one of your "best friends."

DANNY

C'mon, Eddie. You don't mean that.

Eddie gets out of the vehicle and retrieves his bowling bag:

EDDIE

Yeah. I do. And I'm gonna take a break from bowlin', too. You can tell the guys Michele's getting' far enough along she needs me to help take care of the kids. That's true enough.

DANNY

Where'm I gonna find a replacement at this late date?

EDDIE

I'm sure Jerry'd be willin' to fill in, the two of you being such good buddies and all.

DANNY

Well then. I dunno what else to say. Guess I'll see you 'round.

EDDIE

Not if I see you first.

Eddie exits. After a moment the porch light goes out.

END ACT I

ACT II

SETTING: 1985. The downstairs “rathskeller” of a small-town bar implied by a table and two chairs.

AT RISE: EDDIE and DANNY enter. They have come from a funeral and were dressed for the occasion—dark but not necessarily black jackets, slacks, white shirts and ties. Nothing stylish, elegant, or flashy. EDDIE is still wearing his jacket and his tie is still up to his collar, although that may change as time goes on. DANNY already has his tie loosened and his shirt collar unbuttoned. He carries his jacket and two bottles of beer.

DANNY

Loosen up that tie will you? You look like you’re bein’ strangled by a snake.

EDDIE

I wear a tie to church. It’s not a problem. I never knew this room was down here.

DANNY

Billy set it up after he bought the bar last year. Calls it the “Rats Killer.” Don’t think it gets used much. There ain’t a john down here and you gotta go back upstairs ever’ time you wanna get ’nother drink.

EDDIE

That why you got two beers?

DANNY

Sure you don’t want one of ’em?

EDDIE

I don’t drink beer anymore.

They sit down. There’s an awkward silence.

DANNY

Nice service wasn’t it? Never saw so many flower ‘rangements in my life. Betcha they all come from Jerry’s shop.

EDDIE

What’s gonna happen to it now he’s gone I wonder.

DANNY

Gertie Snyder’ll prob’ly take it over. She’s been his assistant for years and she’s been runnin’ it by herself since Jerry got sick.

EDDIE

Surprised it was a closed casket. Vain as Jerry was you'd think he woulda wanted people talkin' about how good he looked in his funeral suit.

DANNY

It was great some of the old gang come back for it. He really woulda liked that.

EDDIE

So where are they? You said they'd all be here.

DANNY

Would you'da come if I told you I needed to talk to you privately?

EDDIE

So you lied to me. Just like old times. So long.

Eddie makes as if to leave. Danny grabs his arm. Eddie shakes him off.

DANNY

Please. Just set down. I gotta tell you somethin' important. 'Bout Jerry's death. ... Please?

Eddie reluctantly sits down. Danny sits across from him. Henceforth the actors should feel free to stand, sit, walk around, and physically interact in any way the spirit moves them and the director sees fit.

EDDIE

The obituary said it was pneumonia and he was under a specialist's care up in Chicago.

DANNY

He had pneumonia, but that ain't what killed him.

EDDIE

Then what?

DANNY

He had that gay thing. The one Rock Hudson got. ... AIDS. That's what he died of. AIDS.

EDDIE

Oh, come on. There's no AIDS around here. It's not like we're livin' in New York or San Francisco.

DANNY

Not like we're completely isolated from civilization neither. Relatives come to visit. Truckers come through. And who knows what people bring home with 'em when they go outta town. Used to be you could fix things with a shot of penicillin. Not no more.

EDDIE (still processing)

Jerry had AIDS.

DANNY

That's why the casket weren't open. By the end he was all skin and bones. Purple spots all over him.

(Eddie reacts. Danny continues.)

No way he'da wanted people to see him like that.

EDDIE

How do you know what Jerry looked like? Nobody'd seen him for months. Even before he went into the hospital.

DANNY

One of his nurses called an' told me Jerry wanted to see me. Nobody he knew ever visited she said and there weren't much time left. It was pitiful seein' him layin' in that bed lookin' like somebody right outta the Nazi death camps. He was real weak but b'fore they made me leave he got up the strength to tell me Gertie down to the flower shop had an envelope for me. When I picked it up I know she wanted me to open it right there in front of her but I waited 'til I got back home. Good thing I did. You know I'm livin' in a kitchenette down to the Cozy Motel, don't you?

EDDIE

I knew you and Julie got divorced. Six months ago?

DANNY

A year. Time flies when you're havin' fun.

EDDIE

The legal notice in the paper said somethin' about "irreconcilable differences."

DANNY

Pretty irreconcilable when your wife catches you with your cock up some guy's ass.

EDDIE

What?!?

DANNY

They was puttin' in some fancy new equipment at the plant and corporate brought this guy Tom in to train me how to run it. He couldn't keep his eyes off my crotch, and he kept talkin' 'bout how *lonely* it was bein' sent to strange towns where he didn't know nobody. So I said if he liked football he could come over Sunday and we'd hang out together and watch TV. Julie always takes the kids to see her mother on Sunday afternoons, so I knew we'd have the house to ourselves. Well, Tom says he played football back in high school. Mostly "tight end." But nowadays he'd have to play "wide receiver." 'Bout as subtle as a truck. And I said to myself, well that's somethin' I ain't never tried yet, so I told him what time to be there.

EDDIE

You're a darned fool, Danny. Thinkin' with your dick.

DANNY

Where I done a lotta my best thinkin'. But not this time. Tom shows up, we have a beer and then get down to business just in time for Julie to walk back in unexpectedly. When she finally stopped screamin' and throwin' stuff, she called me a disgustin' piece of shit and told me to get

my sorry ass outta her *her* house. I was 'fraid she was gonna tell ever'body why she threw me out. But she musta thought 'bout what people'd think of her as a woman if her husband preferred fuckin' men to fuckin' her. So she sent good ol' Robert Horatio Nelson the *Turd*, Esquire, Attorney-at-Law to tell me she'd keep quiet long as I agreed she could have the house, her car, full custody of the kids, and most of my paycheck in the divorce. He *implied* that otherwise Julie'd have me 'rested for 'busin' the kids.

EDDIE

That's awful.

DANNY

It's my own damn fault. So there I was just settin' in that stupid motel room feelin' all depressed and hardly seein' nobody. My married friends couldn't have nothin' to do with me 'cause their wives all assumed I'd been cheatin' on Julie with 'nother woman. I finally called the only single guy I knew.

EDDIE

Jerry.

DANNY

He was real sympathetic. Said he was available anytime I needed somebody to talk to. No strings attached

EDDIE

And you believed him.

DANNY

I was at his place two or three nights a week and nothin' much happened. We'd have a few beers and he'd listen to me rantin' 'bout how I made a total messa my life. But then one night he said he was outta beer so we switched to whiskey. After we got a good buzz on he offered to let me finish with him what I'd started with Tom. I think maybe he put somethin' in one of drinks 'cause I passed out right afterwards. Dead to the world. Next mornin' my butt hurt like hell. I remember fuckin' him. I don't remember him ever fuckin' me.

EDDIE

Are you sayin' Jerry raped you while you were unconscious?

DANNY

He tried to 'pologize. Said he musta had too much to drink 'cause if he'd been in his right mind he'd never woulda done nothin' like that. Promised never to try it again. Almost the exact same words I said to Julie.

EDDIE

You shoulda had him arrested!

DANNY

C'mon, Eddie. What kinda *real man* would ever tell a cop he fucked a guy and then got raped? When word got out I woulda been a laughin' stock. And Julie'd have all the ammo she needed to cut me off from my kids completely. I couldn't take that chance.

EDDIE

Okay. But then I don't get it. After he did that to you, when he was in Chicago dyin' you still went all the way up there to see him. Why?

DANNY

'Cause despite what happened he was still the closest thing to a friend I had.

EDDIE

You're shittin' me.

DANNY

Who else was there? Nobody. So I started goin' over there again. 'Course I set some pretty firm ground rules and I made my own drinks. But like it or not, I couldn't keep 'way from Jerry anymore'n you could.

EDDIE

What're you talkin' about?

DANNY

That envelope he left for me. When he got the positive AIDS test over in Kokomo he wouldn't tell'em who he'd been with. Said he never knew their names. But he did. Some of 'em anyhow. What was in that envelope was a list of names and phone numbers. I was right there at the very top. Callin' the others's been the hardest thin' I ever had to do. Been yelled at, cussed at, hung up on. One guy just started wailin' and sobbin'. Still got one name left but I don't hafta call that one.

EDDIE

(He's afraid he knows the answer to this.)

Why?

DANNY

'Cause I'm talkin' to him right now.

EDDIE (in denial)

I couldn't have AIDS.

DANNY

'Course not. You're no limp-wristed nancy-boy, are you? Nope. You're just a guy happens to like havin' sex with other guys.

EDDIE

All I've ever done was fumblin' around with you in high school, which you always said didn't count, and havin' that disgusting encounter with Jerry in the restroom ten years ago.

DANNY

And you call me a liar. Knowin' you, you couldn't never stop thinkin' 'bout that "disgusting encounter," could you. So lemme guess. One night you drive by Jerry's house and his porch light's on. You coulda kept drivin' past. You done it before, ain't you? But this time you drive 'round the back and park where nobody can see your car from the street.

EDDIE

All right. Yeah. I sat there the longest time, but I finally went up and knocked on his door. When he opened it he got this big smile on his face. Said, "I've been lookin' forward to seein' you

again.” Then he dropped to his knees right there in his back hallway. Drivin’ home I was so ashamed. Did my usual bargainin’ with God and makin’ silent promises to Michele I’d never do it again.

DANNY

But you did, didn’t you?

EDDIE

I felt like I was split in two. Most of the time I was a guy livin’ the kinda life God intended. Beautiful family. Halfway decent job. Church ever’ Sunday and Wednesday. But sometimes this other Eddie showed up, a guy willin’ to cheat on his wife, steal time from his kids, and transgress against God’s commandments just to get himself a quick blowjob. After while I didn’t know which Eddie was the real one. Went on like that for years. Then last spring Michele’s aunt died.

DANNY (thrown)

What?

EDDIE

She took her mother and the girls up to South Bend for the funeral. They left on Friday and weren’t comin’ back ’til Sunday. I stayed home with Eddie Junior ’cause he had a little league game Saturday mornin’ and when you’re a ten-year-old pitcher that’s the most important thing in the world. Then durin’ the game one of the kids’ mothers asked me if he could stay overnight at their house. Her son was havin’ a sleepover.

DANNY

And there you was, footloose and fancy free on a Saturday night. You arrange a sleepover of you own?

EDDIE

Finally I had a chance to maybe get some answers to all the questions I had bottled up inside me. When I got up enough nerve to dial Jerry’s number, he said he’d be happy to “cancel all his previous engagements.” ’Course I was scared to death. But ever’ move he made was slow and deliberate, like you’d be if you didn’t wanna spook a nervous animal. He kept sayin’, “Don’t worry. We don’t hafta do anythin’ you don’t wanna do.”

DANNY

Yeah. I heard that one, too.

EDDIE

But I said I wanna experience all of it. When was I ever gonna get another chance? So he—how’d he say it?—he “initiated me into the sacred mysteries.”

DANNY

Sometimes when he talked like that I had no idea what he was sayin’.

EDDIE

Some of what we did was just okay but some of it was amazin’. I think I came four times that night. Maybe five.

DANNY

Damn. My record with Julie's only three. *(Beat)* You know, rape don't havta come with force or knock-out drops and it can still be rape. He knew you was confused and vulnerable and he was ready to take advantage of that.

EDDIE

Confused? For sure. But the only time I felt vulnerable is when I had a two-hundred-pound man on top of me with my ankles on his shoulders.

DANNY

So. Did you get the answers you was lookin' for?

EDDIE

Oh, yeah. I found out I am exactly who I was always afraid I was.

DANNY

A queer.

EDDIE

An abomination unto the Lord.

DANNY

Jeez. Here you go again. 'Bomination. Is that just a fancy Bible word meanin' "disgustin' piece of shit"?

EDDIE

You could say that.

DANNY

Too bad it weren't in Julie's vocabulary. Okay. You believe God created you, right? So that mean God created a disgustin' piece of shit?

EDDIE

God created man with free will. I always had the choice whether to yield to temptation or not. But I was too weak and I chose wrong and I failed the test. Ever' time.

DANNY

Test? You mean this whole thing with Jerry, all these years beatin' yourself up—I want it, no I don't, yes I do—that was some kinda final exam and you flunked it?

EDDIE

It goes a lot farther back than Jerry. Farther even than your basement. I've been wrestlin' with this most of my life. At least since my first wet dream. There was another boy in it. You wanna know who?

DANNY

No I do not. Honestly, I don't get how you folks think. What kinda God sets traps for His people to fall into?

EDDIE

God tests us 'cause he loves us. It's for our own good. For the good of our souls.

DANNY

If you say so. I just don't get it. So have you told Michele about your big revelation?

EDDIE

(Beat) No. I was so focused on getting' answers I never thought about what I was gonna do once I had 'em.

DANNY

Well, it looks like maybe you're gonna hafta tell her sooner or later. Poss'bly sooner

EDDIE

One other thing I remember from that night. As Jerry and me were cleanin' ourselves up, I noticed this purple mark on his back. When I asked him about it he seemed surprised for a minute, like he didn't know it was there. But then he claimed it was just a birthmark. Said it was his "only imperfection." It wasn't just a birthmark, was it?

DANNY

Musta been the first sign.

EDDIE

Danny, this is a death sentence. Nobody survives this!

DANNY

We don't know that.

EDDIE

We do know that. For God's sake, Rock Hudson was a big, rich, famous movie star! If they couldn't cure him, they can't cure anybody! Face it. God said guys who do what we've been doin' deserve destruction and here it is. We're gonna die and it's gonna be a horrible death and then we're gonna wake up in hell and spend eternity in a molten lake of fire!

DANNY

Get a grip, Eddie! We don't even know if we got it or not. B'fore we go flyin' off the handle we gotta get tested.

EDDIE

To see if we're gonna be the next ones to die.

DANNY

'Course we can't get tested here. Whatever they may say, at our local health department there's no such a thing as confidentiality. We gotta do what Jerry did. Go someplace like Kokomo where nobody knows us. The company still havin' you drivin' back and forth to Elwood ever' coupla weeks?

EDDIE

Yeah.

DANNY

Then you can stop in Kokomo comin' or goin.' And then while you wait for the results, you go 'bout your business as usual so Michele won't suspect somethin's wrong.

EDDIE

How'm I'm gonna do that? I'll be worried sick.

DANNY

You been keeping secrets from her for years, ain't you? Just try to keep it up a little longer.

EDDIE

What'll we do if the results are bad news?

DANNY

Then we get tested again and we wait again. And then if it's still bad news we do what needs to be done, startin' with havin' real uncomfortable conversations with Julie and Michele.

EDDIE

I don't know what I'll do if I got it and passed it on to her. Or the kids! Oh my God!

DANNY

Your kids are prob'ly okay. Those stories 'bout Rock Hudson. They said some scientists thought you had to have sex to get it. If that's true then I doubt if I gave it to Julie. We ain't had sex in more'n a year. That's way b'fore Jerry raped me.

EDDIE

Michele and I haven't had sex since Eddie Junior was born.

DANNY

You serious?

EDDIE

She said now she'd given me a son she didn't hafta put up with that nasty stuff anymore.

DANNY

No wonder you was knockin' on Jerry's door.

EDDIE

But I thought you could get AIDS real easy just bein' 'round somebody that has it. Shakin' hands or sharin' silverware or somethin'.

DANNY

Nobody really seems to know what the hell the odds of gettin' it are. So try to think positive. Maybe we both dodged a bullet.

EDDIE

Or more likely we both got it.

DANNY

Or maybe just one of us. *(Beat)* I been thinkin'. Even if I don't test positive, if you do and Michele throws you out, maybe we could figure out some sorta livin' arrangement where I can take care of you.

EDDIE

Why would you do that?

DANNY

'Cause I wanna make up for lost time. Believe it or not, I love you, man. And I wanna show you I do know what it means to be a guy's best friend. So yeah, if you test positive I'll take care of you.

EDDIE

I wish I could make the same promise to you. But if I don't have AIDS—

DANNY

Then you'll still be livin' at home with Michele and the kids and you couldn't risk bein' 'round somebody with a incurable disease. I understand that. We'll cross that bridge if we come to it.

EDDIE

So what happens if we're *both* positive?

DANNY

Then we take care of each other. We take care of each other 'til we can't take care of each other no more.

Eddie bursts into tears. If the two are seated, perhaps Danny reaches over and takes his hand. If they're standing, perhaps he envelops him in a bear hug.

END OF PLAY