

EDDY, JO & LARRY

By Geoff Hargreaves

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *After reading the Oedipus Rex of Sophocles, I wondered how things stood today in relation to this taboo topic. To my surprise, I discovered that the issue has become topical, now that adopted children have the right to know who their biological parents are.*

Many newspapers confirm the sexual attraction experienced between reunited sons and mothers and daughters and fathers. When I found that Thebes and Corinth are place names in Illinois and Mississippi, geography seemed to conspire in the project. Learning that the relationship is not illegal in Rhode Island and New Jersey, clinched my interest.

EDDY, JO & LARRY

(2,200 words)

Go to where the silence is and say something. --Amy Goodman

Theme: When Eddy discovers who his biological parents are, he leaves his adoptive parents in Mississippi and travels to Illinois to meet them, with explosive consequences.

Characters:

LARRY CADMAN: aged 50, looks older than his years, uses a walking cane.

JO CADMAN: aged 37, wife of Larry, painter and engraver.

EDDY POE: aged 19, their biological son from Corinth, Mississippi.

Setting: Time: the present

Place: the artist's studio of Jo in Thebes, Illinois, a single bed in a corner.

At rise: LARRY snoops around. He hobbles, using a walking cane. He examines a painting on an easel.

LARRY

What? Him!

LARRY lashes at the canvas and sends it flying from the easel.

Enter JO, coming up the stairs.

JO

(panting)

Those stairs! So steep! They'll be the death of me, one day.

LARRY

(angrily)

Well, Jo, at last! Where've you been? I've been waiting for my lunch for the last hour. I'm starving.

JO

You told me you were going to the Apostolic Lighthouse to talk with the pastor.

LARRY

I decided to do it tomorrow.

JO

You rarely come up here. Why today?

LARRY

I've been looking over your work. I should say, your lack of work. What happened to the series of engravings you promised me?

JO

I put them aside. I've been working on that painting. The Sphinx. Hey, what happened to it?

JO picks up the canvas.

LARRY

Whose face is that on the Sphinx?

JO

If you must know, it's Eddy's.

LARRY

You've been seeing him behind my back! How dare you! How many times do I have to tell you? I don't want anything to do with that kid. And I don't want you to have anything to do with him, either.

JO

Eddy's your son, Larry. Your only child. He's my son, too.

LARRY

We gave him up for adoption when he was three days old. Nineteen years ago. We've had no contact whatsoever. We have nothing in common with him. He ceased to exist when we gave him to that Mississippi couple. He is not my son! And not yours, either.

JO

I never forgot him.

LARRY

Well, you can forget him now.

JO

I want to invite him here for Thanksgiving.

LARRY

I won't hear of it. I won't allow him to set one foot in this house. He doesn't belong here. Don't you understand? He has no part in our lives.

JO.

I already invited him.

LARRY

Then you can uninvite him. As far as I'm concerned, he doesn't exist. He has no right to exist. We need never mention him. There is nothing to say about him. Nothing to see. Nothing to know.

JO

Tell him that yourself at our Thanksgiving meal.

LARRY

I should knock you to the floor.

*LARRY raises his cane, to hit her.
JO dodges aside.*

LARRY

Where are you seeing him? No, don't tell me. I don't want to know. It's got to stop. And it

will stop, right now!

JO

He went to a lot of trouble to find us. The Mississippi couple didn't want him to look for us. They were afraid they'd lose him. But he was determined to come to Thebes to meet us.

LARRY

Yeah, I bet they probably treated him like dirt. Feeding him nothing but the cheapest slugburgers.

JO

On the contrary, they treated him like a prince.

LARRY

So he says. How would we know?

JO

He's come all the way from Corinth to Illinois. He had no money. His adoptive parents wouldn't help him. He hitched ride after ride.

LARRY

Then he wasted his time. Sentimental fool! Hey, have you been slipping him money? Is that why—

JO

You made me give him up for adoption.

LARRY

Don't lie to yourself. You were in your first year at art college. What benefit was a child to you? To us? Why kill a brilliant career for a careless mistake? You were as willing as I was to get rid of him. Don't fool yourself with silly stories. A careless mistake, that's all he was or is and all he ever will be. Neither of us was ready to be a parent. You least of all.

JO

I was his mother. I *am* his mother.

LARRY

You had talent, even genius. You were made for success. And I was the one who added the zeroes to your value in the art market.

JO

What good was my talent? My success? My upward motion means nothing when my ceiling is your floor!

LARRY

(raising his cane)

Call off the dogs! I've heard this more than enough. Soon it will be the list of my every faux pas over the last twenty years.

JO

I mean every word!

LARRY

Stop this nonsense! Or I really will knock you flat.

JO

Why? Are you scared your son will see you for what you are? A bully, a liar, a phony, a pervert?

LARRY swings his cane at her.

JO backs away with a scream.

EDDY

(offstage)

Hey! Is everything all right up there? Jo? Jo?

LARRY

What? Is that him? You brought the kid here?

JO

(calling):

Don't worry. Come on up, Eddy. Ignore your father.

Sound of ascending footsteps.

LARRY

No way. No way he's coming up here. No way he's staying a moment longer in this house.

LARRY goes to exit.

LARRY

Hey, you. Whoever you are. Get outa here!

JO

Come on up, Eddy! Ignore him!

*Exit LARRY, waving his cane.
A thud. A yelp. A scream.
The crash of a falling body.*

JO
What the hell!

*JO goes to the exit.
Enter EDDY, hair and face
bloody.*

JO
Oh, Eddy love! What happened?

EDDY
He smashed me on the head with his cane.

JO
Oh no! Where is he now?

EDDY
At the foot of the stairs. I saw red. I pulled him toward me and he went flying over the bannister. Head first. He's just lying there. His head is smashed open. I think he's dead. Dead, Jo! I'm sure of it.

JO goes to the exit and looks.

JO
Oh, Eddy! How terrible! I've never seen anything that awful. There's blood everywhere. I can't bear to look at it.

EDDY
Call an ambulance. Get him to the hospital.

JO
(taking a second look):
A hospital can't help him. His head is wide open.

EDDY
Then call the police.

JO returns to EDDY, grabs a rag from her painting equipment, and wipes some of EDDY's face.

JO

The police? Really? What will we tell them?

EDDY

The truth. That I killed my father.

JO

Now calm down, Eddy. Let's think carefully before we say anything we regret.

EDDY

It's the truth, Jo. I killed my father! Your husband.

JO

Your biological father.

EDDY

My whatever father. I waited nineteen years to meet him.

JO

Look, you defended yourself against a man called Larry Cadman, who attacked you without provocation. We don't have to tell anybody he was your father.

EDDY

(frantic)

But he was my father. I came all the way from Mississippi to meet him. He refused to see me, but he was my father.

JO

Now be sensible, Eddy love. You don't want to start a chain of gossip that we can't control. Heaven knows what people will end up saying. And enjoy saying it. We can explain that he simply fell down the stairs. He was unsteady on his feet. He has been for years. He never went anywhere without his cane. It's not unlikely that he'd fall on those dangerous stairs. I've given myself a scare or two on them.

EDDY

The police, Jo!

JO

Listen, Eddy. Carefully. You probably imagine he was a decent guy, but he wasn't. Far from it. He was fired from his job as a driving instructor, after he sexually abused his clients. Male and female. For decades now, he's been selling my engravings in Chicago, as

if they were his own work. He played the part of a sterling citizen, going to church every Sunday, contributing to charities, but it was all fake, all show, all poses. I hated him. He threatened to kill me if I tried to leave him. He was rotten to the core. I'm glad he's dead. It's a terrible thing to say, but I mean it.

EDDY

Really? Can that be true? I don't know what to say, Jo.

JO

Then think about us two. Where do we go from here?

EDDY

What do you mean?

JO

I was going to tell you before, Eddy, but the time never seemed right.

EDDY

Tell me what?

JO

I'm pregnant! It's your child, Eddy. I haven't slept with that monster for over a decade.

EDDY

Oh Jo! Let me hug you.

JO

I know other people will think this is wrong. But I've been doing some research. It's perfectly natural, when children are adopted early. Boys separated from their mothers, daughters from their fathers. Over and over again, they fall in love, when they finally meet. It's irresistible. Nobody wants to admit it. But, when there's been no contact since early childhood, it happens time after time. There was an instant connection between us. And it hasn't lessened.

They hug.

EDDY

And it won't. Ever. How do you feel about it? Being pregnant, I mean.

JO

I'm delighted. Totally delighted. What could be better than having our own child?

EDDY

I do love you, Jo. I know people will say I shouldn't, but I can't help myself. I really can't. I love the way you smile with your eyes, not just with your mouth. And I love being

the only one who really understands you.

JO

Let people say what they like. Only we know what we feel. Even your WhatsApp messages have the feel of pillow-talk. From the moment you arrived here, I knew that I could never offer you less than my total love.

EDDY

In Illinois your total love can mean two to ten years in jail. Plus a \$25,000 fine.

JO

I've thought about that. As soon as we can, we'll move to New Jersey or Rhode Island. Our love is legal there. We can't be officially married, but who cares? We'll be safe from the law. There's our escape. That's where the tunnel is.

EDDY

But what if there's a problem with the fetus?

JO

We'll cross that bridge when we get to it.

EDDY

If you say so.

JO

Let me tell the police that Larry was killed by thieves who broke into the house. I'll say I found him on the floor when I came back from the Oak Street market.

EDDY

There's my blood as well as his on the staircase. There are drops of it on the floor over there. We could never be sure that we got rid of all of it. How would it look then, if you said it was thieves on the staircase and they found my blood in here?

JO

I'll say it must be the blood of one of the thieves. You can slip away to Chicago. I'll find you there.

EDDY

People here have seen us together, Jo. You said there are less than five hundred people living in Thebes. Any one of them could mention my presence to the cops. The staff at the Budget Inn Motel know my name—well, as Poe, not as Cadman, but still—and that I came here from Corinth. The whole thieves thing could blow up in our faces.

JO

You're right, Eddy. You're smarter than I thought. So . . . what now?

EDDY

I'm going to the police. We'll tell the truth. Part of it. We won't mention that you're my mother or that he was my father. I'll say he attacked me and I defended myself. His death was an accident. It's the plain truth, after all. I didn't intend to kill him. I just pushed him away.

JO

But why did he attack you? They'll want to know.

EDDY

You tell me.

JO

Hmmm . . . I know. It was an absurd disagreement about politics. That will do it. He's been known to burst into furious flames, if his illusions and delusions are contradicted. Plenty of the locals can testify to that.

EDDY

You mean US imperialism in Latin America? Something like that?

JO

That will do it, twice over. I'll say you came to the house, so that I could complete the painting of the Sphinx. That's perfectly credible.

EDDY

It's time to call the cops, Jo.

JO

Give me a big kiss first, Eddy love.

They kiss and hug.

JO

Oh, how I'm going to miss you, if they give you jail time.

EDDY

I'll think about you every day.

JO

Afterwards, we'll be together for the rest of our lives.

EDDY

With our baby.

JO

Yes, fingers crossed, with our baby.

EDDY

And we won't give him—or her—away, ever. Ever. Ever.

JO

Not ever.

EDDY

Time to make the call, Jo.

EDDY starts to wipe his face.

JO

No, don't clean yourself up. Let the cops see what the bastard did to you. Okay, young Mr. Edward Poe, artist's model. Remember that's all you are for the moment. Now, Mrs. Josephine Cadman, artist, sometime teacher, wife of the late Mr. Larry Cadman, is going to notify the police of a most unfortunate accident. Take a deep breath. All this shall pass.

JO takes out her cellphone and dials.

END

AUTHOR BIO:

After studying psychology in Dallas, TX, I moved to Mexico, where I currently teach and translate. I have had two full-lengths plays staged in USA, plus 5 short plays. I have published translations of 5 Mexican and Bolivian novels with NY and London publishing houses..