

Two Legged Rat Bastards

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Based on the short story "A Full Boat," by Daniel Wallace

OVER TITLES:

WINSTEAD (V.O.)

I'll never forget the day my father died,
a stray bullet, the result of some
traditional celebration where guns were
fired into the air. One fell from the sky
and into my father's head, killing him
instantly.

EXT. PARK - DAY

An old man, EDDIE, and a YOUNG MAN, WINSTEAD, are sitting
on a bench near a scenic overlook of a city.

WINSTEAD (V.O.)

They didn't hate him, they didn't love
him, they didn't even know him. They
didn't even know they killed him.

Eddie, early 80's, has the seedy feel of the full-time
alcoholic. Bloodshot eyes, whiskery chin, irritable
disposition.

Winstead is his opposite. He looks like he was just
picked up from the cleaners -- sweet, fresh, naive.

CLOSE ON EDDIE.

EDDIE

(bitterly)

I have nothing, nothing but contempt for
the two-legged bastards who sashay, who
promenade around as if walking were
something anybody could do.

Eddie raps his leg: it's wooden.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

This wooden leg suits me just fine, son.
But I just can't walk around all la-de-da
like they do. I limp... Limp and drag,
limp and drag.

WINSTEAD

(nodding)

Yes you do.

Winstead winces ever so slightly as we

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A very young Winstead lies in bed in a darkened room, holding a flashlight. We hear a loud THUD followed by a horrific SCRAPING SOUND of wood on wood. Closer and closer and closer it comes.

BOY

(whispering, almost chanting)

It's only my dad, it's only my dad, it's only my dad ...

CUT TO:

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - DAY

EDDIE

I've always liked you. I hope you know that.

WINSTEAD

I'm your son, Dad.

EDDIE

Even so.

Eddie takes a long fatherly look at his son, and then sort of pats his son on the arm. Clearly, the old man is uncomfortable with displays of affection; so is the son.

An awkward beat.

EDDIE (CONT'D)

You know how I lost it, don't you?

WINSTEAD

Lost what?

EDDIE

The leg! The leg!

WINSTEAD

You said something about a whale . . .

The old man shakes his head.

EDDIE

That was just a story. The truth is . . .
I lost it in a card game.

This doesn't register for a beat. Then:

WINSTEAD

A card game? Did you say 'a card game'?
You bet your leg in a card game?

EDDIE

You wouldn't understand. It was a
different time when men were men and
cards were cards and men played card
games. For keeps.

As he speaks we

CUT TO:

INT. BACK ROOM POKER GAME - DAY OR NIGHT

Night or day it doesn't matter: there are no windows.
Smoke as thick as London fog. Through it there appears to
be a poker table, around which sit five men, all of whom
are bandaged in some odd way.

EDDIE (V.O.)

Most of my friends had lost some body
part or another: an eye, an ear, but
sometimes teeth.

As we're watching, SLICK JIM reveals his hand: THREE
SEVENS. He gives a big toothy smile to BIG Ralph, seated
to his left.

SLICK JIM

Ooh. How do you like that?

BIG RALPH

Love it.

Big Ralph lays down four fours. Slick Jim loses all color
in his face.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

Forceps.

Slick Jim has a tooth pulled. It's not pleasant.

EDDIE (V.O.)

One of the people we played with, he was
a doctor. Performed the surgery then and
there.

The doctor drops the tooth in what looks like to be a
shot of whiskey -- when YOUNG EDDIE enters and sits down.
He's all confident bravado as he nods toward the cocktail
with the tooth in it.

EDDIE (V.O.)

It was a rough game. But you knew that going in. 'Don't bet your leg if you're not prepared to lose it.'

YOUNG EDDIE

(pointing at glass)

I'll have one of those.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - DAY

The contrast between the poker game and the bright sunny park is startling.

WINSTEAD

I don't think -- I know it ever would have occurred to me, under any circumstances, to bet my leg or any part of my body in a card game.

EDDIE

That's something a father longs to hear.
(bitterly)

My father - hell, he didn't give a shit whether I had my legs or not. He never thought to tell me one way or another what I should or shouldn't bet. When the moment came, I wasn't prepared. And I bet the leg.

CUT TO:

INT. POKER GAME - NIGHT

The game has been going on for a while. Eddie has shed his jacket. The ashtray is piled high with cigarette and cigar stubs, many of which are still burning.

EDDIE (V.O.)

It was Saturday night. Two AM. The room was so smoky it felt like we were playing cards in the clouds.

The camera PANS around the table, revealing one bedraggled gambler after another. Slick Jim has HUGE COTTON BALLS in his mouth, dripping red. Even Big Ralph is suffering: he's holding his cards in one hand while his other is resting in a bowl of ice, in sort of pinkish water.

In the corner is a lovely lady holding a cigar . . .

EDDIE (V.O.)

We'd been at it for the last four hours or so, and I was on a roll! I couldn't lose! It didn't matter what I played - I won a hundred dollar pot with a pair of threes!

Eddie throws down a pair of threes and greedily rakes in the cash. The VOICE OVER continues as we watch bets being made and lost, neckties loosened, faces sweating, etc.

EDDIE (V.O.)

People couldn't read me. By midnight I was up seven hundred and fifty dollars. I thought about leaving and taking my winnings and buying something special for myself - a new wallet, a nice bottle of scotch, a warm pair of socks. But with things going so well I thought they could only get better. I decided to quit when I hit a thousand. I won the next hand - Montana Low-Hole, roll your own. That brought me up to eight seventy five. I lost the next, but won the next two. Grand total: nine hundred and sixty two American dollars. One more hand, and that was it: I was out of there.

END MONTAGE, and we're CLOSE ON the dealer, who winks.

EDDIE (V.O.)

The dealer choose my favorite game: seven card stud. This is the game I was born to play, son: I'd never lost a hand of stud. This was my lucky day. Everybody folded - except for one man.

(beat)

DeSoto Moriarty, we called him.

He camera finds DESOTO MORIARTY, a dapper and sinister-looking gambler with a pencil thin moustache and a long scar down one side of his face.

CUT TO:

INT. PARKED CAR

The contrast between the sunny day and the smoky room is (again) intense.

WINSTEAD
Why did you call him that?

EDDIE
(ruefully)
Because that was his name.

CUT TO:

INT. POKER GAME.

EDDIE (V.O.)
DeSoto knew how to play a hand of cards.
We kept at it, raising each other until
we'd gone through all our money.

YOUNG EDDIE
Call.

DESOTO
(smiling)
Call? So soon?

YOUNG EDDIE
Maybe I'm just tired of winning.

DESOTO
If you really had something you'd be
willing to bet more than money. Me for
instance, I know I've got you beat.
That's why I'm betting my thumbs. *Both of
them.*

Desoto smiles confidently as Eddie stares him down.
They're both smiling now.

YOUNG EDDIE
(gravely but with confidence)
Pick a leg.

DESOTO
Right.

The two men continue to stare at each other as they
reveal their hands.

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - DAY

WINSTEAD
Wait. You bet your leg on two pair?

EDDIE
I was young. Reckless.

INT. POKER GAME. - NIGHT

Young Eddie thinks he's won and is about to pull in the money -- when Desoto lays his cards on the table. It's a full boat. Young Eddie looks at the cards in disbelief.

INT. POKER GAME. - NIGHT

As we focus on the disgusted expression of the other players at the table, we hear Young Eddie SCREAMING.

We find him. He has a belt in his mouth to clench when the pain becomes intense. And we see, briefly, the horrendous surgery he's experiencing . . .

CUT TO:

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - DAY

The young man is looking at his father as though he were an alien.

WINSTEAD
But I still don't understand. What did he want with your leg? What did he do with it once he had it?

EDDIE
That was his business. After the doctor sewed me up I said good bye to the leg and never had anything to do with it again. It was DeSoto's now. And that fucker, he took it with him everywhere. That's why I eventually stopped playing with those guys. I couldn't stand the smug smile on his face, and the way he rested his hand on my knee cap.

He sighs.

WINSTEAD
What a story. On the one hand, you were stupid to even be there, but on the other hand you were kind of brave. I would never play in a game like that. The stakes are too high.

EDDIE

It works both ways, though, doesn't it?
You can either lose big, or you can win
big. Losing is the worst, but winning -
there's nothing like it.

The old man stares at the young man intently, studying
his features until Winstead starts to feel uncomfortable.

WINSTEAD

Winning? But what did you win?

Eddie smiles as we

CUT TO:

INT. POKER GAME.

A cocktail waitress brings the cursing, sweating Eddie
another shot while the doctor finishes sewing up his leg.
She glances down at the stump, dry heaves, and looks away
in disgust.

DOCTOR

Okay that should do you Eddie. Remember
to change the bandages twice a day and
try to stay off of it for at least three
weeks. Tammy, help him out to the street,
will you please?

The cocktail waitress grimaces and puts her hand on
Eddie's shoulder, still looking in the opposite
direction.

EDDIE

I'm not going anywhere. This game isn't
over.

Eddie steels his gaze and looks around the table, stunned
face to stunned face. He settles on Desoto.

EDDIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I couldn't end the night a loser, son.

Eddie grabs the forceps off the waitress' tray, yanks out
a molar, and tosses it onto the table.

YOUNG EDDIE

Deal me in, Carl.

Nervous beat. All eyes on the dealer as he begins to
deal. The players examine their cards.

YOUNG EDDIE (CONT'D)

Three toes.

He stares at Desoto.

DESOTO

All in.

Desoto uses Eddie's amputated lower leg to shove all his chips into the pot. He glowers at Eddie. Eddie glowers back.

DOCTOR

Too rich for my blood.

He tosses his cards to the dealer.

BIG RALPH

I'm out.

He tosses his cards to the dealer.

EDDIE

Left leg.

Desoto's poker face cracks.

DESOTO

I raise you a kidney.

EDDIE

I'll see your kidney and raise you a kidney.

DESOTO

What? You're crazy. I'm not betting both kidneys.

EDDIE

Guess I win.

DESOTO

Okay, both elbows.

EDDIE

No.

Young Eddie goes for the pot.

That's when we hear a BABY CRYING. Everybody looks around, confused...

DESOTO

God damn it, not now!

Desoto is embarrassed.

DESOTO (CONT'D)

My wife has started working nights and now I'm stuck here with the kid. Would you gentlemen excuse me? I'll be right back.

EDDIE

Wait.

Everyone turns to Eddie, who has a markedly different expression on his face.

YOUNG EDDIE

Is that a boy or a girl?

Eddie smiles. Desoto knows what he's getting at. Desoto sits back down.

DESOTO

Tammy. Bring me the kid.

CLOSE ON Desoto as a bit of fear passes across his visage. But just as quickly passes away.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - DAY

Winstead, almost against his will, is beginning to understand.

EDDIE

Four Aces, King high . . . the best hand I ever had. Are you telling me I never told you that story - your story?

The young man's jaw drops slowly as he stares at his father, who, for the first time, is looking at his son with a genuine affection -- even love.

In the background, in the far distance, we hear the echo of a GUNS shooting. A beat, and then -- a bullet pierces the back of Eddie's neck, and he slumps over, dead.

WINSTEAD (V.O.)

And that's when it happened - the man I called my father -- tiny already, shrunken with age and the weight of his many adventures -- slumped over in a bloodless moment of the purest finality.

The screen goes BLACK.

WINSTEAD (V.O.)

To this day, I think he was my father.

(beat)

But I would never bet on that.

END.