

Another Song by Tyler Smith
Draft Six: October 4, 2000

Characters:

Lew: Musician, early to mid-thirties

Natalie: Musician, mid-twenties

Rachel: Lew's mother, mid-fifties to early sixties

Setting:

Rachel's small home, in which she has lived for many years. It was her childhood home. She lived in it with her husband, long since gone, and she presently lives in it with Lew.

Time: The present.

*At rise: **Natalie** and **Lew** sit on couch in a small, sparsely furnished room. A jug of cheap wine sits on a coffeetable, They are drinking from cheap glasses or perhaps even plastic cups. Lew is wearing bluejeans and a t-shirt, Natalie bluejean shorts and a t-shirt. It is late on a warm spring night.*

LEW: *(Raising his glass)* Here's to the latest queen of the big-time honkeytonks.

NATALIE: *(Clinking her glass to his)* Bring on those sawdust-strewn floors!

LEW: Bring on the beer-soaked barmaids!

NATALIE: Here I come, smoke-suckin' citizenry!

LEW: If you see her gettin' smaller...

NATALIE: ...it's 'cause I'm movin' down the road! *(Laughs, drinks, fills both of their glasses.)*

LEW: *(Looks about the room)* Something's just not quite right here.

NATALIE: *(Leaning against him and sipping her wine contentedly)* I sure don't know what you mean.

LEW: We got wine, you are definitely a woman...but with you going on the road, we need song.

NATALIE: Well, sing me something for the road. You've been there.

LEW: OK. Picture something right in front of you, just as clear. But look ahead, it's so long, there's no ending.

NATALIE: I can feel that pull!

LEW: Learned this one a long time ago:

(Sings)

"I was born by the river
"In a little tent
"And just like that river
"I've been runnin' ever since
"It's been a long time comin'
"But I know, a change is gonna come."

That's the only thing I know about being on the road. It changes you.

NATALIE: I'm not afraid of that.

LEW: Even so. You move past things, sometimes without seeing them, and then the night comes, and you try to sing yourself to sleep.

LEW: No, you wouldn't be.

NATALIE: Lew, come on, now. This is just a two-bit shot to play some honkytonks. That ain't worth spit unless my collaborator comes out on the road with me.

LEW: You know, Nat, I've sung this song before. Done the road thing. Didn't do too well.

NATALIE: I never did too well in history. Boring. Sing me a new song.

LEW: Oh, hell. What can I tell you? Nothing. You're gonna learn it for yourself some freezing midnight in a coffee shop with hard bright light, wishing for home and a slice of grandma's coconut cream pie.

NATALIE: Hey, man, I've done home. So have you. *(Rises, walks to the window.)* Look out that window, Lew. *(He sits for a moment, looking at her.)* C'mere! Get that lazy butt off the couch and hold me.

LEW: *(Rises, walks to her, puts his arms around her from behind)* All right?

NATALIE: All right. Now, look out there at that night. Think about all our drives out Old Sawmill Run Road, trying to catch the moon. Now's our chance.

LEW: Don't get romantic on me.

NATALIE: Romantic? I just got a dream, one I need so I can *live*. You're the reason I snuck out of my house to hang out in smoky little dives with wet floors and dirty blue lights, so I could find my own voice, put my heart on the line in front of people and crack the world right open. Now, you're not going to tell me that I should have just settled for my room and that little patch of dirt I grew up on?

LEW: You need to prove you can leave. I already did that.

NATALIE: What are you afraid of? You don't have to do this alone, like before.

LEW: I sang in a lot of places and I watched people sip their beers and look right through me. After a hundred nights, I didn't have any songs left to sing because I'd left behind everything I had, the place that gave me something to sing about in the first place: a little roadhouse on the edge of town, guys getting off the Greyhound rubbing sleep from their eyes, a tree branch overhanging a streelight on Third and Oak. A girl with a beautiful voice falling asleep on my backporch and waking up with dew all over her.

I'd gone out looking for my life, and it was here waiting for me all the time.

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NATALIE: (*Tenderly*) You gonna help me or what, old man?

LEW: Hell. Of course I want to come. What I wouldn't give for everything to be as clear for me as it is for you. (*Pause*) Just makes me think more and more of my old man.

NATALIE: I never even heard you talk about him much.

LEW: Just a drifter, really. Moved into this old house with Rachel a long time ago, but he was always leaving.

(*From offstage*)

RACHEL: Lew? Is that you?

LEW: We're here, Rachel.

RACHEL: Is that Nat with you?

NATALIE: It's me, Rachel.

LEW: Come on down.

RACHEL: Just a minute. I'll get my sweater.

NATALIE: Did we wake her up?

LEW: Hell, no.

RACHEL: (*Entering*) It's early. How long you-all been home?

LEW: Since the end of *Matlock* and half of *Barnaby Jones*, if I heard the TV right.

RACHEL: I must have dozed off.

LEW: You ever seen a show all the way through, Ma?

RACHEL: Now, I only rest my eyes a minute or two.

LEW: You must have heard us singing.

NATALIE: How are you feeling tonight, Rachel?

RACHEL: Not too poorly.

LEW: (*Holding up the jug*) Sit down here and have a drink.

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RACHEL: Well, maybe just a thimbleful. (*He pours a small amount of wine into one of the cups.*) Looks like you-all got something to celebrate.

LEW: (*Draws a chair up for her and they all sit around the coffeetable.*) There you go. Nat's got some big news. Got herself a shot to go out on the road.

RACHEL: Well, anybody with two ears knew that was coming. All the songs the two of you do.

NATALIE: That makes it as much Lew's news as mine.

LEW: I didn't do a thing.

NATALIE: No? First time you saw me in that little dive down there on Dover Street, how many songs did I know?

LEW: 'Bout five.

RACHEL: Oh, he can pass those songs around. His father was a singer, you know.

NATALIE: I know.

RACHEL: Now, when he was just tiny Lew had him a little old guitar and always wanted to play it. (*To Lew*) Remember how you tried to play those old colored songs.

LEW: Nobody calls them colored anymore.

RACHEL: Now, why a boy wants to sing all those drinking and fighting and going-to-the penitentiary songs...

LEW: That's not all they're about. (*Pause*) Besides, you taught me the first song I remember.

RACHEL: Go on.

LEW: That's right. And it was about drinking, don't you know? You know old Rachel can sing, Nat?

NATALIE: I heard her in the kitchen a time or two.

LEW: Come on, now, Ma. Sing with me. You know this one, too, Nat.

(*Sings*) "Get you a copper kettle
"Get you a copper coil
"Cover in new-made cornmash
"And never more you'll toil..."

RACHEL: Oh, lord, I haven't sung that in years.

LEW: Don't act like you don't remember.

RACHEL: *(Softly)*
"You'll just lay there by the juniper
"While the moon is bright
"Watch them jugs a-fillin'
"In the pale moonlight."

NATALIE: *(Clapping)* Now, that's why you drink and sing and play the guitar!

LEW: *(Lightly)* Two outta three ain't bad...I'm no singer.

NATALIE: Well, your mother is.

RACHEL: That was one even Jimmy didn't know.

NATALIE: *(To Lew)* Remember the first one you taught me?

LEW: Sure I do. Now, see, Rachel, this is a blues, but there's no drinking, fighting or going to the penitentiary.

NATALIE: Never thought I'd be able to sing it.

(Singing)

"Woke up this morning, looked 'round for my shoes
You know I had those mean old walking blues."

LEW: *(Joining her, reprising the verse)*
"Woke up this morning, and I looked 'round for my shoes
You know I had those mean old walkin' blues."

RACHEL: Now, he got that song from his daddy too.

LEW: I never heard Pop sing that song.

RACHEL: Oh, you did too. My, you two do sing it sweet. I did used to love singing with Jimmy. *(Takes a sip of wine.)* Trouble is, his singing would go right to your head.

NATALIE: Did you ever play with him?

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RACHEL: No. *(Pause)* He took me to a dance or two out by the river, and I'd sing every now and again. I liked that. And we'd drive home by the water, with the stars out. That was always enough for me. Not for him.

(She moves to a small chest and takes out a photo album.)

Did you ever see a picture of him, Nat? Mercy. I haven't opened this in a while. *(Holds album without opening it. Natalie turns away from her and looks out the window.)*

LEW: We don't need to go back into all this.

RACHEL: *(As if she didn't hear)* If you look at these, you'll see a boy looks just like his daddy. *(Pause)* The one I remember best, he bent your fingers right on to those guitar strings.

LEW: I just remember him pressing.

RACHEL: Putting it in your blood.

LEW: That's hocus-pocus.

RACHEL: No, there's something to that...I'll show you. Look at your fingers. *(She takes his hand.)* See, Natalie, these calluses, hard and thick?

LEW: Occupational hazard for guitar players. Nat has 'em too.

RACHEL: *(As if she hasn't heard)* Then there's a picture of Jimmy in here, right before he left. The first time. And then right next to it, the picture of you, ready to leave for the road, with your daddy's smile, just the same.

Do you remember?

LEW: I had a guitar case full of songs, and I was going to play them all in every town I could find. And I damn near did.

NATALIE: We're gonna get a whole slew of new pictures to put in this book.

RACHEL: Then there's the picture after he came back. So blue. See, it takes a little bit out of you. *(Closes book, takes a sip of wine before she speaks again, to Lew, quietly.)*

I expect you'll be going along.

LEW: I'm thinking about it.

RACHEL: Good night to be singing old songs then.

NATALIE: Maybe sometimes we got to put ourselves up against something, Rachel.

RACHEL: Well, you sound like a young woman. I'm getting to be an old one, and I guess I see all the ways you can get hurt. *(Pause)* Lew, turn that porch light on, would you?

LEW: Just draws bugs.

RACHEL: It's a habit, I guess. *(To Natalie)* I'd leave a light on for Jimmy, and when Lew got older, I'd leave it on for him. In the morning, if the light was off, I knew he made it home.

LEW: Always made it home.

RACHEL: No, you left.

LEW: For a while. Came back, right?

RACHEL: Yes, like a circle. Guess you're ready to start a new one.

NATALIE: Rachel, you're wrong. You're making everything sound hopeless, that love leaves whenever somebody walks out the door. Love's stronger than that.

RACHEL: Oh, I expect you think I'm just a bitter woman, pining away for the man who left me, and trying to keep my boy at home because I'm selfish. Well, maybe all of us are selfish. You're a strong girl, Nat. You want what you want too. I don't blame you.

(To Lew) I never saw either one of you happy from traveling. You know, Jimmy used to sing one all the time that I never listened to all that close -- he had so many songs -- but over the years, I started to hear it.

He'd sing:

(Softly)

"Babe, I want to stay here

"You know I want to stay here

"My feet start going down

"And I got to ramble

"My feet start going down

"And I got to ramble."

The night before he left, he asked me to dance. I looked in his eyes, hoping I'd see the young man I'd given my heart to. But he'd gone away so many times, and left so many little pieces of himself in rooms and alleys and buses, there just wasn't much left. All he ever thought about, soon as he was home, was leaving again.

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But we danced. The room was dark, and our shadows were on the wall. It was a ghost dance.

The next morning, when I saw the sun, he was gone.

LEW: *(Angrily)* That's not me. What's wrong with you? I haven't gone anywhere. Nowhere in my life, not really. You think because a guy you call my father, who I hardly knew, took it into his head that he couldn't get any moss under his feet that that's what I'll do? I'm not him.

RACHEL: *(After a moment)* I've said my peace, son. I believe I'll go to bed.

(She rises and exits. Lew starts after her, hesitates, stops. He looks after her, paused halfway between her place of exit and where Natalie stands.)

NATALIE: Lew, you're right. You're not him.

LEW: You're right. I'm not him. Maybe it's time to break that circle Rachel talked about.

(Natalie looks at him for a beat or two before she begins speaking.)

NATALIE: When I see the sun tomorrow it's going to be in my eyes, going down the road, away from here, but carrying lots of little pieces of here. I'm going to watch people drink their beer and try to look through me, and then I'm going to reach right out there with my voice and grab them, right down their throats, to the bottom of their hearts.

Since we're singing songs tonight, I've got one for you:

(With great strength)

"I've got good news to bring
"And that is why I sing
"All my joys with you I'll share
"I'm going to take a trip on that old gospel ship
"And go sailing through the air.

"I'm going to take a trip on that old gospel ship
"I'm going far beyond the sky
"I'm going to shout and sing
"Until the bells unring
"When I bid this world goodbye."

If I don't sail out there...tomorrow will just be another song.

(She kisses Lew and slowly walks toward the door and exits on the opposite side from Rachel's exit. He stands for a moment, takes a sip of wine, picks up the book of

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photographs, but does not open it. He sets the book down, takes a step toward Rachel's side. Then he stops, look towards the other door and follows the course taken by Natalie.)

Blackout

End of Play