

smARTfilms

# darkness at noon

## *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973) film notes by Tova Gannana



Eddie Coyle (Robert Mitchum) walks up to the window of the diner like it's his gravesite, the reflection of flowers, the black glass of the night window, the sound of a transit train. Eddie's fate is already sealed. Inside the diner, an old man in a paper hat busses tables, a woman in fur and pearls sits, in conversation, her sandwich going cold. Eddie reaches for a piece of lemon pie; a light hangs round and bright above his head. "Coffee," he says politely as he nods. A man hands Eddie a mug; Eddie pays in change. It's late. The cooks are sitting down in their white coats after a shift, elbows on the table, glasses to their lips. Eddie is meeting a man he hasn't met before, which is something Eddie is used to doing. On this night, Eddie is buying guns. The young gunrunner is a talker. He spills something about what else he is

selling. Eddie picks up the information, puts it in his pocket. Nothing can be thrown away; in exchange, it can be used at a later date. The diners, pool halls, and barrooms of Boston and its suburbs are the places in Eddie's world. Walking out of one, after having two doubles, he throws his coat over his shoulder like a Frenchman leaving a cafe.

Eddie is a crooner. He knows to whom he must sing. Eddie says to Dillon (Peter Boyle), a man tending bar and a felon turned police informant who also works as a hitman for the mob, "I'm looking at three to five. Lost the appeal. Lost the motion for reconsideration. Got to surrender up there for execution of sentencing in a week or two." Before entering Dillon's bar, Eddie had put thirty guns in a trunk for a man seated in a booth behind him to go outside and pick up. Dillon in a white button up and long white apron wipes down the bar and pours from the tap. Dillon isn't sure what, but he knows something is going on. Dillon like Eddie is friendless. Both are impatient; both are waiting. Eddie drinks his beer; Dillon serves it.



Where does one go but to Florida, to sunshine if you're lucky? Being lucky means not getting caught or having information on someone else to sell. The young gunrunner's feet aren't as fast as Eddie would like them to be. He needs thirty more guns by tomorrow night. In the middle of the day in a bowling alley, Eddie tells him, "I've spent most of my life hanging around crummy joints with a bunch of punks, drinking the beer, eating the hash and the



hotdogs and watching the other people go off to Florida while I'm sweating out how I'm going to pay the plumber. I done time and I stood up but I can't take no more chances. Next time it's going to be me going to Florida." Another deal between them is made.

In Quincy, Eddie carries a garbage can high on his shoulder, sets it down by the curb, his children run out of the house to catch the school bus, he kisses his daughter on her cheek. He worries to his wife Sheila (Helena Carroll), "Did you say anything to the kids this morning about that trouble up there?" The trouble up there is in New Hampshire where Eddie is facing a prison sentence. "I thought they acted kinda funny towards me this morning." Eddie washes his hands in their narrow kitchen sink; Sheila wipes the dishes dry. Eddie's family is the reason he can't do more time; the way his life is going he has no more time to live.

*The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1973) begins with surveillance, the sound of a camera capturing an image. In the suburbs of Boston, where sometimes the money is, Mr. Partridge (Peter MacLean) walks out of his green shuttered colonial and is unknowingly photographed. His bank, South Shore National, won't be the only one held up by men in masks using Eddie's black market guns. No one will get hurt, they say, until someone gets killed. The suburbs bleeding out in traffic, sprawling houses and strip malls from the city, are on the surface sleepy and easy. The residents of Sharon, with work and purpose, ride to and from Boston by commuter train. The sign to their town reads, "Sharon, a better place to live because it's naturally beautiful." Throughout the film, alongside criminal conversations, we hear weed wackers, telephones, and typists, residential chatter. The bank robbers wear masks that render their faces emotionless and unreadable. They speak their directions through slits. The faces of the workers at the banks being hit are also expressionless. They do not convey fear, as though sooner or later they knew this was going to happen.



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