

Party At Billy's

by

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An alarm clock is heard ringing, then it is shut off and groaning can be heard. BRAD, early 30's, dressed in pajamas, housecoat and slippers, enters the living room from Brad's bedroom and heads to the kitchen. He has just woken up. In the centre of the living room there is a couch, two chairs and a coffee table with a phone, a TV remote and some magazines on top. Brad disappears into the kitchen, re-emerges with a cup of coffee, sits down on the couch and turns on the TV.

BILLY enters the living room through the front door. He is 29 years old, dressed for work -- pants, shirt, necktie and jacket. His tie and the top button of his shirt are both undone. He walks purposefully to the centre of the living room, removing his jacket as he goes. He throws it on the couch and sits down on one of the chairs facing Brad.

Brad ignores him, so Billy moves his chair so that he is blocking Brad's view of the TV. Brad leans to one side, and Billy leans to block him. Brad leans to the other side, and Billy does the same. They both return to the middle, and Brad slumps a little in resignation and stares at Billy in expectation.

BILLY

I have to talk to you about something ...

Brad points the remote control at Billy and jabs at the buttons. Billy grabs the remote from Brad, points it over his shoulder to turn off the TV, then puts it down on the chair beside him. Brad stares at his empty hand for a few seconds, then pretends to look around on the couch for the remote control, then slowly looks up at Billy.

BILLY

I've got a problem at work.

BRAD

And you think I can relate? That's funny.

BILLY

It's serious. I have to make a decision by tomorrow...

BRAD

Wow. Work sounds tough. I don't think I'd like it.

BILLY

... And it could change my entire  
life...

BRAD

Is that a good thing or a bad  
thing?

Billy grabs the living room phone off of the coffee table and  
punches in some numbers, making faces at Brad.

BILLY

Jeff? It's Billy. I've got this big  
problem and I need to talk about it  
with somebody. Do you think you  
could come over? Well, yeah, it's  
not a phone problem. Oh, that's  
great. Thanks a lot. See ya in a  
bit.

Billy hangs up the phone.

BRAD

What'd you phone Jeff for?

BILLY

Because he's willing to help me.

BRAD

If I help you instead, will you  
cancel the Jeff signal?

BILLY

(pause)  
Maybe.

BRAD

Okay. Here's my advice: flip a  
coin. Heads you say yes, tails you  
say no.

Billy stares at Brad with a disbelieving look.

BRAD (CONT'D)

I warned you...

Brad narrows his gaze.

BRAD (CONT'D)

I did warn you, didn't I ?

BILLY

I am NOT going to make a decision that could alter my entire destiny with a coin toss! I want logic and reasoning, a list of pros and cons, with weighted values and flow charts and pie charts and probabilities and possible outcomes and scenarios! This is my LIFE we're talking about here! Not a game of chance!

BRAD

Life IS a game of chance. You know, you do it all the time. Maybe not actually flipping a coin, but you make snap decisions on an almost constant basis that are changing your life in ways you don't even realize. Can I beat this red light? Should I order the chicken or the fish? Should I ask that girl out and then see a doctor about this pain in my arm? At least with the coin toss method you can externalize the blame.

BILLY

I still want to talk it out properly.

BRAD

Why? Not enough self-doubt already?

Billy removes his necktie and folds it up, putting it in his shirt pocket.

BILLY

No... In case some irrational fears are holding me back. In case my biases are interfering with my reasoning. In case I'm making incorrect assumptions, or not envisioning all possible results. A coin toss doesn't take any of that into consideration.

BRAD

Yes. A more impartial judge you'll never find.

Billy stares at Brad with an incredulous look.

BILLY

It's scary, how you sometimes  
almost make sense.

The phone rings and Billy reaches for it.

BRAD

What do you mean, "almost"?

Billy answers the phone.

BRAD (CONT'D)

What do you mean, "sometimes"?

BILLY

Hello? Yeah, it's Billy. Uh, sorry,  
I can't make it tonight, I'm having  
a crisis. No, not faith, I don't  
have any faith. It's work-related.  
No, I didn't get fired. I have to  
make this decision, and I need some  
help. What am I supposed to do,  
flip a coin?

(pause)

You've been talking to Brad,  
haven't you?

Brad gives the thumbs up sign and smiles.

BILLY

All right. See you in a bit.

Billy hangs up the phone.

BRAD

So who was that?

BILLY

That was Steve. We were supposed to  
hang out tonight. He's going to  
come over instead, help me out.

BRAD

Yes, you certainly need help on a  
big decision like this.

BILLY

I haven't even told you what the  
decision is yet!

BRAD

And I don't need to know. I'm kind  
of like a coin toss, myself.

Billy is gesturing wildly.

BILLY  
You're unbelievable. You're  
actually LESS than no help at all!

BRAD  
You say "less", I say "a step in a  
different direction".

BILLY  
I refuse to believe my decisions  
are worthless!

BRAD  
The universe admires your  
stubbornness as it rolls right over  
you.

Brad lifts up one of the couch cushions.

BILLY  
And I don't want to blame others  
for my decisions! I value my  
friends' input and viewpoints!

BRAD  
Just not mine...

Billy is pacing around the room with nervous energy.

BILLY  
Because your input isn't really  
input at all! You're the one trying  
to avoid blame and responsibility!

BRAD  
For your life, yes.

Brad finds a quarter in the couch and picks it up.

BILLY  
So you make your own decisions when  
they're yours?

BRAD  
Of course.

BILLY  
Then why are you suggesting that I  
flip a coin?

BRAD

Two reasons: one, because I'm more sure of myself than you are, and two, because I still don't know what your problem is yet.

Brad throws the quarter to Billy. He catches it but doesn't look at it, instead staring at Brad in disbelief for a few seconds.

BILLY

Your logic is flawed and full of contradictions.

BRAD

So's the universe. I'm just trying to fit in.

BILLY

I thought you were a rebel.

BRAD

I have needs...

There is a knock at the door.

BILLY

Jeff's here.

BRAD

As we knew he would be.

Billy hastens to the front door, pocketing the coin. JEFF enters. He is in his early 30's, good-looking, dressed by The Gap. Jeff doesn't like Brad, but is polite to him.

BILLY

Hey, Jeff!

JEFF

Hey, Billy. Brad.

Billy and Jeff return to the centre of the living room.

BRAD

Hey, Jeff. How's Tanya?

Jeff runs his hand through his hair on the top of his head and sucks in a breath through his teeth.

JEFF

She's fine. Actually, I have to meet up with her pretty soon...

Jeff checks his watch while Brad studies his body language.

BRAD

Well, how... nice of you to spare a few moments from your busy schedule to help Billy out. Isn't that... nice, Billy?

Jeff gives Brad a suspicious glance. Billy gets between them.

BILLY

Come on in, sit down for a bit.

Everybody sits down. Billy is in a chair, Jeff and Brad are on opposite ends of the couch.

JEFF

So, Billy -- what's the big prob?

Jeff gives Billy his full attention. Brad puts one arm on the couch armrest to prop his head up while he stares at the far wall. Billy looks back and forth between Jeff and Brad, then turns to Jeff and takes a deep breath.

BILLY

I just got word from the head office in Portland. They actually got their heads out of their asses and noticed all my hard work. I've been offered a promotion.

JEFF

And...?

BILLY

And I don't know whether or not I should accept it. They need my answer by tomorrow morning.

Brad sits up and leans in towards Billy.

BRAD

Wow... Why didn't you say...

Jeff cuts Brad off.

JEFF

What's the big deal? Accept the promotion.

BILLY

What? You didn't even think about it!



JEFF

What's to think about?

BILLY

This promotion could change my entire life!

JEFF

Billy, your life sucks. Don't you want better than...

Jeff waves his hand around the room.

JEFF (CONT'D)

This?

BILLY

Oh, look at you, all passing judgment on my lifestyle... I'll have you know, my life does not suck!

JEFF

Uh, you say it sucks, like, all the time.

Brad gets tired of waiting for a spot to jump into the conversation, so he patiently leans back on the couch and watches intently and bemused.

BILLY

Well, sure, in comparison to a better life, but now we're talking about mine!

JEFF

That doesn't make sense, and your life still sucks.

BILLY

What kind of a friend are you?!!

JEFF

One who doesn't understand why you don't want to better your life.

Billy turns his body away slightly in his chair.

BILLY

I want to better my life... Which does not suck, but could not suck less... Uh, more... Just... Maybe not this way. On my own terms.

JEFF

And what terms are those?

BILLY

Doing something I love to do,  
something I feel passionate  
about...

JEFF

Such as...?

Billy avoids eye contact with either of his friends.

BILLY

I want to be a writer.

JEFF

Pfft. Doesn't everybody?

Billy turns to look directly at Jeff, pointing at him for emphasis.

BILLY

Ah, but not everybody does it!

JEFF

And you are?

BILLY

I've written... things!

JEFF

Are you any good?

BILLY

Sure!

JEFF

Good enough to make a living from  
it?

BILLY

Maybe!

JEFF

All right then. If you have that  
much faith in your writing, don't  
take the promotion.

There is a long, silent pause. Brad takes advantage of the lull and leans in again.

BRAD

Should have flipped a coin...

Billy is rubbing his temples with his fingertips.

BILLY

That's just... That's just...

BRAD

WAY too much responsibility for  
your own future!

JEFF

WHAT?!!

BRAD

So why is it a choice between the  
promotion and writing?

BILLY

There's a couple of reasons...  
First off, it's a big promotion. If  
I took it, I'd have less time to  
write because I'd have more  
responsibility at work.

Billy removes his necktie from his pocket and starts fiddling  
with it, stretching it, wrapping it around his left hand,  
then his right.

BILLY (CONT'D)

I don't want to be one of those  
people who says they'd write a book  
if only they had the time. This  
promotion could be the difference  
between me and them.

Billy looks up nervously at Jeff and Brad to see if that's  
enough of a reason. They look at him blankly, so he  
continues. He stares at the floor, fidgeting uncomfortably,  
pulling the necktie taut, twisting the ends around his fists.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Another reason is more... I kinda  
set a goal for myself to become a  
famous writer by the time I turned  
30. The big birthday's coming up,  
and, it's like, this is my last  
shot.

Brad leans back on one arm and nods his head in  
understanding. Billy takes this as encouraging and continues.  
He opens his hands, palms up, the tie dangling from one hand.

BILLY (CONT'D)

And the other reason is it's  
like... this choice... between...

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

what kind of a life I'm going to lead. Do I try to make a go of it, doing something I really want to do, or do I sell out and take the promotion, and the money, and get on the corporate fast track and become... and become...

Brad jerks his thumb in Jeff's direction.

BRAD

Him?

JEFF

Excuse me?

Brad spreads his arms out questioningly, palms up.

JEFF (CONT'D)

What's wrong with me?

BRAD

You don't even know. That's a bad start.

Billy is helplessly watching in horror.

JEFF

Unlike you, I am a productive member of society!

BRAD

Who actually says things like that! Wow!

Brad scrunches his face and shivers.

JEFF

Hey! Guys like me keep this country running! What do writers do?

BRAD

I think they write things for guys like you to read when you're not running the country... Oh, and good job on that, by the way.

Brad gives Jeff a thumbs up. Jeff gives Brad a nasty look, then turns to Billy.

JEFF

What if you aren't a good enough writer? You haven't made it yet.

(MORE)

JEFF (CONT'D)

You think you'll make it in the next few months? You're going to still need this job! And you could use the extra security of the promotion, not to mention the extra money.

BRAD

Money isn't everything...

Jeff leans closer to Brad, snapping out his words.

JEFF

No, it's only your rent. And your groceries. And your phone bill, and gas, and electricity ...

Brad leans a little towards Jeff to show he's not intimidated, enunciating his words clearly.

BRAD

It's not integrity. It's not creativity. It's not self-respect.

Brad looks sideways at Billy, as if seeing him for the first time. Billy is looking at the floor.

JEFF

Look, you want to write? Write. Just don't let what you think you have to do get in the way of what you REALLY have to do. It sounds like a nice dream, but how realistic is it? The odds are against you. Take the promotion.

BILLY

Sometimes you have to take chances.

JEFF

With your entire life?

BILLY

Yes.

JEFF

Why?

BILLY

To get what you really want. Nothing worthwhile ever comes easily, or should. That's pretty much the definition of "worthwhile".

JEFF

What if it doesn't turn out? Is it  
"worthwhile" then?

Billy pauses and thinks.

BILLY

Yes. I think so, yes.

JEFF

And I think you're deluding  
yourself.

Billy looks away.

BILLY

Sometimes... you have to do that,  
too.

The three sit in uneasy silence. Jeff looks at his watch.

JEFF

Crap! I'm late! I was supposed to  
meet Tanya at the restaurant 10  
minutes ago!

Jeff gets up to leave.

JEFF (CONT'D)

If she drops by, tell her I left,  
uh, 15 minutes ago, okay?

Brad gets up, smiling, and escorts Jeff to the front door.  
His voice is dripping with sarcasm.

BRAD

Sure. We'll do that. Hey, thanks  
for coming over and providing us  
with such wonderful insight.

Jeff exits out the front door, stops and angrily turns to  
point at Brad.

JEFF

You know, you...

Brad slams the door in Jeff's face, then returns to the  
living room and stands near Billy, studying him cautiously.

BRAD

What a dork.

Billy throws his necktie onto the couch where Jeff was,  
overhand, with some force.

BILLY

What the hell? Why did I phone him for help?

BRAD

Because to you, he seems to have his life all in order. You thought he'd have some insight into what to do with yours.

BILLY

Yeah, I just forgot he's such a... normal. I mean, he's a nice guy, a great guy, he just doesn't have any... vision.

BRAD

If nobody ever pursued their dreams, they'd never achieve them, and then there'd be nothing great in the world.

BILLY

You sound like a fortune cookie.

BRAD

I was aiming for bumper sticker. Jeff just... doesn't have any dreams.

BILLY

He doesn't need any, he's dating Tanya! Why do guys like Jeff always get girls like her, anyway? Me, I don't even have a girlfriend! I'm gonna spend my thirtieth birthday alone.

Billy buries his face in his hands, then looks up to the ceiling.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Why can't I have it all? Why can't I have a great girlfriend and lots of money and a great job, or at least be mindless enough to not know any better?

BRAD

Why, indeed. Hey, I heard their relationship's in trouble. You could...

Brad nods once and winks at Billy, who turns and gives Brad a level look. Brad walks backwards into the kitchen, pointing at Billy.

BRAD (CONT'D)  
Think about it. I hafta make a  
phone call. You could have it all!  
Dream big!

Billy buries his face in his hands again. There is a knock on the door. Billy looks up with a tired expression, then gets up and crosses to the front door to open it, muttering to himself.

BILLY  
I'll get it. It's probably Jeff...  
Wanting to break my writing hand...

2 THE KITCHEN

2

Brad is talking on the kitchen phone extension.

BRAD  
As soon as you can, we could use  
another viewpoint... No, it's not a  
favour to me... No, it's not a  
favour to him... Because it'll be  
funny... Okay, see you in a bit...

Brad hangs up the phone.

3 THE LIVING ROOM

3

STEVE is in his late 20's and looks stupid. He is stupid. He is somewhat stocky and has a moustache, a print shirt and shorts. He and Billy are sitting down, Steve on the couch, Billy in his chair. Brad enters the living room from the kitchen and rejoins them on the couch.

BILLY  
Brad! Steve understands!

BRAD  
Great! Which one of you is Steve?

Steve gives Brad a puzzled look.

STEVE  
Hey.

Brad and Steve shake hands, then Brad sits down on the couch.



STEVE

So you, like, want to be a writer,  
right?

BILLY

Right!

STEVE

And you gotta, you know, do whatcha  
gotta do.

BILLY

Right!

STEVE

And if you take the promotion,  
you're losing a part of your  
individuality, your identity,  
'cause they'll expect you to  
conform and stuff.

BILLY

Right...

Brad looks bemused.

STEVE

And, like, you'll become some sort  
of corporate suit-wearin' type. You  
don't want to wear a suit for the  
rest of your life, do you?

BILLY

Hell, no!

BRAD

This is inspiring.

STEVE

And you wouldn't have any time to  
spend with your buds! Hangin' out,  
shootin' the breeze...

Brad looks back and forth from Steve to Billy.

BRAD

Are you... one of them?

STEVE

I mean, look at me: I go to work, I  
don't have to think too hard, and  
when I'm done for the day, I'm  
done. Right?

BILLY

Uh huh...

Brad turns to Billy.

BRAD

What do you DO when I'm not around?

STEVE

I mean, I don't want to work all my life. I want to have fun.

BRAD

Do you hang out with this guy a lot?

STEVE

And you, you want to write. I'm no good at that sort of thing, so I don't know... But yeah, don't take the promotion, that's just bad news. That's the end of your life, man.

BRAD

Well, unless you believe in reincarnation.

STEVE

Believe in what?

BRAD

What about the money? If he takes the promotion, he'll get more money. Then he could afford to buy more stuff, and have more expensive fun...

STEVE

Huh. Hadn't thought of that...

BRAD

Should we give you a minute? Two, five, ten...?

STEVE

Okay, but what good's more money if you don't have time to spend it?

BRAD

You get the condensed package. They cram more in.

STEVE

Would you have time to work, write,  
AND hang out with the guys?

BRAD

Oh, you could probably drop one of  
those...

Brad throws a pointed glance at Steve. Billy turns to Brad.

BILLY

Why are you on the other side of  
the argument now?

Brad leans toward Steve.

BRAD

You're not in sales, are you?

STEVE

No, I work in a warehouse.

BILLY

I thought you were against the  
promotion...

STEVE

Is there something wrong with  
working in a warehouse?

BRAD

No, not at all! It's timeless,  
honourable work.

Brad turns to Billy.

BRAD (CONT'D)

This is the other side? Maybe we  
should get Jeff back here...

BILLY

You think he might be right?

STEVE

I like it... And I'm happy just  
doing that. I don't want more.

BRAD

Sometimes you have to do things you  
don't like, or don't want to. We  
have to figure out if this is one  
of those times... Not every artist  
should be an artist.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

You and I have been to enough gallery openings to realize that. We have to find out what's right for you. To do that, we need more opinions, including different, opposing ones.

BILLY

But...

BRAD

Billy! I'm gonna take care of it. I went through the same thing when I turned thirty. It was terrible! I won't let it happen to you.

BILLY

What did you do?

BRAD

I got drunk. That's... our back-up plan. For now, phone everybody you know and tell them to come over.

BILLY

Sure. Why not?

Billy gets up and heads to the kitchen. There is a knock on the front door.

BRAD

I'll get the door, because I live here or something...

Brad stands up and turns to Steve.

BRAD (CONT'D)

And you -- grow TOWARDS the sun.

Steve makes a puzzled face at Brad.

STEVE

Speaking of getting drunk...

BRAD

Fridge.

Steve follows Billy into the kitchen. Brad opens the front door and sees TANYA. She is in her late 20's. She is very attractive but cold-looking, and fashionably-dressed, but not too expensively. She is wearing a short skirt that shows off her legs.

BRAD

Tanya!

Brad flashes a big smile that is almost sincere.

4

THE KITCHEN

4

Steve is looking in the fridge. Billy is on the phone, not looking at Steve.

STEVE

Is this all you have?

BILLY

Yeah, what are you doing tonight?

STEVE

Because this is barely enough for me.

BILLY

Can you come over? I've having a crisis.

STEVE

Unless you guys aren't drinking...

BILLY

No, not sexual identity... I've been offered a promotion and I don't know whether or not to take it.

STEVE

If you're inviting more people over, though...

BILLY

You thought I was gay?

STEVE

You could be gay. I'm making a beer run. You want anything?

Billy waves Steve off.

BILLY

Oh, you consider that a compliment... Well, thanks, I guess.

Steve exits the kitchen.

5

THE LIVING ROOM

5

Brad is seated on the couch. Tanya is perched on the edge of Billy's chair as if she is ready to leave. Steve enters the living room.

STEVE

Hey, Brad. I'm...

Steve sees Tanya.

STEVE (CONT'D)

Well, hello...

BRAD

Ah, here's Steve. What you see is pretty much what you get.

STEVE

Pleased to meet you. And you are?

TANYA

(icy)

Tanya.

BRAD

Tanya is Jeff's girlfriend.

Steve loses interest in Tanya.

STEVE

Lucky guy. I'm makin' a beer run.  
You two want anything?

BRAD

Some coolers, maybe.

Brad turns to Tanya.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Do you...?

TANYA

No. I won't be here long.

Steve goes to the front door and exits the apartment.

BRAD

Right, Jeff, should get here soon.  
He's usually so dependable. How are  
you two getting along?

TANYA

We're fine. When did he say he would get here?

BRAD

Oh, any time now. Say, maybe you could help us with our problem while you wait...

TANYA

Us?

BRAD

Billy's problem, actually. He's been offered a promotion at work and isn't sure if he should take it or not.

TANYA

Well, I don't really care, but if he wants the promotion, he should take it. If he doesn't want the promotion, then he shouldn't take it. What's so hard about that?

BRAD

There's more to it than just what he wants. There's the whole matter of what's best for him, what's good for his future. Like, if he was your boyfriend, what would you suggest he do?

TANYA

I'd tell him to take it.

BRAD

Okay, but what if you knew he wanted to be a writer? Then what?

Tanya makes a sour face.

TANYA

A writer? Yuck. Take the promotion.

BRAD

"Yuck"?

TANYA

Writer's are poor. It's so unattractive.

BRAD

But what if your boyfriend took the promotion and had less time to spend with you? What about that?

TANYA

I'd tell him to make time for me.

BRAD

But what if he wanted to write?

TANYA

Who cares what he wants? Take the promotion.

BRAD

But you said earlier that he should do what he wants. Now you're saying that doesn't matter.

TANYA

Yeah, because it's different now.

BRAD

How is it different?

TANYA

Because now it's MY boyfriend.

BRAD

So if it was Jeff, you'd say take the promotion.

TANYA

Right.

BRAD

Even if he didn't want to take it?

TANYA

If the only reason he didn't want the promotion was so that he could write, then, yeah. Especially.

Tanya looks around, slightly bored.

BRAD

Okay, but now it's Billy. What do you say to him?



TANYA

Billy should do what he wants. If he wants to write, and be poor, and be alone and live in a shack, then he should do that.

BRAD

So you're against the promotion?

TANYA

He doesn't want it?

BRAD

No, I don't think so.

TANYA

What an idiot.

6

THE KITCHEN

6

Billy is talking on the phone.

BILLY

Yeah, as soon as you can, I'm having a crisis. No, it's not medical. I have to make a decision with regards to the rest of my life. What do you mean, that's not going anywhere fast? Just get over here, now! Thank you.

Billy hangs up the phone, checks a list of phone numbers written on a piece of paper on the wall, then leaves the kitchen.

7

THE LIVING ROOM

7

Billy returns to the living room from the kitchen and notices that Tanya has arrived.

BILLY

Oh, hi, Tanya.

BRAD

Tanya dropped by to try to catch Jeff. He should be here ANY MINUTE NOW...

BILLY

Huh?

Billy looks back and forth between Brad and Tanya.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
Right... Like he said...

BRAD  
Tanya's for refusing the promotion.

Billy turns to Tanya.

BILLY  
Really?

TANYA  
Look, we don't hang out much, but  
if we did, I'd hate to spend time  
with somebody who kept going on and  
on about how he could have been a  
writer, how great he could have  
been, blah, blah, blah...

BRAD  
But if he tried, and failed, then  
he'd be going on and on about how  
he should have taken that  
promotion, how trying to be a  
writer ruined his life, blah, blah,  
blah...

TANYA  
But he'd be a writer, and poor, and  
unattractive, and we wouldn't be  
hanging out!

BRAD  
Wow. I'm trying to find holes in  
your reasoning, but it's pretty  
airtight.

TANYA  
Of course it is.

BRAD  
(quietly)  
Mind you, airtight doesn't let air  
in, either...

ROB quietly enters through the front door and makes his way  
to the centre of the living room.

TANYA  
What was that?

BRAD  
Nothing.

TANYA

No, you said something.

BRAD

Rob! Your timing is impeccable!

ROB is in his mid-30's, thin, very casually dressed in a loose-fitting shirt from a thrift shop and corduroy pants with patches on the knees and rear. He is very mellow and relaxed.

ROB

Hey guys...

BILLY

Didn't hear you knock...

ROB

I didn't want to disturb you.  
Besides, borders are for people who  
need to be told their limitations.

BRAD

You don't have limitations?

ROB

I don't know. I also lack the  
initiative to find out.

Rob turns to Tanya.

ROB (CONT'D)

Hi.

TANYA

(wary)

Hello.

BRAD

So, want to hear about Billy's  
problem?

ROB

Whoa, whoa, don't be in such a  
hurry to get the polite socializing  
out of the way... How've you been?

Rob sits down on the couch.

BRAD

Oh, I'm good. Or, at least I will  
be when Steve returns with the  
beer.

ROB

Yeah, great. There isn't a problem  
in the world that can't be solved  
with beer.

TANYA

Except maybe alcoholism.

ROB

If you consider that a problem...

TANYA

Most people do.

ROB

I'm not most people.

BRAD

If he was, he'd be bigger.

ROB

Problems are just circumstances  
with bad attitudes.

BRAD

You just make that up now?

Rob flashes a big smile. Billy is getting impatient.

ROB

Yeah. Not bad, huh?

BRAD

Deep. So deep, I need a shovel...  
To hit you over the head with!

ROB

Oh, Brad, I hope I never get on  
your bad side. Of course, that's  
assuming you have a good side!

BILLY

Are you two just about done?

BRAD

That's right, Billy has a crisis.  
And he's only got another...

Brad looks up at a clock.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Fourteen hours or so to solve it.

ROB

That's plenty of time. We could do five, six crises if we had to.

BRAD

Right! They say Rome wasn't built in a day, but they could have tried harder.

BILLY

I am trying to make a decision that is going to directly affect the rest of my life! I would appreciate a less casual attitude towards it.

ROB

You want us to pretend to care?

BRAD

I thought we did care, but were pretending not to.

Tanya turns to Billy.

TANYA

Can I read some of your writing?

Billy is visibly startled.

BILLY

What?

TANYA

While I'm waiting for Jeff. I don't expect much, but it's got to be better than...

Tanya gestures at Rob and Brad.

TANYA (CONT'D)

This.

BILLY

Uh, okay... I guess... Uh, come on...

Billy grabs his jacket off of the couch and he and Tanya go into Billy's bedroom. Brad and Rob watch them leave, then start talking once they're out of sight.

ROB

That's Jeff's girlfriend?

BRAD

Yep.

ROB

Lucky guy...

BRAD

Not really.

ROB

No, not really.

BRAD

I'm going to break them up.

ROB

Why?

BRAD

Jeff's too nice. He's not enough of a challenge for her. In any good relationship, there has to be a struggle for dominance. In the best relationships, it's never resolved. Jeff probably gave in within the first week of dating.

ROB

You think?

BRAD

Yeah. Well, look at her.

Brad gestures towards Billy's bedroom.

ROB

I like how you make decisions on how your friends' lives should be.

BRAD

It's for their own good. Some might call it "meddling". Others might call it "proactive externally-stimulated circumstance realization and conclusion-accelerant".

ROB

They would have broken up anyway?

BRAD

I don't know how they've lasted this long... The relationship's already in trouble. It just needs a little push.

ROB

This isn't because you want her for yourself, is it?

BRAD

I'd be lying if I said "no", and I'd be lying if I said I thought I had a chance. My pants are pretty much on fire.

Rob leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees, looking at a magazine on the coffee table.

ROB

So, are you doing the same thing for Billy? Helping him realize his decision, giving him a push towards the right answer?

BRAD

I would be, if I knew what the right answer was.

ROB

You don't know?

BRAD

Not yet, but we've got lots of time to figure it out. A great man once said, "Rome wasn't built in a day, but they could have tried harder."

Rob picks up the magazine and sits up, looking at Brad.

ROB

That was you.

BRAD

Yes. That's what I meant. Don't worry. We'll know by the end of the night.

Billy's bedroom is messy, but not too messy. The bed is made, some clothes have been thrown on it. There is a large set of bookshelves on one wall with many books. The other wall has a desk and chair against it. There are pens, binders and loose sheets of paper all over the desk. There is a stuffed teddy bear on the bed pillow. Tanya is looking around the room with cautious curiosity. Billy follows her nervously, throwing some clothes from the bed to a far corner of the floor.

TANYA

Is this how a writer lives?

BILLY

I don't know about other writers. I  
don't even know if I'm a writer.

Tanya looks at some of the book titles, running her fingers  
over the spines.

TANYA

A lot of books... Have you read  
them all?

BILLY

Most of them.

TANYA

Do they help you write?

BILLY

Yes.

TANYA

I don't like guys who read too  
much. It gives them ideas.

Tanya turns her attention to Billy's desk, fingering some of  
the papers, but not moving them.

BILLY

Jeff doesn't read?

TANYA

Not that I know of.

BILLY

Did he read much before you started  
dating?

TANYA

I don't know. Why?

BILLY

I was just wondering how much you'd  
changed him.

Tanya turns to look at Billy.

TANYA

So, I'm the controlling bitch  
girlfriend, am I?



BILLY

Oh, no! Brad... was saying  
something... the other day...

Billy points behind him with his thumb.

TANYA

I get the impression Brad says a  
lot of things...

BILLY

Yeah, well... He's all right. I  
mean, he's helping me with my  
problem, after all. You just have  
to look past the sarcasm.

Tanya continues looking at Billy's desk, picking up a page  
and putting it back down.

TANYA

He'll help you, but you have to pay  
a price...

BILLY

Something like that. It's not so  
bad...

TANYA

How can you stand living with him?

BILLY

You get used to it.

TANYA

I couldn't.

BILLY

You're too much alike.

TANYA

Excuse me?

Tanya looks at Billy again with a disbelieving look.

BILLY

Oh, no, you're not as bad! I'm just  
saying, you two have very strong  
opinions and worldviews, a definite  
take on how things should be,  
though they're totally different...  
You're both... strong  
personalities, is what I'm  
saying...

Tanya rests her hands on her hips.

TANYA

Hmm. Maybe you could make it as a writer after all.

BILLY

Yeah?

TANYA

Yeah. You can sure lay it on thick. And it's nice to know I'm "not as bad"...

Billy is all flustered.

BILLY

It's... It's not like there's anything wrong with who you are, or even with who Brad is, it's just that you two wouldn't be... compatible... together...

TANYA

Yeah, I knew that the first time I met him. And again, it's nice to know there's "nothing wrong with who I am". Now I'm really curious about your writing, if it's as exciting and insightful as this conversation...

BILLY

Heh, well... Of course, I'm not exactly writing what I'm saying, I'm just talking off the top of my head... I'm not so good in person...

TANYA

Hmm.

Billy forages around his desk for some papers, picks them up and flips through them, looking for one in particular.

BILLY

I read somewhere once that really talented and creative people who made the best art tended to be quite boring in person, and that exciting and interesting people tended to make bad art.

(MORE)

BILLY (CONT'D)

I don't know to what degree this has affected me -- either consciously or subconsciously -- and if I'm secretly hoping that I'm boring, or if I'm trying on purpose to be boring, so that my writing will improve.

Billy starts to stammer slightly.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Of course, I realize that that's backwards, that being boring might be the result of being talented, and not the other way around, and of course knowing about that makes it all... sort of... contrived...

Tanya stares levelly at Billy.

TANYA

And that is why I don't like Jeff reading books...

Billy shuts up and hands Tanya some papers.

9

THE LIVING ROOM

9

Rob and Brad are still seated on the couch. Rob picks up a magazine from the coffee table and flips through it absent-mindedly, not really looking at it.

ROB

So what do you think Billy should do?

BRAD

It doesn't matter what I think. And I don't want him to know. I've decided I'm going to try to not influence him one way or the other. I'll just help him gather opinions and viewpoints and encourage him to make a decision without pushing him towards any specific choice.

ROB

Blame-avoidance?

BRAD

You know it.

ROB

What if he makes the wrong decision, then blames you for not steering him towards the right one?

BRAD

I'll have to reassure him of my neutrality. I suppose some sort of written record would be best...

Brad gets up and disappears into Brad's bedroom.

ROB

Yes. Proof of your non-complicity for years down the road, when he's destroyed and homeless, cursing your name.

Brad calls out from inside Brad's bedroom.

BRAD

So should I put you down for taking the promotion?

Brad re-emerges from Brad's bedroom and returns to the centre of the living room.

ROB

No, hold off on me for now. I want to hear more of the fors and againsts. Is that going to be anonymous?

BRAD

Yeah, okay. I'll just give him the final numbers or something, no specifics.

Brad sits back down on the couch.

ROB

Good, good. That way, he can't blame any single person. Just all of us, collectively.

BRAD

What are friends for?

Brad puts the memo pad and pen in his pajama top pocket.

BRAD (CONT'D)

I've got this theory, that you're only as good as your friends.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

If you have good friends, they help you out, encourage you to succeed. But if you have bad friends, they drag you down with them. I don't know if it's out of jealousy, or if they don't want to lose you, but it definitely happens.

ROB

Hmm. Billy's screwed.

10

BILLY'S BEDROOM

10

Tanya is sitting on the bed. Billy is standing beside the bookshelf. He doesn't see Tanya look up from the pages to stare at him. The writing has affected her and her view of Billy has changed, though she hides it very well. Tanya finishes reading and looks up, putting the pages down on her lap.

BILLY

Well? What do you think?

TANYA

That wasn't bad, but I don't get the ending. What happened?

BILLY

It's deliberately ambiguous. I leave it up to the reader's imagination, what he or she thinks the characters will do.

TANYA

Seems kind of cheap to me.

BILLY

What do you mean?

TANYA

I like a little closure. I want to know what happens. I've gone to the trouble of reading your story, but you didn't finish it.

Tanya flicks the pages with her free hand.

BILLY

But that's up to you. It reflects what you bring to the story, it helps reveal a part of you.

TANYA

Seems more like a cop-out to me.

Tanya hands Billy back his story, which he holds close to his chest.

BILLY

A cop-out?

TANYA

You're too lazy to write an ending, or you can't figure one out, or commit to it. So you don't, and you call it artistic, and you turn your nose up at people who try to call you on it. It's a cop-out, because you can't figure out the ending to your own story. And it is your story -- if I wanted to make up my own endings, then I'd write my own stories.

BILLY

You're... You're ripping my heart out...

TANYA

What heart?

Tanya stares levelly at Billy.

TANYA (CONT'D)

Do you have any stories with endings?

Billy sorts through his papers, glancing up at Tanya nervously.

11 THE LIVING ROOM

11

Rob is still holding the magazine, but is no longer looking through it. Brad gets up and heads to the stereo system, looking for a record to play.

ROB

What would you do in Billy's position?

BRAD

I don't know... I guess that would depend on whether I was a good writer or not, and Billy's never shown me any of his writing, so I don't know if he is or not.

ROB

Does he think he's any good? If he was, wouldn't he want to show you some of it?

BRAD

Not necessarily. I've noticed that people who think they're good writers, or artists, what have you, actually aren't any good. The ones who are all humble and self-criticizing are the most talented.

ROB

Some sort of inverse relationship of self-opinion to actual talent?

Brad finds a good record.

BRAD

Right. The better you think you are, the worse you really are, and vice versa.

ROB

So if Billy thought he was any good, he'd actually be bad, but he'd want to show you his writing because he'd think he was good...

Brad removes the record from its sleeve.

BRAD

And if he thought he was bad, he'd actually be good, but he wouldn't want to show me because he'd be afraid I'd tell him he was bad...

ROB

Which you wouldn't, because he'd be good.

Brad places the record on the turntable.

BRAD

Unless he was bad, and thought he was bad, in a rare case of humility and perception...

ROB

Unless he was good, and thought he was good, but was just afraid you'd dismiss his efforts with a sarcastic remark like you do with virtually everything else.

Brad starts the turntable spinning.

BRAD

So he might not want to show me his writing because he's good, or because he thinks he's good, or because he's bad, or because he thinks he's bad, or for some other reason we haven't thought of yet.

ROB

Have you ever ASKED to read some of his writing?

Brad looks up and back at Rob.

BRAD

Well, that wouldn't count, would it?

Brad drops the needle, and music starts playing.

12

BILLY'S BEDROOM

12

Tanya is still sitting on the bed, Billy is now sitting on the chair at the desk.

TANYA

This one better have an ending.

BILLY

It has an ending.

TANYA

Because I'm reading it, and when I get to the end, there'd better be an ending.

BILLY

It'll be there.

Billy watches Tanya reading. The music can be heard bleeding through the walls. His gaze drifts from her face to her breasts to her legs, then back up to her skirt hemline. Tanya's eyes dart to the side, and she sees what he's staring at.



She wiggles a bit, shifting her legs to give him a different view, and smiles a little, but he doesn't notice. Finally, she puts the papers down on her lap.

TANYA

Okay, that wasn't so bad, was it?  
Now, why does this story have an ending and the other one didn't?

BILLY

Because I'm trying to do different things with them. Because with this one, I had a definite conclusion, but this one...

TANYA

... is up to the reader, yeah, yeah.

BILLY

So what'd you think of this one?

TANYA

Even though it had a proper ending, I think I liked the other one better.

Tanya holds the pages up again and looks at them.

BILLY

A-ha! See? The so-called "incomplete" story involves you more, it draws you in, and you end up liking it more.

TANYA

No, it's just better written.

BILLY

All right. But then isn't that proof that the ending -- or lack thereof -- isn't important?

Tanya picks up the first story from the desk.

TANYA

No. This would be an even better story if it had an ending. Why not take the ending from this story and put it on the end of this one?

BILLY

Well, I can't do that... They're completely different stories.

TANYA

Why not? They're both about a guy  
obsessing over a girl, or "lack  
thereof"... Autobiographical,  
perhaps? Write what you know?

Tanya looks up at Billy with a sly look. Billy shifts  
uncomfortably.

BILLY

I'd be lying if I said there wasn't  
a part of me in each story...

TANYA

So your life doesn't have enough  
endings? No experience with closure  
to draw from?

Tanya quietly pockets the pages when Billy looks away.

BILLY

Well, no. But then, who does?

TANYA

You're saying you've been spending  
your life mooning over girls and  
never done anything about it?

BILLY

No, I've had girlfriends! It's just  
always been so... anti-climactic.  
The relationships just seem to...  
die out gradually. There's never  
any definite ending that feels like  
an ending. And, of course, I've  
mooned over way more girls than  
I've dated. And with those, there's  
never any closure.

Tanya gets a little coy.

TANYA

What kind of girls do you obsess  
over?

BILLY

Oh, it's not any specific type.  
They have to be smart, funny...

TANYA

I understand, you have to say that.

Tanya gets up and strolls to the bookcase. Billy stands and  
backs up, giving her room.

BILLY

What? No, I mean it.

TANYA

What you mean is, smart, but not smarter than you. And funny, but not as funny as you, just funny enough to laugh at your jokes.

BILLY

No, not at all! I like being challenged...

TANYA

But not to lose an argument... You guys are all the same. What else, what other qualities?

Tanya spins around and faces Billy, smiling wickedly.

BILLY

Attractive, but not conceited...

TANYA

Oh, come on!

BILLY

What?

TANYA

No, wait, I've got it -- reminds me of my mother...

BILLY

NO... What about you? What do you look for in a guy?

TANYA

Not too smart. And...

BILLY

A-ha! You like guys who aren't too smart!

TANYA

Yes...

BILLY

But you know that guys like women who aren't smarter than they are!

TANYA

And...?

BILLY

So you purposely go out with guys who won't be happy in the relationship because they aren't the smart one!

Tanya rolls her eyes.

TANYA

You'll never have to worry about that burden... First, it makes it easier to get out of the relationship if I want to. If they're dumb enough, they realize they're dumb, and they know they can't do anything about it. And if they're not quite that dumb, you just let them think they're smarter than you. Then you plant ideas and let them think they came up with them. Guys are easy to control.

Tanya pulls a book out of the shelf, looks at it briefly, then puts it back in the wrong spot on purpose.

BILLY

Which do you prefer, dumb or just smart enough?

TANYA

Given the choice, the better-looking one.

BILLY

Have you ever gone out with somebody smarter than you?

TANYA

Yes.

BILLY

Then how did you control him?

TANYA

Pfft. As if logic and reasoning were the only way to control a guy...

Brad and Rob are sitting on the couch. Music is playing. Rob has found Billy's necktie and has tied it around his head. Brad is writing inside the memo pad. There is a knock at the front door.

BRAD

Could you get that? I'm busy.

Rob gets up and heads to the front door. Halfway there, he spins around and walks backwards to talk to Brad.

ROB

Are you actually busy or just looking like you're busy?

BRAD

A little of both.

Rob opens the front door. GEOFF enters. He is in his early 30's, dressed in jeans, belt and a buttoned shirt. He is slightly overweight and nerdy-looking.

ROB

Hey, Geoff! Come on in. Brad, it's Geoff!

Rob and Geoff return to the living room.

BRAD

Jeff's back? Oh, Geoff with a "G".

ROB

Gee-off. Spelled-Wrong Geoff. Geoff Part 2.

Rob sits back on the couch, Geoff remains standing.

GEOFF

Shut up. It's a perfectly acceptable spelling. I got Billy's phone call. What's going on?

ROB

We're deciding his future. It's fun.

GEOFF

How so?

Rob has pulled the necktie over his eyes and "looks" in Geoff's direction.

ROB

It's not ours. We can do what we want with it.

BRAD

He kids, but it's actually very serious.

Rob removes the necktie from his head but still holds it in his hands.

GEOFF  
Where is Billy?

BRAD  
In his room. With Tanya.

GEOFF  
Oh, Jeff with a "J"'s girlfriend.  
Isn't he here, too?

BRAD  
He was here earlier. He left, but  
he'll come back.

Both Brad and Rob have stopped looking at Geoff.

GEOFF  
How do you know?

BRAD  
They all come back. Nobody walks  
out on me!

ROB  
They've been in there for some time  
now...

BRAD  
Ah, young love...

GEOFF  
So is Billy leaning towards either  
side?

BRAD  
I don't think he wants the  
promotion, but he might be wrong.  
So we're getting everybody to vote  
on what he should do.

GEOFF  
What's it at so far?

Geoff sits down in a chair. Brad consults the memo pad.

BRAD

There's one vote for take the promotion, and there's one vote for "he should do what he wants", so I guess that's for not taking the promotion, but it kind of hinges on whether Billy's a good writer or not.

GEOFF

There's four people here and only two votes?

BRAD

Six, actually -- two people have already come and gone.

Rob is twirling the necktie around his index finger.

ROB

Maybe you shouldn't tell people the running tally. It influences the outcome. Like when they have cross-country elections. You're not allowed to broadcast the results in the later time-zones because people tend to vote for the party that's winning.

BRAD

Okay. Only I will know the score until it is revealed at the end of the process. I'm feeling very important all of a sudden.

The necktie twirls off Rob's finger and lands on the couch.

ROB

What's that like?

14

BILLY'S BEDROOM

14

Tanya is sitting on the bed, holding Billy's teddy bear. She plays with it throughout the scene, waving its paws around and making it dance or just holding it close. Billy, sitting on the chair, watches it enviously.

BILLY

So why are you with Jeff? You two don't seem all that compatible...

TANYA

Why, indeed?

BILLY  
You don't know?

Tanya looks at Billy suspiciously.

TANYA  
Why don't you think we're  
compatible?

Billy blushes a little and starts to stammer slightly,  
looking away.

BILLY  
You... just don't seem right  
together. Your personalities are so  
different.

Tanya rolls onto her front and slides closer to Billy.

TANYA  
Opposites attract...

BILLY  
To an extent... Jeff... I mean,  
don't get me wrong, he's a great  
guy...

TANYA  
I'm not great?

BILLY  
No, no, not that... It's just  
that... he's such a nice guy...

TANYA  
And...?

BILLY  
And... sometimes, when he talks  
about you, you sound kind of...  
mean...

Tanya gets up on her knees.

TANYA  
(pretending to be  
indignant)  
Mean? Me?

Billy pulls back slightly in fear.



BILLY

You don't think you're kind of...  
just a little... meanish...  
sometimes?

Tanya laughs.

TANYA

I know I am!

BILLY

It's on purpose?

Tanya is on all fours. Her breasts are practically in Billy's face.

TANYA

Look, nice guys are nice, but they  
need to get stepped on every once  
in a while. They're practically  
begging for it.

Tanya brings her fist down on the teddy bear's head, but not too hard. Billy looks concerned, while trying to look at her breasts while trying not to look like he's looking at her breasts.

BILLY

What do you mean? You're saying he  
wants to be mistreated?

TANYA

He'd never come out and say it --  
you guys never do -- but I think  
he'd be very disappointed if I was  
little Miss Perfect.

BILLY

Why's that?

Tanya leans right in to Billy's face.

TANYA

Sweetie -- you've got to earn me.

Billy gasps. Tanya sits back.

TANYA (CONT'D)

See, all the crap I put him through  
makes it all seem worthwhile to  
him.

BILLY

Wow... That's evil... Do all women do this?

TANYA

Only the smart ones. I really shouldn't be telling you any of this. I could get kicked out of the sisterhood.

BILLY

So why are you?

TANYA

You're harmless. Oh, don't look so offended, that's a good thing. You're not such a bad guy. So I'm helping you out a little with women... You've got enough problems as it is, with your stupid, unfinished stories and all.

Tanya gestures at Billy's desk.

BILLY

What's the difference between Jeff and me?

TANYA

You mean, why am I dating Jeff instead of you?

Billy blushes.

TANYA (CONT'D)

Oh, I don't know. Luck of the draw, random chance, I met him first...

BILLY

That's not what I meant.

TANYA

But that's what I heard, and that's what counts.

BILLY

If you were with me, would you be as mean to me as you are to Jeff?

TANYA

Oh, even meaner. You know the secret, so I'd have to crush you. Repeatedly. From all directions.

(MORE)

TANYA (CONT'D)

To keep you stunned and confused,  
of course.

BILLY

But it'd all seem worthwhile...

TANYA

You'd have to give up writing.

BILLY

I don't know if I could do that. Or  
that I should have to...

TANYA

Well, luckily you don't have to  
make that decision!

Tanya bounces up off the bed, throwing the teddy bear back  
down on the pillow. She stops and looks at Billy quizzically.

TANYA (CONT'D)

Speaking of decisions... Why do you  
have to decide your whole life  
tonight? What's the rush?

BILLY

I'm... turning thirty in a few  
months.

Tanya doesn't get it and looks at Billy for an elaboration.

TANYA

And?

BILLY

It's always been my dream, to be a  
successful writer by the time I  
turned thirty. I figure now, with  
the promotion being offered...

TANYA

Why does it have to be when you  
turn thirty?

Billy is in a slight state of shock because this has never  
occurred to him.

BILLY

I... don't know... It just always  
has been...

TANYA

Isn't it kind of dumb to base your life around some stupid, imaginary milestone?

Billy is on the defensive.

BILLY

It's not... It's more of a... guideline...

TANYA

I don't know which is worse: the stupid milestone or the stupid dream.

BILLY

You think my dream is stupid?

TANYA

Most dreams are.

Billy speaks hesitatingly, trying to remember what Brad said earlier.

BILLY

But... if nobody ever tried to fulfill their dreams, they'd... never actually do them, and then... there'd be nothing... great in the world.

Tanya rolls her eyes.

TANYA

Wow. Put that on a t-shirt.

Tanya turns and heads for the door.

BILLY

Do you ever get tired of being evil?

Tanya stops and turns back to face Billy, pretending to think hard.

TANYA

No. No, I don't. Do you ever get tired of being a schmuck?

BILLY

Yes. Yes, I do.

TANYA

Take the promotion. You don't have  
the balls to be a writer.

Tanya smiles, then spins on her heel and exits the bedroom.

15

THE LIVING ROOM

15

Brad and Rob are on the couch, Geoff is sitting on a chair.  
Tanya enters the living room from Billy's bedroom.

ROB

She emerges, like a butterfly from  
a cocoon...

GEOFF

What does that make us?

Rob shrugs his shoulders, then leans in.

ROB

(quietly)

Five year olds with nets...

BRAD

You were in there a while...

Tanya returns to the living room.

TANYA

Are you implying something?

BRAD

Me? No.

TANYA

I think he's trying to imply that  
I'm a slow reader...

BRAD

I'm not subtle enough to imply  
anything...

ROB

It's true. You should hear him  
sometimes. I can't believe he ever  
holds anything back.

TANYA

So yes, I was in there a while,  
because I was reading some of  
Billy's writing, and...

Tanya pauses for dramatic effect.

TANYA (CONT'D)

He's not bad.

Brad pulls the memo pad and pen from his pocket and opens them up.

BRAD

All right! So, do you think he should pass up the promotion and devote his life to "his craft", or...?

ROB

We're taking a vote! Brad's keeping score, tell only him what you think Billy should do, and he'll let us know the final results at the end.

TANYA

You're... voting... on what he should do with his life? His future's going to be decided by what the majority of you think he should do?

Tanya laughs.

ROB

But it works so well in politics...

BRAD

I originally suggested flipping a coin. He was really against that.

GEOFF

That's not a bad idea.

ROB

Randomness? That's about as good a method as any...

BRAD

That's what I said earlier... Only, more eloquently.

ROB

When you think about it, you've only got a fifty-fifty chance of being wrong.

BRAD

I thought it was a fifty-fifty chance of being right.

ROB

Those aren't bad odds... Not much of a point spread, though.

GEOFF

Hey, we should BET on what Billy's going to do!

The group stops and looks around at each other.

ROB

That's an awesome idea! Say, five dollars to play, the pot is divided evenly amongst the winners, Brad can hold the money...

TANYA

Now you're BETTING on his decision?

ROB

We won't be deciding his future with the bets, we'd just be trying to benefit from the outcome! We're deciding his future with a completely separate vote!

GEOFF

Right! One to let him know what he should do, the other to try to guess what he will do.

ROB

The two are mutually exclusive. Or mostly exclusive...

TANYA

So some of you actually think that he'll make the wrong decision?

ROB

We'll be betting on it. Literally!

TANYA

That is SO fucking SICK!

(pause)

I love it! I'm in!

Tanya fishes around in her pocket for five dollars. There is a flurry of activity while the others look for their own five dollars. Steve enters through the front door with a large bag containing several six-packs and some bottles. He shuffles to the centre of the living room.

STEVE

Booze is here! What'd I miss?

Rob is holding up a \$5 bill.

ROB

Oh my god! To bet, or to booze?

(pause)

I'll get drunk first. Everything's  
clear when you're drunk.

16

BILLY'S BEDROOM

16

Billy is lying on his back on his bed. His whole world is spinning. He doesn't blink, his mouth is slightly open, moaning a little. He turns his head to the side, looking at his teddy bear. Slowly, he rolls over on his side, almost into the fetal position, and smooths out the spot on the bear where Tanya pounded it.

Then he slowly sits up, looking at all the papers on his writing desk. He stands up, goes to the desk, and messily gathers all the papers up in a pile. He picks up the pile, crumpling it slightly, and holds it in one hand over the garbage can beside the desk, but he can't bring himself to let go. He turns the pile slightly in his hand, cocks his head, and reads a few lines from the top page.

He brings the pages closer to his chest and flips through them. He stops and reads some more, then flips through more pages and reads again. Some pages are out of order, so he rearranges them.

Billy sighs and puts the pile back down on his desk. He picks up a pen and purposefully places it on top of the pile. He stands there looking at it with a sad expression on his face. He turns and props the teddy bear up on the bed in a sitting position. He points at it with both hands for emphasis, as if talking to Tanya and making a point.

BILLY

Because... it's who I am...

Billy lowers his head and drops his hands to his sides, not sure if he believes himself or not. The teddy bear falls over.

Brad quietly enters Billy's bedroom and stands in the doorway. Billy doesn't notice him.

BRAD

Hey...

Billy turns his head with a slight start.



BRAD (CONT'D)

There's a rumour going around out here that your fingernails are this long...

Brad holds his hands up about a foot apart.

BILLY

All right, all right... I'm coming out.

BRAD

You are the big story tonight...

BILLY

Celebrity or train wreck?

BRAD

Celebrity in a train wreck.

Billy turns around and smiles wanly.

BILLY

News at eleven...

17

THE LIVING ROOM

17

Tanya and Rob are sitting on the couch, drinking beers. They are both somewhat relaxed.

ROB

I wish I had the choice for myself. The decision Billy makes tonight will change the rest of his life. And he's aware of this. How often does that happen? How often can you pull back from a situation and just admire the awesome gravity of it? To revel in the balanced moment, to stand at the fork in the road, to stare down either path, not quite able to see what's at either end, and to have the presence of mind to fully realize its importance?

Tanya is staring off into the distance and does not turn to look directly at Rob.

TANYA

Oh, probably six or seven times in your life.

ROB

You think?

TANYA

Hmm, yeah.

ROB

So I should have had two or three  
by now...

TANYA

Yeah.

ROB

Damn. I wonder if I had them, or if  
I just can't remember them...

TANYA

If you can't remember them, then  
maybe you made the right decisions.  
Nothing disastrous happened, so  
you're not dwelling on any past  
mistakes.

ROB

But if I made the right decisions,  
then why isn't my life better?

Tanya squirms, then pulls Billy's necktie out from under her.  
She looks at it, then tosses it to the side of the couch.

TANYA

Not every life is possibly destined  
for greatness. It might not matter  
what you do, what decisions you  
make, you'll still end up...  
mediocre.

ROB

So... I've arrived!

TANYA

Okay.

ROB

All right... You don't think I've  
peaked too early, do you?

Tanya shrugs her shoulders.

Steve and Geoff walk from the living room to the kitchen.  
Steve is carrying the bag containing the beer and bottles.  
Geoff goes to the fridge and opens the fridge door.

GEOFF

Okay, there's four different combinations. One, vote that Billy should take the promotion and bet that he will. Two, vote that he should take it, but bet that he won't. Three, vote that he should refuse it and bet that he'll refuse it. And four, vote that he'll refuse it but bet that he'll take it.

STEVE

Okay.

Geoff takes cans and bottles from the bag Steve is holding and loads them into the fridge.

GEOFF

Now, if I vote that he should take the promotion and I bet that he will, I'm projecting much of my sensibilities onto Billy. That's a mistake, from a betting standpoint. I have to consider his mindset, his personality. But if I vote for the promotion and bet against, I'm wagering on him making the wrong decision, at least in my opinion. Is that ethical? Should I profit from his mistake?

Geoff finishes loading the booze, then takes a beer off of a six-pack ring and hands it to Steve. Then he takes another one off for himself.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

This becomes even more exaggerated if I vote to refuse the promotion. If I also bet that he'll refuse it, I'm encouraging him to screw up his life for my benefit. If I bet he'll take it, I'm encouraging him to do the wrong thing while wagering he'll do the right thing, a completely foolish stance, again from the betting standpoint, and unethical as well.

STEVE

I think you're making the situation more complicated. Vote whichever way you think he should go.

(MORE)

STEVE (CONT'D)

Bet whichever way you think he will go. Simple.

Geoff puts his beer on the counter, then takes his wallet out of his pants pocket. He removes some money and gives it to Steve, who pockets it. Then Geoff picks up his beer again.

GEOFF

And I think you're over-simplifying the situation. I'm starting to regret making the suggestion that we have a bet. There is the matter of Billy's future to consider. Are the vote and the bet a conflict of interest?

STEVE

I don't see how. They're separate.

GEOFF

Well, no, they're not. Our actions will determine not only Billy's life, but also reveal much of our own.

STEVE

All right. If you say so.

Geoff and Steve exit through the kitchen door and stop just outside.

GEOFF

I guess my point is, Billy's not the only one with a big decision to make tonight.

STEVE

It's only a five-dollar bet!

GEOFF

No, no, you're missing my point...

STEVE

Are you sure you have one?

Brad and Billy exit from Billy's bedroom and stand in the hallway between the bedroom and the living room. Billy surveys the living room unhappily. Brad sips his beer.

BILLY

This is it? Nobody else has shown up?

BRAD

It's early... More will come.

BILLY

You know, I always hoped I'd have at least six friends. I heard once that that's all you need at the end of your life, to carry you to your grave.

BRAD

Don't worry. You can always get cremated...

BILLY

Oh, no. I want a headstone. If I can't make it as a writer, I want to at least leave some mark on the world.

BRAD

Even if it's only something to trip on?

BILLY

Especially if...

BRAD

What do you want it to say? Something pithy? Bitter? Smart-ass?

BILLY

How about, "I gave it a shot"?

Billy moves his hand in front of him, from left to right, to indicate the words.

BRAD

"I'll see you again someday -- in Hell!"

Brad uses the same gesture to indicate the words with his empty hand.

BILLY

"I did my best, and now I rest."

BRAD

"Ask me about my grandchildren -- in Hell!"

BILLY

How do you know I'm going to Hell?

BRAD

It seems pretty obvious to me...

BILLY

"Here lies a great writer."

BRAD

"Right here, a grating lie."

BILLY

YOU'RE going to Hell...

BRAD

That's a given.

BILLY

So what should your headstone say?  
"Don't cry for me -- as if you  
would have."

BRAD

"I hope you caught my killer."

BILLY

Where is everybody? More people  
should be here by now!

BRAD

They're coming, geez... You're in  
an awful big hurry to die...

BILLY

Did we call everybody? Did we  
forget anyone?

BRAD

We didn't forget anybody, calm  
down... It's all being taken care  
of...

Billy fidgets and sighs. Brad sips his beer.

BILLY

"Made the wrong decision, regretted  
it to his last day."

BRAD

"He lived his life until he died."

BILLY

Is that you or me?

BRAD

Ehh. Whichever.

There is a knock at the front door. Brad smacks Billy lightly on the arm, then quickly walks to the front door to answer it.

20

THE LIVING ROOM

20

Billy walks from Billy's bedroom to the living room, passing Rob and Tanya. Tanya gives Billy a sideways glance and smirks. Billy continues, crossing over to Geoff and Steve who are standing and drinking by the kitchen door.

BILLY

Hey, Geoff with a "G". When'd you get here?

GEOFF

Just Geoff. Been here a while. How ya doing?

BILLY

Not so good. Thanks for coming by to help me out.

GEOFF

Hey, no problem.

STEVE

You want a beer?

BILLY

Heh. Normally, I would, but I don't think I should make one of the most important decisions of my life while under the influence of alcohol.

GEOFF

All the best writers drink, you know.

BILLY

Not all of them. You're thinking poets.

21

THE LIVING ROOM

21

Brad opens the front door and ALEX enters. Alex is in his late 30's, fairly normal dress, and clearly not happy. They stop at a point halfway between the living room and the front door.

BRAD

Hey, Alex! Glad you could make it. Where's Rachel?

ALEX

Uh... She's not coming.

Alex rubs the back of his neck.

BRAD

What? Are married people allowed to do that?

ALEX

Yeah, it's just... I don't even know if I should be here. Billy just sounded so desperate on the phone...

BRAD

Yeah, he is... Big fight, huh?

ALEX

Ohh yeah. A real stupid one, too.

BRAD

Are there any other kinds?

ALEX

You know how she is... Friend of the earth, meat is murder, all that crap...

BRAD

Uh huh.

Brad sips his beer.

ALEX

So we had this huge three hour fight because I killed a spider in the house.

BRAD

Three hours per bug? Is that the going rate?

ALEX

It wasn't so much that I killed it, but how I killed it.

BRAD

How's that?

ALEX

I caught it alive, threw it in the toilet, and... peed on it.



BRAD

Ow, wow. I love doing that.

ALEX

Yeah, me too, but she couldn't understand that it's just something that guys do.

BRAD

Women lack the desire... And the ability...

ALEX

She kept saying I was exerting my male dominance -- it's a spider, for christ's sake! It's not like I peed on her...

Brad goes to sip his beer, then stops, looking past Alex with a dreamy look in his eyes.

BRAD

Sometimes you hit it just right, and you drive it underwater. That's the most amazing sense of accomplishment, it's unreal.

Brad snaps out of it, looking back at Alex.

BRAD (CONT'D)

How did she even know?

ALEX

She insists that I leave the door open.

BRAD

What? Why?

She doesn't want us to have any secrets.

BRAD

That's insane. You have to have secrets. No relationship can withstand complete honesty.

ALEX

She thinks ours can. I don't agree, but she doesn't know that.

BRAD

Proving my point exactly. I can't help you. You need a divorce lawyer.

Brad sips his beer.

ALEX

I am NOT getting a divorce because I want to pee on spiders! How would THAT sound in court?

BRAD

But you DO want a divorce?

ALEX

No!

BRAD

Then why are you bothering me with this? Go help Billy with his problem.

Brad pushes Alex towards Billy, who is near the kitchen door with Steve and Geoff.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Which reminds me...

Brad approaches Tanya and Rob on the couch.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Hey Tanya, Jeff phoned. He got a little sidetracked. He's at some bar, he sounds a little drunk and wants you to go get him.

TANYA

That asshole!

Brad backs up a few feet and turns, smiling slightly.

22

THE LIVING ROOM

22

Alex approaches Billy near the kitchen door as Geoff and Steve leave for the bathroom.

BILLY

Alex! Thanks for coming. Hey, tell me something -- how well do you know Tanya?

Billy points at Tanya on the couch with Rob.

ALEX

Not too well. She's pretty hot,  
though. Thinking of...

BILLY

Yeah. I think she was flirting with  
me earlier, but...

ALEX

Go for it. 'Cause next thing you  
know, you're married and your wife  
won't even let you LOOK at other  
women!

BILLY

It could be tricky... She's dating  
a friend, but their relationship's  
in trouble...

ALEX

Geez, start making your move now!  
Then, when they break up, she'll  
know who to come running to...!

Alex punches Billy lightly in the arm. Billy rubs it  
absentmindedly, looking sideways at Alex with a slightly  
disgusted look.

BILLY

Rachel not here tonight?

ALEX

No... We had this huge fight. Hey,  
maybe I could get your opinion...

BILLY

Oh, no! Tonight's about me. Get  
your own night.

ALEX

How about next Wednesday?

BILLY

I'm busy.

23

THE LIVING ROOM

23

Tanya and Rob are still on the couch. Tanya is sitting up and  
is quite animated. She is sipping her beer angrily.

TANYA

Can you believe that jerk? Leaving  
me here with you losers while he  
goes off and gets drunk!

ROB

He should be here, getting drunk...

Rob looks at his beer.

ROB (CONT'D)

With us losers...

TANYA

Who does he think he is, all of a sudden?

Tanya takes a big swig of her beer, throws the empty beer can over her shoulder behind the couch, then grabs another beer from the coffee table.

ROB

"Oh, look at me -- I'm all drinking in a bar!"

Tanya opens her new beer and takes a sip.

TANYA

Yeah! Well, he can just come here! Why should I go to him?

ROB

Who's driving this bus, anyway?

TANYA

You just wait till he gets here! I'm gonna give him what for!

Rob pumps his fist in the air in a circular motion.

ROB

You go, girl!

TANYA

He can't treat me like this! He doesn't deserve me!

ROB

Nobody deserves you...

Tanya leans forward and blearily looks sideways at Rob.

TANYA

I'm gonna go talk to Billy... Here, read these.

Tanya reaches into her pocket and takes out Billy's stories. She hands them to Rob, then gets off the couch.

She doesn't see Billy with Alex, so she goes into Billy's bedroom, looking for him. Rob raises his beer to Tanya, then finishes it. He glances at the pages, putting the empty beer can on the coffee table, then gets up to talk to Brad.

ROB  
I get half credit.

Brad looks at Rob and blinks twice.

BRAD  
Yeah, okay.

Rob turns around and enters the kitchen.

24

THE KITCHEN

24

Rob is alone in the kitchen. He picks up a bottle of alcohol from the counter and looks at the label. He approves, so he gets a glass from an overhead cupboard. The phone rings and he answers it, putting the glass down.

ROB  
Hello? Survey about what? Naw, I...  
Hey, let me ask you a question.

Rob pours a liberal amount of alcohol into the glass, then recaps the bottle, putting it back down on the counter.

ROB (CONT'D)  
What, you're in a hurry to phone somebody else who won't want to talk to you? This'll only take a minute... What's your name? I'm Rob... Oh, don't hide behind your regulations, if you don't want to tell me your name, have the gumption to say so.

Rob goes over to the refrigerator.

ROB (CONT'D)  
I've got friends with jobs like yours, so I know you're sitting in a crowded office with a bunch of other minimum wage slaves, all wearing headsets and trying to convince complete strangers to talk to you for a few minutes so you can meet a quota.

Rob opens the freezer door and removes an ice cube tray.

ROB (CONT'D)

But what you really want, because you've been on the job for a few hours, or you know you will be, is for something to break the monotony. So you can either take the opportunity to talk to me, or you can go back to the sound of receivers slamming down in your ear again, and again, and again...

(pause)

Hi, David. Can I call you Dave? Oh, good. That means you're friendly.

Rob takes the tray to the counter and cradles the phone receiver between his face and his shoulder.

ROB (CONT'D)

So, Dave, here's the deal: My friend Billy has been offered a promotion. But he wants to be a writer. He has to choose: he can't do one or the other. And he doesn't know what to do. So we're taking a vote to try to decide for him.

Rob twists the ice cube tray and removes two ice cubes, putting them into his glass.

ROB (CONT'D)

Yeah, a whole bunch of us, it's kind of turning into a party. Is your office in town? What time do you get off? Why don't you drop by? No, they're totally cool. Bring some booze, that always helps get you in the door, no questions.

Rob puts the tray down and grabs the phone with his hand again.

ROB (CONT'D)

Yeah, bring your friend. Here, let me give you the address...

25

THE LIVING ROOM

25

Alex and Billy are standing by the kitchen door. Tanya slowly crosses from Billy's bedroom to join them.

BILLY

So, what do you think I should do?

ALEX

You want me to decide your future?  
I've got my own problems. What  
makes you think I can help you out?

BILLY

Objectivity. It's not your problem,  
so it's easier sometimes to see  
what's wrong.

ALEX

I don't understand the problem.  
Does that mean I have too much  
objectivity?

BILLY

Can't you just fake it like  
everybody else?

Tanya joins them, carrying her beer. She is more drunk now.

TANYA

Billy!

BILLY

Yes?

TANYA

I just wanted to tell you, I'm  
changing my vote. I think you  
should be a writer!

Billy breaks out in a smile.

BILLY

Wow, what changed your mind?

Alex nudges Billy's arm, then leaves them.

TANYA

I figured that Jeff would tell you  
to take the promotion. And he's an  
asshole.

BILLY

Assholes can't be right about  
anything?

TANYA

No. It's a character flaw. They're  
always wrong. And if they're not,  
you want them to be, which is the  
same thing.

BILLY

When did you realize Jeff was an asshole?

TANYA

Are you calling my boyfriend an asshole?

BILLY

Uh, no, you did.

TANYA

Ha! You're one to talk! You're an asshole, too!

BILLY

I am?

Tanya smirks and turns away slightly, covering her mouth with her hand.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Well, am I a bigger asshole than Jeff, or a smaller one?

TANYA

You're a... different asshole!

Tanya stifles a laugh and sips her beer.

BILLY

Well, I've always tried to be unique...

TANYA

And you want to be a writer! That's so romantic!

BILLY

What? You said earlier that it was gross and unattractive!

TANYA

Well, it is kind of stupid, but a lot of girls fall for crap like that.

BILLY

What about you?

Billy tries to look Tanya in the eye, but she keeps looking all around the room.



TANYA

Nope. I'm not like those girls. I'm different, too. But not an asshole!

BILLY

What would I have to do to make you fall for me?

TANYA

You can't DO anything to make a girl fall for you. We see right through that crap. Well, unless you want a stupid girl. You just have to be yourself, and keep trying, and eventually you'll find the right one, the one who loves you for who you are -- a disgusting writer!

Tanya laughs and tries to sip her beer.

BILLY

So you can see right through me?

TANYA

Pretty much.

Billy holds out his arms to the sides.

BILLY

Well?

Tanya scrutinizes Billy, furrowing her brow in mock concentration.

TANYA

You're trying to figure out how to get me without wrecking your friendship with Jeff.

Billy's eyes widen in horror. Tanya laughs. She leans in and talks quieter.

TANYA (CONT'D)

Do you want to know how?

Billy and Tanya make eye contact. Tanya leans back in and whispers in his ear.

TANYA (CONT'D)

You make me think it was MY idea...

Billy's eyes widen even more.

26

THE BATHROOM

26

Geoff and Steve are in the bathroom smoking a joint. Brad opens the door to come in, then stops. He is surprised at first, then slightly annoyed.

BRAD

Oh. Crack the window at least,  
would ya?

GEOFF

Sorry. Want some?

BRAD

No, I'm afraid of heights.

STEVE

You sure?

BRAD

Yeah, I'm sure. I like to be in  
control. And I have political  
problems with that stuff anyway.

GEOFF

How so?

BRAD

It's a drug that makes you lazy,  
stupid and forgetful. You can still  
go to work, but then you go home,  
get high, watch a bad movie or  
something and eat a bag of chips,  
then fall asleep.

STEVE

What's wrong with that?

BRAD

You're not active, you're entirely  
passive. Worse, you're consuming.  
It's all you can do. You're not  
making plans, you're not building  
or creating, you're not out  
fomenting revolution. You're  
becoming too stupid to realize how  
your government is screwing you.  
Even if you did realize it, you'd  
just forget all about it in five  
minutes. Or you wouldn't feel like  
doing anything about it, or even  
doing anything.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

You're the perfect citizen -- complacent, consuming, and too apathetic and confused to affect a change in the status quo. Some people are content to give control of their lives over to something or somebody else. And some of us aren't. I guess my point is, if the powers that be were a little bolder, they wouldn't keep that stuff illegal, they'd make it MANDATORY. And I don't want any part of that.

GEOFF

What if we weren't going to overthrow the government in the first place?

BRAD

Oh, well, then nothing's lost here.

Brad looks at Geoff and Steve with mild distaste.

BRAD (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go pee in the kitchen sink.

27

THE LIVING ROOM

27

The living room is now a little more crowded, with about a dozen people in total. SCOTT is in his mid-20's. He is dressed somewhat conservatively, but has a removable earring. He runs up to Billy and grabs him by the sides of his arms.

SCOTT

Billy! Am I glad to see you! I came over as soon as I heard! You HAVE to take that promotion!

Scott lets go and Billy pulls back a little.

BILLY

Okay. Why?

SCOTT

Because we need you on the inside!

Billy is somewhat distracted from his earlier conversation with Tanya.

BILLY

The inside?

SCOTT

You can't destroy the system just from the outside! You need to have agents inside -- moles!

BILLY

Feeding you information and stuff?

SCOTT

Yeah! Exactly! But! And this is important -- they have to be strong enough to resist the temptation of all that power and money. They can't let it corrupt them!

A cute girl walks past and Billy checks her out. He quickly stops himself, glancing around to see if Tanya saw him do it.

BILLY

What makes you think I won't?

SCOTT

Oh, come on... I know you! You're one of the good guys! You won't fail us!

BILLY

I didn't know so much was riding on me. I'd better straighten up.

SCOTT

You take that promotion, you climb the ladder, gain their trust, then when the time is right, blam! We knock that fucker down!

BILLY

You're speaking metaphorically, right?

SCOTT

Um, yeah.

BILLY

About what?

SCOTT

The system, man! Smash the state!

BILLY

You're on welfare. If you "smashed the state", you'd have to actually go out and get a job.

SCOTT

Oh, no, I wouldn't. My parents are loaded!

28

THE LIVING ROOM

28

BECKY is in her late 20's. She is fairly normal-looking, pretty in a nerdy way, with glasses and short hair. Dressed conservatively but not expensively. The living room is slightly more crowded now, with about twenty people in total. She walks up to Billy.

BECKY

Don't take the promotion! It's a trap!

BILLY

A... trap.

BECKY

The whole business world, the economy -- it's all built on lies and false claims.

BILLY

Go on.

BECKY

Okay. You have a company, and it makes a certain amount of money one year. Then the next year, it makes more -- they have increased growth. Then the next year, they make even more.

Billy shakes his head slightly from side to side.

BILLY

I have no idea where this is going.

BECKY

All right. Then the next year, they make less. Profits are down that year, that's what they tell everybody. But they're still making a profit if you compare it to the first year!

BILLY

Oh, okay. They say they lost because they made less than in previous years, but they're still in the black.

BECKY

Right! But they say sales are down, that they have to expand into new markets and find a broader consumer base and regain stockholder's confidence, or some such bullshit.

BILLY

Okay.

BECKY

So you have a business model -- an economy -- that requires constant growth. Simply making a profit isn't enough, you have to keep increasing your profits or it's interpreted as losing ground.

BILLY

Okay.

BECKY

Isn't that the definition of a pyramid scheme?

Billy thinks about this for a while.

BILLY

My head hurts. It started hurting a while ago, but I'm experiencing increased growth.

BECKY

You can either walk away, or just hope that you're buying in and getting back out early enough so that you don't get caught in the crash!

Billy smiles in a disbelieving manner.

DAVE is in his mid to late 30's. He is wearing a shirt and tie, both are undone at the top. He has just gotten off work from his office job. His hair is slightly frazzled and he is drinking a beer, carrying the rest of a six-pack in one hand. His girlfriend LISA is standing behind him, acting casual and looking around. She is dressed attractively but informally, and is also drinking. The living room is even more crowded, with about twenty-five people in total.

DAVE

Take the promotion. Trust me, I speak from experience. Take anything and everything they offer you, 'cause the opportunities out there are few and get sucked up by somebody else faster than you can react. I'm surprised they gave you a day to even consider it -- you should have said "yes" on the spot. In fact, you should be calling them right now and begging them for that promotion. Because if you say "no", they'll remember that. They'll remember it, somebody will write it down in your personnel folder and it'll stay there like a big red X for the rest of your life. And do you think they'll ever offer you another promotion again? To the guy with the big red X? The guy who told them where to go the first time? What, he's too good for us? He can tell us what to do? Screw that, let's keep him down in the mailroom or the stockroom or wherever and give the promotion to the guy who'll appreciate it. Like me! I'd love to be offered a promotion. I hate my job. I'd probably hate the new job, but at least I'd get paid better. You don't want to hit thirty-five, forty, and still be earning minimum wage! That's just sad, that's pathetic! What better way to tell people you're a failure? Hey, I had a dream once! It didn't pan out and the world passed me by! I tried to catch up but they gave me the big, fat finger, laughed in my face and told me to get back in line! That'll teach you to try something different, to try to make it without us, on your own, doing your own thing! You want a dental plan? You want a fucking dental plan?!! Kiss my fucking ass, then take a seat and watch a million other guys kiss my ass a million times better and maybe you'll get another shot!

BILLY

Who... ARE you?

DAVE

I'm David. Uh, Dave.

Dave holds out his right hand to shake.

BILLY

Have we... met before? Your voice  
sounds really familiar...

30

THE KITCHEN

30

Brad has just finished peeing in the sink when Tanya crosses over from Billy's bedroom and enters. Brad hurriedly zips up and runs some water. Tanya is drunk, but has stopped drinking. She slams her half-full beer down on the counter.

TANYA

A-ha! There you are!

BRAD

Tanya! How nice of you to burst in  
with no warning whatsoever!

TANYA

What?

BRAD

Nothing. Never mind. What can I do  
for you?

TANYA

I would like to change my vote. And  
my bet.

BRAD

Sure, I'll make a note of that.

TANYA

He should NOT take that promotion.

BRAD

Right. Let me just write that  
down... What changed your mind?

Brad takes the memo pad and pen from his pocket.

TANYA

If he took it, that would be so...  
boring. So predictable. So normal.  
He should try not to be so dull,  
such an... asshole!

Brad freezes.



BRAD

We're not talking about Billy, are we?

TANYA

He leaves me here while he goes off and gets drunk, he's never had an original thought in his life, and everybody else thinks he's so, so...

BRAD

Nice?

TANYA

That's it! That's it exactly! Everybody thinks he's so nice, but I know him better than any of you!

BRAD

He's not nice?

TANYA

Well... Yeah, he is, mostly. But he's so boring!

BRAD

Ah. I see.

Brad opens the memo pad to the right page.

TANYA

Can't I meet a nice guy who's nice, but not boring? Is there some rule that exciting guys have to be assholes?

BRAD

I thought Jeff was an asshole...?

TANYA

No... You're not following me!

BRAD

Well, you are kind of weaving all over...

TANYA

Listen -- Billy should be a writer. Because that's interesting. If he takes the promotion, he's just an asshole. A boring... asshole.

BRAD

I don't...

TANYA

Just write it DOWN.

BRAD

Boring asshole, got it.

Brad writes in the memo pad.

BRAD (CONT'D)

And you're changing your bet, too?

TANYA

Yes. I'm betting that he won't take the promotion. Because he knows he's boring, and he has to do everything he can to be interesting, or nobody will ever love him.

BRAD

Wow. It's a wonder people ever get married, isn't it?

Tanya shakes her head slightly.

TANYA

I don't know what they see in each other...

BRAD

Um, your bet hasn't changed. You were against the promotion before.

TANYA

Yes, but now it's for a different reason!

BRAD

Oh. Okay. That's still the same thing...

TANYA

No, it isn't! It's entirely different... at the root!

BRAD

Ah. All right, I'll just make a note of that. Different... root...

Brad pretends to write in the memo pad.

TANYA

Before, I bet he'd refuse it  
because I told him he couldn't do  
it because he was such a wimp!

BRAD

Reverse psychology, huh?

TANYA

More like a dare...

BRAD

Hmm.

TANYA

But now, he's going to refuse it  
because I told him it was romantic!

Brad is startled and annoyed.

BRAD

Why'd you do that?

TANYA

Because it is! To some girls...

BRAD

You're hardly playing fair, are  
you?

TANYA

I don't want to lose my money.

BRAD

I wasn't talking about the bet.

TANYA

Huh?

Brad rubs his forehead and furrows his brow.

BRAD

How do you feel about him?

Tanya turns slightly sideways.

TANYA

What? I don't know. I'm not telling  
you. Geez. He seems nice.

BRAD

But... boring?

TANYA

Right!

BRAD

But if he refused the promotion,  
he'd be interesting...

TANYA

Huh. Yeah... Maybe I'll... If he...  
Huh.

Tanya stares off into space.

BRAD

Okay. Whatever you do, do NOT tell  
him that!

TANYA

Why not?

BRAD

Because he's got enough of a  
problem tonight without you  
distracting him.

Tanya is sobering up.

TANYA

Distracting him? What do you mean?

BRAD

I went through the same thing as  
Billy when I turned thirty...

TANYA

Oh, not this milestone crap  
again...

Brad pauses and stares directly at her.

BRAD

Isn't there anything that you know  
you have to do? With your life?

TANYA

Sure. I suppose.

BRAD

What about Jeff?

TANYA

What about him?

BRAD

Does he?

TANYA

I don't know.

BRAD

Why not?

TANYA

I don't know!

BRAD

Well, maybe he doesn't. And maybe  
he knows he doesn't. In which case,  
I was wrong, and you two are  
perfect for each other after all.

Tanya's look turns foul. She picks up her beer from the  
counter and walks right up to Brad. They're face to face,  
inches apart, neither looking away, neither flinching. Tanya  
holds her beer up at arm's length and slowly tips it over,  
pouring the contents into the sink.

TANYA

To help get rid of the piss  
smell...

31 THE LIVING ROOM

31

Tanya exits the kitchen and stops outside the door. She looks  
around the living room for Billy in the crowd. Dave and Lisa  
pass her and enter the kitchen as Tanya throws herself into  
the living room.

32 THE KITCHEN

32

Dave and Lisa enter as Brad leaves.

LISA

What he should do is quit his  
job...

DAVE

Why's that?

LISA

It's the only way to make it.

DAVE

But he needs his job, to live off  
of.

Lisa opens the fridge, Dave puts their beer inside.

LISA

But if he quits it, then he HAS to make it as a writer. It's like, if you want to get over a fence, you throw your hat over. Then you HAVE to find a way. The necessity makes you more determined and more likely to succeed.

DAVE

But what if you don't wear a hat?

Dave takes a beer off of the ring and gives it to Lisa, then takes one for himself.

LISA

It's a metaphor. You can throw anything over. Your shoe, or your watch... My point is, if he wants to be a writer, he should commit to it totally. No going back. Burn all his bridges.

DAVE

But what if he just -- for some reason -- can't make it?

LISA

Then... I guess he loses his hat.

DAVE

His shirt, more like...

Dave and Lisa take sips from their beers. Rob crosses from the living room and enters.

ROB

Hey.

DAVE

Hey.

ROB

So which way are you voting?

Rob opens the fridge.

DAVE

To take the promotion. What about you?

ROB

I haven't decided yet.

Rob takes a beer out.

DAVE

He'll take it, if he knows what's good for him. He wants to be a writer, right?

ROB

So he says.

DAVE

That shit never works out. It's a stupid dream. The sooner he gives it up, the better.

ROB

Some people actually do make a living from their writing...

DAVE

Yeah, all the wrong people. A lot of crappy books out there. What does this Billy guy write? Is he any good?

ROB

I don't know, I've never read his stuff. Short stories, I think.

Rob opens his beer and takes a sip.

DAVE

He should write crap. Crap sells. If you try writing quality, you'll starve and die. Or you eventually have to go out and get a regular job. Same thing.

ROB

Which way are you betting?

DAVE

There's a bet?

ROB

Yeah. Five dollars. The pot's divided evenly amongst the winners.

DAVE

That's kind of a low-risk bet.

ROB

(shrugs)

We're kind of low-risk people...

DAVE

Ha, now I know which way I should  
bet!

Rob smiles slightly and leaves the kitchen.

33

THE LIVING ROOM

33

Steve is sitting on the floor against the wall near Brad's bedroom, drunk and stoned. Geoff is lying on the floor beside him, not moving. Billy crosses from the bathroom and sits down on the other side of Steve, near a half-eaten pizza in a delivery box.

BILLY

Oh man, what a night. I'm more  
confused now than I was before this  
all started.

STEVE

Yeah? I've achieved perfect  
clarity...

Billy looks up and glances Tanya across the room through the crowd of legs. She is looking for him, but doesn't see him and moves on.

BILLY

You know what I should do?

STEVE

Naw... I meant, with the universe.

BILLY

Aw, crap...

Billy looks around, too late to escape.

STEVE

See, I was put on this earth to  
move boxes around.

BILLY

Right. In the warehouse. Boxes.

Billy slumps, resigning himself to a stupid conversation.

STEVE

But it goes much farther than that!  
Those boxes eventually leave the  
warehouse...



BILLY

Uh huh. To be shipped to other warehouses.

STEVE

Yeah. There's this never-ending cycle: boxes come in on big trucks, they get sorted and moved around a bit, then they go back out on more trucks.

BILLY

Right. Definition: "warehouse".

A girl passing by trips on Billy's leg, stumbles, spills some of her beer, giggles and leaves. Billy looks up, slightly annoyed.

STEVE

These boxes -- you don't know where they come from. You don't know where they go. You don't know what's inside them.

BILLY

Don't they have shipping labels?

STEVE

You just do what you have to do with them, then they're gone.

BILLY

No, they live on in our memories.

Billy picks up an empty beer can from the floor, shakes it, then puts it back down.

STEVE

They have these lives, completely separate from us, before we get them, and after they leave, that we don't know about.

BILLY

Or want to...

STEVE

But somewhere else, another guy, much like me, in another warehouse much like mine, is moving the same box that I moved around last week, or last month, or that I'm gonna move tomorrow.

Billy spies the pizza and takes a slice, chewing it thoughtfully.

BILLY

I was kind of hoping you were unique...

STEVE

It's, like, the perfect metaphor for life...

BILLY

I am now officially embarrassed for you.

STEVE

Stuff comes into and out of your life on a constant basis. Some sticks around longer than others. But then it's gone, out of sight, out of your control.

BILLY

Can you hear me?

STEVE

Think of each box as representing something in your life: a friend, a lover...

This catches Billy's attention.

STEVE (CONT'D)

A belonging, a decision. Some of those are around for a long time. But some of them -- most of them -- eventually disappear and are never seen again. The important thing is what you do with them while you have them. That's what makes a good warehouse.

Steve turns to face Billy.

STEVE (CONT'D)

How well-run is YOUR warehouse?

There is a long pause while Billy looks back at Steve.

BILLY

Sadly, I don't think it's as well-run as yours.

STEVE

There ya go...

BILLY

Of course, I don't think mine's  
quite so empty...

Geoff comes alive.

GEOFF

That was beautiful! My warehouse is  
so busy! And cluttered! And dusty!

STEVE

You've gotta sweep up every once in  
a while! And keep the loading ramps  
clear! And don't leave food lying  
around. Or you get rats!

Billy throws the pizza crust into the box, gets up and dusts  
off his pants.

BILLY

I think I know what to do now.  
Thank you, Steve, Geoff with a "G".

Billy disappears into the living room crowd. Geoff and Steve  
call after him.

GEOFF & STEVE

Just... Geoff!

BILLY (O.S.)

Whatever!

34

THE LIVING ROOM

34

Tanya and Billy are separately weaving their ways through the  
crowd, he from Brad's bedroom, she from the front door. They  
meet in the middle of the living room.

BILLY

Tanya, I...

Tanya interrupts him, putting her hand on his chest and  
looking straight into his eyes.

TANYA

Come with me...

Billy shuts his mouth, then follows Tanya, slightly annoyed  
that he didn't get to say what he wanted to. She leads him  
into Billy's bedroom.

When he realizes they're going back to his bedroom, Billy nervously checks all around him to see if Jeff is there yet.

35

THE LIVING ROOM

35

Brad is talking to various people individually around the living room, which is quite noisy and crowded now, with about thirty people in total. KEVIN is in his late 20's, dressed in a turtleneck and shorts.

KEVIN

Go for it. That's what he should do.

AMANDA is in her early 30's, dressed sensibly.

AMANDA

No. That'd be a mistake. He could fuck everything up.

CALVIN is in his mid-20's, dressed in a loud shirt, his sunglasses up in his short, spiky hair. Two of his friends, similarly dressed, are behind him, setting up a beer funnel and hose for use.

CALVIN

You only live once! Take a chance!

KELLY is in her mid-20's, dressed somewhat trashy, with large hair.

KELLY

Better safe than sorry. That's what I always say. Well, unless you really, really want to...

KEVIN

A little regret isn't such a bad thing.

One of Calvin's friends is on the receiving end of the hose, the other one is opening the beers.

CALVIN

You're gonna get old anyway. Do you want to be both old AND boring?

AMANDA

There's risk, and then there's calculated risk...

EDDY is in his late 20's. He is wearing a plain, two-colour shirt with his name embroidered on the front.

EDDY

I hate to use a sports analogy, but  
you can't score a touchdown if you  
won't run with the ball.

KELLY

Has he said which way he wants to  
go?

AMANDA

Can he live with that decision? Is  
it worth it to him, taking that  
risk just to find out?

ANDY is in his late 30's, dressed in jeans and a shirt.

ANDY

Whatever he does, tell him NOT to  
ask his mother...

KEVIN

If you make a mistake, you learn to  
live with it.

Kelly cocks her head to one side.

KELLY

What's his sign? That might help.

AMANDA

A lot of mistakes aren't necessary.  
You don't have to learn everything  
firsthand.

EDDY

Nobody just throws the ball to you  
and that's it, you score...

TONY is in his late 30's, dressed conservatively.

TONY

Regret and remorse can tear you  
apart, but so can not knowing.

Calvin's friend is pouring two beers at once into the funnel.

CALVIN

That's the fun of it! You don't  
know how it'll all end up!

KELLY

I disagree. No, wait...

Kelly giggles.

KEVIN

In a hundred years, who's gonna  
care, or even remember?

EDDY

Tell him I said to do it. Can I get  
paid now? I've gotta get going...

Eddy puts on a hat that has the same colours as his shirt and  
holds up some pizza boxes.

TONY

If we knew our futures, we'd go  
crazy from the boredom.

AMANDA

I've got a really bad feeling about  
this...

Calvin's friend drinking from the beer funnel chokes and  
spits up beer all over himself, while the other friend  
cheers.

CALVIN

He'll do the right thing. I'm not  
worried. I know he will.

Eddy looks at the money in his hand, gestures with a little  
wave, then leaves.

EDDY

Hey, thanks!

KELLY

What was the question again?

TANYA (O.S.)

Shut the door.

There is the sound of a door closing.

Brad is studying his memo pad. The votes are obviously in  
favour of taking the promotion. Brad studies it, shakes his  
head, and changes the votes.

36

BILLY'S BEDROOM

36

Tanya and Billy are facing each other in his room. He starts  
to stammer and fidget with nervousness.

BILLY

Tanya... I...

Tanya steps up to Billy and grabs the back of his head with both hands and kisses him hard. He doesn't know what to do with his hands, moving them from out at the side to his hips, then back to his sides, and finally grabbing the sides of her shoulders. After a few seconds, she releases him and he lets go of her.

TANYA  
Billy... I want you...

Tanya looks up into Billy's eyes.

TANYA (CONT'D)  
... to quit your job.

Billy isn't really focussed on what she's saying.

BILLY  
Hmm?

TANYA  
Don't take the promotion -- quit your job. I want you to be a writer.

They kiss again.

BILLY  
Okay.

More kissing. Billy guides Tanya to the bed. She turns so that he sits down first. She kneels on one knee over top of him, then stops kissing and pulls back slightly.

TANYA  
Now, this is a really big decision. You know that, right?

BILLY  
Uh huh.

TANYA  
Listen to me: take the promotion. Take the promotion, forget what I said before. Don't ever write another thing ever again.

BILLY  
What? But you...

Tanya kisses Billy, but there is no passion. It's almost a peck, but longer.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Okay.

Tanya starts to sound panicky. She stands up and takes a step backwards.

TANYA

No! You're a really good writer...  
Really good... That's what you  
should do. All right?

Billy is totally confused and starting to panic, too.

BILLY

Okay! I will!

TANYA

NO! Take the promotion! That's what  
I want you to do...

BILLY

Okay! Make up your mind already!  
Please.

Tanya is positively scared. Tears well up in her eyes, and she struggles not to cry.

TANYA

I want you to be a writer. I want  
you to quit your job. I want you to  
take the promotion. I want you  
to...

BILLY

I don't under...

TANYA

(screaming)

Are you listening to anything I'm  
saying?!

BILLY

Yes! Just... tell me what you  
want... and I'll... I'll...

Billy stops and looks down at the floor.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Oh.

Tanya and Billy stand awkwardly, not wanting to look at each other. Tanya is shaking a little.



TANYA

Yeah. "Oh".

BILLY

So... what now?

Their eyes meet. Tanya brushes Billy's cheek affectionately.

TANYA

You... write your own story...

Billy nods. Tanya turns to leave, takes a few steps, then stops and looks at Billy.

TANYA (CONT'D)

I hope you figure out a good ending...

Tanya whirls and flings the door open, exiting the room. Billy stands up and looks at the doorway. He turns and looks at the teddy bear on the bed as if for an answer, then back to the doorway.

37 THE HALLWAY

37

Tanya exits Billy's bedroom and stops, briefly leaning against the wall with her hands, as if needing to just touch something solid. She sniffs and wipes her eyes, smooths out her clothes and makes herself presentable. Then she continues towards the living room.

38 THE LIVING ROOM

38

Steve and Geoff are sitting in the living room by Brad's closed bedroom door. Jeff enters through the front door. There is a loud crash of heavy objects hitting the floor and glass breaking.

CALVIN (O.S.)

Uh oh!

There is the sound of people laughing. Steve spots Jeff and hails him.

STEVE

Jeff! You came back! Have a beer!

Jeff crosses over to Brad's bedroom door to join Steve and Geoff.

JEFF

Thanks. Tanya never showed up at the restaurant. Do you know if she's here?

Jeff accepts a beer from Steve.

STEVE

She was a while ago. She might  
still be around, I don't know.

Geoff, carrying a beer, staggers closer and straightens up.

GEOFF

Well, if it isn't Jeff with a  
"J"...

JEFF

Huh? Oh, I know you, you're...

GEOFF

I'M Geoff!

Someone bumps into Geoff, who spills some of his beer and  
looks around, annoyed.

JEFF

Right! Geoff with a "G".

Geoff stabs his own chest with his finger.

GEOFF

No! Just Geoff! I was here first!

Scott crosses over from the bathroom.

SCOTT

Hey, Jeff! How are ya?

GEOFF

A little pissed off.

Geoff sips his beer.

SCOTT

No, no, the real Jeff. How are ya,  
man?

GEOFF

I'M the real Geoff!

JEFF

Hey, Scott. I'm good. Have you seen  
Tanya?

SCOTT

Yeah, I saw her going off with  
Billy a little while ago... Oh  
wait, there she is.

JEFF

Thanks. Excuse me, guys.

Jeff and Tanya have seen each other, and are quickly heading to meet in the centre of the living room.

GEOFF

I'M the real Geoff!

SCOTT

What's your problem, man?

GEOFF

I was first! I'm older than he is, I lived here first, I knew you guys first -- I should be just Geoff, and HE should be Jeff with a "J"!

SCOTT

Man, you're the one with the mutant spelling. Seriously -- blame your parents. You'd actually be justified.

GEOFF

Rrrrr...

39

THE LIVING ROOM

39

Jeff and Tanya finally reconnect.

JEFF

Hey, Tanya? Were you here the whole time?

TANYA

Uh, yeah. Where were you?

JEFF

At the restaurant. Waiting for you... And then I...

TANYA

Right. To come pick you up... You're off having fun, and I'm stuck here.

JEFF

What are you talking about? Didn't...?

TANYA

Do you have any idea what's been going on?

JEFF

I was actually wondering...

TANYA

Oh, but you don't care about interesting stuff like that. You've got to be all normal. You've got to be all dull and uninteresting. Everybody thinks you're so nice.

Jeff looks around nervously.

JEFF

Maybe we should talk about this somewhere else...

TANYA

No! I want everybody here to know what kind of an asshole you really are!

JEFF

Tanya, you're a little overexcited right now, and a little drunk...

TANYA

I'm not drunk, YOU'RE drunk!

Tanya points at the beer in Jeff's hand, which he hasn't even opened. He quickly puts it down.

JEFF

Why don't I take you home? We can...

TANYA

No! I want to stay here, with all my new friends! With Billy the writer, and Brad, and... and that guy...

Tanya points at Rob in the living room.

TANYA (CONT'D)

I forget his name, but he has a really cool shirt...

Rob is standing and talking to Becky.

ROB

I got it at that vintage store on 5th. Only 7 bucks. They've got some great stuff there...

JEFF

You want to stay, we can stay, just  
don't make such a scene...

TANYA

I'm not making a scene -- you're  
making a scene!

JEFF

Tanya, come on, let's sit down.  
There's a spot over there...

Jeff points to the side, gently taking Tanya's arm. She pulls  
away.

TANYA

Don't tell me what to do...

JEFF

I'm not trying to tell you what to  
do, I just think it would be nice  
to...

TANYA

There's that WORD again...

40

THE LIVING ROOM

40

Dave and Lisa are talking to Brad at a point near the  
bathroom. Brad is recording their votes in his memo pad.  
Billy crosses from his bedroom to right behind Brad, who  
doesn't see him.

BRAD

Okay, good, got it. And did you  
guys want to bet?

DAVE

Yeah. \$5 says he does the smart  
thing and takes it.

LISA

My \$5 says he won't.

Dave and Lisa each take \$5 bills from their pockets.

DAVE

You're betting against me?

LISA

I'm not betting against you... I'm  
betting against the guy...

BRAD

You've got it covered either way...

Billy looks a little dazed, then his expression turns to one of concern.

BILLY

What was that?

BRAD

Uh, nothing. Examining your career options. Determining your future. Like I said, nothing.

BILLY

You're BETTING on my decision?!!

BRAD

Oh, that... It's not as seedy as it sounds.

BILLY

It's not?!

BRAD

No. It's more... recreational.

BILLY

Oh my god... I don't believe this!

BRAD

It was Geoff's idea!

Brad points in the general direction of the living room crowd.

BILLY

Son of a...

Billy storms off. Brad hails after him.

BRAD

Geoff with a...

Brad pauses, cocking his head with a quick thought.

BRAD (CONT'D)

(much quieter)

"G"...

LISA

That was him, right?

BRAD

Yeah.

LISA

Huh. I thought he'd be taller...

Brad plucks the \$5 bills from Dave's and Lisa's hands.

41

THE LIVING ROOM

41

Tanya and Jeff are still by the front door, arguing. Geoff drifts a little closer to them.

TANYA

Did you even know that Billy has, like, this HUGE problem that he has to solve by the end of the night? Probably the biggest decision he'll ever have to make in his whole miserable existence?

JEFF

Of course I did. I was...

TANYA

And did you know he's a writer? Did you even know that?

JEFF

Well, yeah, that's what I'm trying to tell you. I was here earlier and I talked to him about it.

TANYA

What did you tell him?

JEFF

Well, I told him to get some sense into his head, quit writing and take the promotion, of course.

TANYA

You told him that?!!

JEFF

Why are YOU so concerned about Billy anyway? That's not like you...

Tanya halts, then freezes, looking at the floor.

TANYA

Because... Because maybe...

She slowly looks up at Jeff with a sad look.

TANYA (CONT'D)

Is there anything you know you have to do?

JEFF

What?

TANYA

With your life. Is there anything you know you have to do with your life?

JEFF

I don't know. Maybe. I... Why?

Tanya looks down past Jeff into the distance.

TANYA

I think we should break up.

JEFF

What?! Why?!!

Tanya doesn't move, her voice cracks slightly.

TANYA

Because... we might be perfect for each other.

JEFF

What? But... Tanya, I... Wha?

Tanya leans forward and kisses Jeff on the cheek, then slowly walks past him. Jeff is stunned, turning to watch her go. A partygoer crashes into him, knocking him back a step, but he keeps watching Tanya leave, exiting through the front door.

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THE LIVING ROOM

42

Billy sees Tanya kiss Jeff then leave, but doesn't realize what has happened. He closes in on Jeff by the front door, Geoff is nearby. Neither notices him approaching until he calls out.

BILLY

Jeff!

Jeff and Geoff both turn to Billy.

JEFF

What?



GEOFF  
He was talking to...

BILLY  
You fucking piece of shit!

Geoff quickly backs away. Everybody else in the room turns to look at Billy and Jeff.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
Boy, did I ever have you figured wrong! Before, I thought you were just stupid, now I find out you're fucking with my life? What am I, a plaything to you?

JEFF  
What are you talking about? And what did you do to my girlfriend?

Billy stops, turns slightly sideways, and draws himself up proudly.

BILLY  
I kissed her!

JEFF  
What?!!

The crowd gasps.

BILLY  
In my bedroom! Before you came back! What do you think of that?

JEFF  
You backstabbing little... Why did you...? What is the matter with you?

BILLY  
What's the matter with me? What's the matter with you!

Billy turns to address the crowd.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
What's the matter with ALL of you? I ask you to come over to help me out with my problem, only the biggest decision I've ever had to make in my life, and you turn it into a big fucking party!

Billy picks up an empty beer can and throws it.

BILLY (CONT'D)

With... with bets, and votes,  
and... Fuck! I haven't heard one  
helpful piece of advice tonight!  
Not one! You're all wrapped up in  
your own little problems and  
bizarre viewpoints and conspiracy  
theories to give even five seconds  
of serious thought or consideration  
to ME!

Billy slowly spins around to look at everybody in turn.

BILLY (CONT'D)

That's all I wanted! A little help!  
It's only the rest of my fucking  
life that's at stake! I know it  
means nothing to you, but it's all  
I've got! So you want to know what  
I'm gonna do? I'm gonna go to my  
room and make my decision -- ON MY  
OWN -- like I should have done in  
the first place! And when I come  
out, when I'm done, when I've made  
MY decision, you'd all better be  
GONE!!!

Billy quickly crosses the floor into his bedroom and slams  
the door. Geoff approaches Jeff who is completely stunned by  
the turn of events.

GEOFF

Jeff with a "J"!

JEFF

What?

GEOFF

I'M just Geoff, YOU'RE Jeff with a  
"J"!

Jeff closes his eyes, not quite believing what's going on. He  
waves Geoff away with one hand.

JEFF

Yeah, okay, sure.

Geoff triumphantly turns his back on Jeff, pumping his fists,  
then melts into the crowd, shaking Steve's hand. Jeff slumps  
his shoulders, defeated, and exits the apartment through the  
front door. Brad addresses the crowd.

BRAD

Okay... I guess the party has come to an end. Please see me now to make your final votes and bets, and thank you for coming...

Slowly, the rest of the people leave. Tony approaches Brad and gives him five dollars. He tells him his vote and Brad writes it down in the memo pad. Tony drifts out with the last few people. Rob is the last one left. He comes over to Brad and they walk to the front door. The apartment is empty now but much messier, with beer cans, pizza boxes and other garbage strewn about.

ROB

Is Billy going to be okay?

BRAD

Oh yeah, he's fine.

ROB

He seemed pretty upset...

BRAD

Yeah? Don't worry. I'll take care of it.

ROB

Hey, it looks like you succeeded in breaking up Jeff and Tanya...

BRAD

You mean, "us", right?

ROB

Uh, no, I changed my mind. You take full credit for this one. I don't think my insurance would cover it.

Brad smiles and shrugs his shoulders.

BRAD

Heh, okay. Good night, Rob. Thanks for coming.

ROB

Good night.

Rob exits. Brad shuts the front door and returns to the living room. He sits down on the couch, taking out the little memo pad and pen and putting everything down on the coffee table. He finds a leftover beer on the coffee table. Somebody has tied Billy's necktie around it. Brad opens the beer without removing the necktie and takes a sip.

He puts it down, then takes the pen and writes in the memo pad. Billy opens his bedroom door and comes into the living room, standing in front of Brad.

BILLY  
Everybody gone?

Brad leans forward and lifts up an empty beer can, looking underneath.

BRAD  
Yep.

BILLY  
Well?

BRAD  
Just a sec...

Brad checks the memo pad, writing down the totals.

BRAD (CONT'D)  
Okay.

BILLY  
So... What are the results? What did they vote?

BRAD  
All right. Seventeen of our dearest and closest friends thought you should pursue the wondrous but uncertain life of a writer. However, twelve of them thought you should come to your senses and take the promotion with all the boring predictability and financial security that it would bring. So... there it is. Seventeen against the promotion, twelve for taking it.

BILLY  
Okay.

There is a long pause while Billy thinks about the results. He sits down on a chair and stares off into the distance, thinking some more, not moving. Brad closes the memo pad and puts it on the table, taking another sip of beer. Finally, Billy takes a deep breath and turns to face Brad.

BILLY (CONT'D)  
Okay. So... I've made my decision.

BRAD

You're going to refuse the promotion?

BILLY

No. I'm going to take it.

BRAD

What? But they voted...

BILLY

Brad... Did you talk to any of them tonight? Our friends are all a bunch of IDIOTS. I wouldn't trust them to make the right decision for me.

Brad beams with pride, then quickly hides his smile with his hand. Billy doesn't notice.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Hey, you don't think I scared them with...

BRAD

Your little outburst? Naw...

BILLY

What about Jeff? Do you think he'll ever speak to me again?

BRAD

He'll get over it. Or not. I don't really care.

Billy looks at Brad with an amused expression and a slight smile.

BILLY

So... what WERE the results of the bet?

Brad reaches for the memo pad.

BRAD

Well...

BILLY

No, wait: I don't... I don't want to know.

Billy sees his necktie on Brad's beer. He removes it from the can, undoes the knot, then turns it over and over in his hands, examining it.

BRAD

You don't?

BILLY

No. I think it would be too depressing. I'm just gonna... go to bed.

Billy stands up.

BRAD

Well, maybe this will cheer you up: I heard Jeff and Tanya broke up...

BILLY

Really? Huh... I wonder whose idea that was...

Brad reaches over and grabs the phone, holding it out to Billy, who stands and sadly looks at it.

BRAD

I'm presuming, of course, that you got her number.

BILLY

No, but that's all right. I don't want to be starting anything if I'm moving away.

BRAD

What?!!

BILLY

The promotion's to the head office. I have to move to Portland.

BRAD

Wha... Why didn't you tell me?

BILLY

Because I figured that if you knew, you'd try to influence my decision. Now you'll have to find a new roommate who'll put up with you, what a hassle that'll be...

Brad is gaping open-mouthed at Billy.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Oh, I guess I don't need this after all...

Billy digs in his pocket and retrieves the quarter Brad gave him earlier. He throws it to Brad who catches it with his free hand, but doesn't look at it. Billy looks at his watch.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Actually, I've got about half an hour before I have to go to sleep... So... I think I'll... write something.

Brad is surprised again. Billy turns and heads towards Billy's bedroom. He waves, but doesn't look back.

BILLY (CONT'D)

Thanks a lot... For, you know, helping me out...

Brad is stunned. He answers Billy by reflex.

BRAD

No problem, Billy... Good night...

Billy goes into Billy's bedroom and shuts the door. Brad hangs up the phone, then finishes his beer. He opens his fist and flips the quarter in the air, catches it and slams it down on the coffee table. He slowly moves his hand away and looks at the coin.

BRAD

Huh.

Brad looks at it for a bit, then stands up and heads for Brad's bedroom, leaving the quarter on the table.

BRAD (CONT'D)

(muttering)

Which way was "heads" again?

Brad opens his bedroom door, goes inside, and closes the door.

END.