

CORPORATE PLAYGROUND

Written by

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EXT. FRONT OF SCHOOL - EVENING

A boy stumbles down the sidewalk.

BILLY, twiggy and freckled, RUNS, his knees and palms patterned with fresh pavement scrapes.

He breathes shuddered breaths, snotty and sniffing.

Laughter resounds from a ways behind him, a group of guys hanging off their pack leader, DAVID.

They hold up a DRAWING, passing it around and cracking up.

GUY #1
(cackling)
Holy-! The resemblance is uncanny!

David shrugs. His friends shove at his shoulders, snickering. Goaded on, David grins.

He shouts at Billy's retreating figure.

DAVID
Don't worry, I'll make some copies
for you, man!

The group bursts into laughter.

Billy runs until he can't hear them, tumbling to a gasping stop. He folds, slick palms sliding against his knees. He heaves.

BILLY (V.O.)
It's a bit funny, now.

He chokes, breaking into sobs. He wipes at his eyes with his fists, pulls at his face until the tears stop.

BILLY (V.O.)
I was so sure you had ruined my
life.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY (YEARS LATER)

An office suffused with soft noise, computer keys, flipping papers, and shutting doors. The quiet productivity of a sandbox.

A man, Billy, reedy but steady, stands halfway inside of his BOSS' office. He nods intermittently, slowly edging his way out.

BILLY (V.O.)
A lot of things seem silly in
hindsight.

BOSS
-just unacceptable behavior! You'd
think we hired him to go on smoke
breaks! Can you believe it?

BILLY
Not at all, sir.

BOSS
That's right.

Sensing the last of his temper, Billy starts pulling the door
closed.

His boss sighs, smoothing down his brow. He gives a parting
shot as the door inches closed.

BOSS (CONT'D)
-And tell him to get those copies
on my desk no later than Thursday!

BILLY
Of course, sir.

He shuts the door. His coworkers greet him from their
cubicles as he walks. A woman pops up.

COWORKER #1
Hey, Bill.

BILLY
Good to see you, Shelley.

He doesn't linger. A man gives him a glance over a screen.

COWORKER #2
Chewed out? Boss seemed pissed.

BILLY
Not at me.

A coworker he gets drinks with regularly, Steven, spins out
of his cubicle on his roly-chair, legs crossed and primed
for gossip.

STEVEN
New guy again?

Billy stops. He doesn't say anything, but he doesn't have to.
Steven huffs.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
That guy, seriously...

BILLY
He's trying his best.

STEVEN
Yeah, well if his best is just...

Steven waves his hands to mean: NOTHING.

Billy shrugs, but a smile curls in the corner of his mouth.

BILLY
He's got a shit teacher.

His coworker laughs.

STEVEN
Oh please, even you can't do much
for-

They are interrupted by a man waving Billy over from a little ways away, tucked around a corner. Speak of the devil.

Steven clicks his tongue as Billy goes over.

INT. HALLWAY

The man curls into himself as soon as Billy reaches him. They stand as opposites, both in stature and composure.

BILLY
Something wrong?

DAVID
No- uh. I wasn't able to catch you
this morning, but I wanted...Well,
I'm not sure if you remember-

BILLY
I do. I'm surprised you can.

David runs a hand over his face, humiliated. His hair is a mess, and his eyes are bloodshot. He's hungover.

DAVID
I made such a sorry sight of
myself.

BILLY
It's wasn't *that* bad.

DAVID
Ugh. I didn't... say anything
weird, did I?

BILLY
Nope.

BEGIN FLASHBACK: INT. BAR - NIGHT

David is very drunk, tearing up, snotty and sniffing. Billy sits beside him, very sober.

DAVID
A-and so I just- *god, this is embarrassing-* It's just that I *need* this, you know? Like, to prove to myself I'm not just some...*ugh.*

Billy takes a sip of his drink.

BILLY
Yeah.

David gives a hysterical laugh through tears.

DAVID
I *know* it's not anything important. I'm not so- I'm not changing the world or anything. It's just...you know?

BILLY
...Mhmm.

DAVID
I want to do good here. W-want to do right by people, for once- *god-* when I saw you for the first time- I just...

END FLASHBACK.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

BILLY (V.O.)
I remember it very clearly, actually.

DAVID
I wanted to apologize-

BILLY

It's fine.

DAVID

-You were so kind to offer- and I just let it get completely out of hand,

BILLY

It's alright, really-

DAVID

And the trouble it must've been- Look, I'm really, really sorry-

BILLY

I forgive you. What else are friends for?

David halts, caught on FRIENDS.

DAVID

I-...what?

BILLY

I'm usually designated driver, anyway. It's not a big deal. If it bothers you, you can treat me next time.

David looks genuinely touched, and slightly thrilled, like a kid who just found someone to push him on the swing set. He regains his composure, clearing his throat.

DAVID

Thank you. Then, uh, how's it going? Oh-! Is everything alright? I heard the boss shouting.

Billy smiles. He sets a comforting hand on David's shoulder, pulling him along as he heads back to his desk.

BILLY

Nothing you have to worry about.

They rejoin the bustle of the office. Printers chug, keyboards clack, doors open and shut.

A phone rings.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY (YEARS AGO)

The bell rings.

A girl gets up from a shared table, walking off without saying goodbye. Billy, opposite her, shoves his stuff together, flushed and embarrassed.

David walks over with a confident swagger. Billy rushes to hide a piece of paper from view.

He looks miserable. David pays it no mind, sliding into the chair across him as their classmates filter out.

DAVID
Hey! How'd it go?

Billy grimaces, visibly annoyed, but clearly a little flattered David is talking to him.

He shrugs like: *what do you think?* David laughs.

DAVID (CONT'D)
Come on, it can't be *that* bad. Can I see?

Billy is extremely reluctant. David clasps his hands together in silent plea. His grin is disarming. Billy sighs, slowly turning the paper over.

On it is an extremely terrible drawing of him. It is artfully atrocious, expertly pinpointing and emphasizing all of the features he is most insecure about.

David almost chokes with the force of his laughter, crumpling as he attempts to stifle it. Billy scoffs.

BILLY
Yeah. I know.

DAVID
(laughing)
Jeez, when I asked her to draw you I thought she might flatter you a bit, ya know?

Billy flinches, shocked. He SLAMS the table as he lifts out of his seat, horrified.

BILLY
You *ASKED*?

David blinks, smiling.

DAVID
Yeah! You like her, right?

Billy grips the table, resisting the desire to strangle him.

BILLY
I told you that in *confidence*!

DAVID
Uh, yeah, and it still *is*. I just
went over and asked her to draw my
friend. Totally innocent.

Billy groans, but he catches on FRIEND, his anger assuaged.
He sinks into his seat and buries his head in his arms,
humiliated.

BILLY
(muffled)
Oh my god...

David laughs, standing and grabbing his backpack. As he
leaves, he gives Billy a comforting pat on the shoulder.

DAVID
Don't freak out about it, man.
It'll be alright.

Billy lifts his head just in time to see him leave. He
slumps, red with embarrassment but slightly thrilled. He
knows David is out of his league.

He smiles to himself, putting away his stuff.

Billy shuffles his things into his backpack. He does not
notice the missing drawing.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY (FRIDAY)

Billy is getting his stuff together, about to go on lunch
break.

David walks over carrying various papers, glancing over at
the door to their boss' office as he does.

BILLY
What's up?

David shuffles, smiling a little nervously.

DAVID
I, uh, wanted to ask if you felt
like getting drinks today. My
treat, of course.

BILLY
(joking)
Only if you promise not to cry.

David laughs, but winces.

DAVID
I'll try. Although...

He stares at the boss' door. The papers hang limp and disorderly in his grasp.

BILLY
He's asking for you?

DAVID
Yeah. I'm worried.

Billy stands up, grabbing his lunchbox. He takes the papers, shuffles them into a neat pile, then hands them back. He bumps David with his shoulder.

BILLY
Don't freak out. You've been doing great this week, really. I think he'll be impressed.

DAVID
I haven't been doing much. It feels like they haven't needed me for anything...You really think so?

Billy smiles at him, disarming. The tension bleeds out of David's body. He rights himself, and heads off. Billy watches him disappear behind the door.

He turns, and heads to lunch.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY (LATER)

The office is subdued, like rain during recess. Billy walks in, but is stalled by the hush.

He looks around. Steven meets his eyes. He gestures towards the hallway, sighing.

Billy strides towards it.

INT. HALLWAY

Billy turns the corner, immediately seeing David, hunched, trying to control his breathing.

BILLY
Hey, hey- What's wrong?

David startles, looking at first horrified to be seen, then relieved at who it is, then utterly mortified.

He scrubs at his face.

DAVID
Jesus, this is so embarrassing.

Billy leans in, face contorting in something like sympathy.

BILLY
What happened?

David laughs hoarsely. Billy walks him over to the water cooler. David trails along, breathing shuddering breaths.

DAVID
What else? I got chewed out.

He leans against the water cooler, limp and lifeless. Billy makes him a cup. He takes it, staring weakly at his reflection.

DAVID (CONT'D)
He had plenty of things to say.
Apparently I've just been screwing
up nonstop.

He starts to tear up, trembling.

DAVID (CONT'D)
You should've seen it. Me walking
in there thinking I'd done anything
worth being proud of. And then he
just yells. About meetings, about
copies, a-and I was even missing
some of the papers I was supposed
to bring to him just then-! *God.*

He chokes, covering his face with his hands. Billy lets him catch his breath before he speaks.

BILLY
Hey. You should go home. Get some
rest.

David whips his head up.

DAVID
What-? N-no I couldn't-

BILLY
Seriously. I'll cover for you.

David stares at him, his horror slowly turning to distant shock.

DAVID
I-...Alright. Okay. Thanks.

Just like that, Billy takes his water cup. David goes and grabs his stuff.

BILLY (V.O.)
And I think it's a bit funny, in hindsight.

David returns, still bowled over with surprise, clutching his things like someone's going to rip them away. He finds his words.

DAVID
I'm sorry....for everything. You've done more for me than I ever deserved. And thank you. It means a lot.

Billy sets a hand on his shoulder.

BILLY
I told you, it's nothing. I'll get those copies printed for you.

David beams, touched.

DAVID
You're a lifesaver.

David pulls him in for a hug. Slowly, Billy pats him on the back.

BILLY (V.O.)
I mean, do you want to know the first thing I thought, when I saw you, David?

With his face over David's shoulder, he allows himself a small smile.

BILLY (V.O.)
I'm going to ruin this guy's life.

FADE OUT.

THE END