

KENTUCKY BILL

By Emily Breeze

CHARACTERS:

HARRY: A salesman. A very dramatic salesman.

MIDGE: Harry's wife. Used to his shit.

SETTING:

A family living room, late at night. Maybe it's the set of a community theatre production of a 1950's canonical American Drama. Or it's just an actual living room.

SCENE ONE

*Harry walks in the door, in a crumpled suit and holding a briefcase.*

HARRY: Damn.

*He fumbles about, looking for the light switch, illuminating the living room. There is a couch, a coffee table with a few magazines, and an armchair.*

MIDGE (*offstage*): Harry?

HARRY: It's alright, it's just me-

*Midge enters in a housecoat.*

MIDGE: It's late, I was getting worried.

HARRY: I'm sorry.

MIDGE: What happened? Did something happen?

HARRY: It was a difficult day at the office.

MIDGE: Is everything alright?

*Harry takes off his coat and sits down, takes off his shoes.*

MIDGE: Are you alright?

HARRY: Let me- I just need to sit for a moment.

MIDGE: I'll get you a glass of buttermilk.

*Midge runs to the kitchen. Harry sits, with his head in his hand.*

HARRY: I'll be fine. It's Miller.

MIDGE (*offstage*): Who?

HARRY: Bill Miller. He's just two desks over from me, in sales. A titan in his day. Just- sitting two desks over, like the rest of us. Back when he would go on the road, they called him Kentucky Bill, because he could sell moonshine to a nun.

*Midge comes back, with a big glass of buttermilk. It's thick.*

HARRY: Thank you.

MIDGE: It's always easier for you to settle down with a glass of buttermilk.

HARRY: Mmm.

*He takes a big gulp. He sets the glass down, looks at Midge.*

HARRY: Bill died today.

MIDGE: Oh!

HARRY: At his desk.

MIDGE: What happened?

HARRY: He was about to take a fishing trip, to this little place he has upstate with Marge- we were laughing about it just this morning. I said, "Carver's letting you take a full two weeks?" and he said, "What are they gonna do, fire me?". He was thinking of retiring later this year, he'd- his whole career he worked at Carver's, alongside Carver Senior first and then he stayed on when Carver Junior took it over. The man worked his whole career at one desk, and he died there today.

MIDGE: What did they do?

HARRY: We didn't even know, at first. Imagine that? A man dies next to you and you don't even notice. He was unnoticeable.

MIDGE: That's the life of a salesman.

*Harry finishes his buttermilk.*

HARRY: What life?

*He crosses to the window. Midge grabs the cup and brings it to the kitchen.*

HARRY: Do you remember that dinner party, just before Christmas, at the O'Neill's?

*Midge comes back in with a full glass of buttermilk, she sets it on the coffee table.*

MIDGE: Oh sure-

HARRY: We all went down to their new basement, Biff had just gotten a pool table.

MIDGE: Right.

*Midge is looking at the magazine on the coffee table.*

HARRY: While you were upstairs with Helen, Biff and I played a round.

*Beat.*

HARRY: Of pool.

MIDGE: You did?

HARRY: It was just one round, we didn't think anything of it, to start. But. Biff wanted to show off, he had all these little tricks he was trying to learn, and he was trying to prove he could jump the cue ball. I said, "Biff it's just a good-natured game, between friends" and he... looked at me and he said, right back to me, "Between friends". And he jumped the cue ball.

*Midge is flipping through the magazine during the above, not giving a fuck.*

HARRY: Just like that.

*Harry turns back to Midge, she shuts the magazine in time. Harry crosses back to the table, sits. Midge nudges him the buttermilk. He grabs it and slogs a gulp back, then turns away in the chair. Midge watches cautiously, then goes back to reading.*

HARRY: The angle was too high. For the cue, he wasn't used to the trick yet and the ball jumped off the table and landed, right on the floor- the new basement floors, Biff hadn't put down the carpet yet and it was still concrete. The cue ball split right down the middle and we just stared at it.

MIDGE: Spooky.

HARRY: We just stared at it, silently, this busted cue ball, and we didn't know what to do with it. After a moment, Biff whistled and picked it up. And we didn't talk about it.

MIDGE: Oh wow.

HARRY: That's what it was today, in the office with Miller. Once we realized- Miss Spalding was the first to realize, she brought him over some papers he had asked for, and she

HARRY (*cont'd*): touched his shoulder and he was cold. She screamed and we looked over and just stared. We all just stared at this dead man. No one knew what to do.

MIDGE: Huh that's crazy.

HARRY: I don't think we'll talk about it. I think tomorrow everyone will have forgotten there ever was a Kentucky Bill, or that he never got to take his fishing trip, or that he might have had some years left with Marge. He'll just- disappear. Unremarked upon. Like a busted up old cue ball.

MIDGE: Well. I hope Marge still takes that trip or it's refundable at least. Because otherwise yeesh.

HARRY: Sometimes I think it might be better- no one noticing. Sometimes I think I envy that.

*Harry takes a deep sip of the buttermilk. He sets it back on the table. Midge looks at him.*

MIDGE: Do you want more buttermilk?

HARRY: No.

MIDGE: Are you sure?

HARRY: I've had enough.

MIDGE: Okey doke.

*Midge grabs the glass, brings it into the kitchen.*

HARRY: I don't think I want to go back to Biff and Helen's.

MIDGE: What?

HARRY: I can't go back there. I don't think I'll be able to face it.

*Midge reappears.*

MIDGE: Ok but we had plans-

HARRY: I had plans, Midge.

MIDGE: Alright.

*Midge sits back down, looks at magazine as Harry goes off again.*

HARRY: I had plans about what kind of life I wanted to build, for you and me and-. But that's all gone now. All gone and all I have staring ahead of me is years and years, hoping I get the chance to go unnoticed.

*Midge tears a perfume strip out of the magazine. She sniffs it.*

HARRY: I don't know if I'm even a person anymore, Midge-

MIDGE (*about the perfume*): Oh that's dramatic.

*She rubs it on her arm.*

HARRY: Truth be told I don't know what know. I just know I can't go back to Biff and Helen's.

MIDGE: What if we went back and you didn't play pool. You could do other things with Biff.

HARRY: Like what. What things.

MIDGE: I don't know, whatever two boys get up to down in a basement-

HARRY: Nothing's ever happened in the basement.

MIDGE: But you were just talking about the cue ball-

HARRY: Except for the cue ball. I don't need you interrogating me.

MIDGE: Honestly, whatever you and Biff have going on-

HARRY: *There's nothing going on!*

MIDGE: -I don't care, I just like hanging out with Helen and if I go over without you, I'll feel guilty and weird and I wouldn't want to go if it can't be like, casual and fun.

HARRY: Well. I'd hate to spoil your fun.

MIDGE: Do you want more buttermilk?

HARRY: No! I don't think I could stomach another glass sitting here, next to you.

MIDGE: I mean yeah it's gross it's buttermilk-

HARRY: I'm trying to talk to my wife! I'm trying to tell my wife a small piece of the horrible crumbs that make up my day, I'm trying to tell my wife the ways in which I'm becoming less of a man and all she can do is drown me in buttermilk. Buttermilk! Buttermilk! Buttermilk! Is that all you have? Is that the only thing you have to give me?

*Harry pushes his chair back, paces. Midge goes back to her magazine.*

HARRY: I am becoming less and less of a man, Midge, I am becoming less of a human being. I don't know if I ever was a human being to begin with- maybe everyone always saw me for what I am from the get, from the very get, except for you and that how you can stand to live with me. God knows how. I feel everyone's eyes on me all the time, somedays I wish I could just die like Bill did, completely unnoticed. What a gift that would be, no one staring at you, like you're some horrible creature, some nocturnal scavenger with a horrible tail and monstrous teeth. Like I belong somewhere else but I keep finding myself trapped in the same cold basement, my claws scratching along those same cold basement floors that will crack you open, that will split you clean in two. Do you know what I am Midge?

MIDGE (*half under her breath, reading the magazine, not giving a single fuck*): A cat on a-

HARRY: I FEEL ALL THE TIME LIKE I AM A POSSUM IN A COLD CONCRETE BASEMENT.

*Midge looks up from her magazine, takes in Harry mid-wild proclamation.*

MIDGE: Ok.

*Blackout.*

*End of Play.*