Checking In

by

Joseph Arnone
Cast of Characters

BILLY: 48
ROB: 18

Place
Middle America

Time
Afternoon
Setting: An old motel that needs a paint job and new windows and is also in need of roof repairs before winter comes.

At Rise: Behind the lobby counter stands BILLY “ready to go” in spirit and energy. In wanders ROB, confused, timid but with backbone.
BILLY: Well, come on in, you ain't lost, you're found!

ROB: Is this Palisade's Motel?

BILLY: Sure is son, you checking in?

ROB: Er, I'm thinking of, I might need a room---

BILLY: Take your time, there's some coffee in the hall there.

(ROB walks to the coffee and then turns back to approach BILLY)

ROB: Are you, listen, is there a Bill Friedman that works here?

BILLY: You're lookin' at 'em.

ROB: You're Bill Friedman?

BILLY: What's this about, son?

ROB: I'm Rob Friedman.

(pause)

BILLY: Oh, hell no.

ROB: I'm your son.

BILLY: Son of a bitch. What ya doin' out this ways?

ROB: Wanted to get a look at ya before I, well, I wanted to meet you at least once.

BILLY: How'd you find me?

ROB: Why'd you disappear on me and Momma?

BILLY: ...It's not like that.

ROB: What's it like?

BILLY: Sheeesh. You ah, you wanna properly catch up, have a beer with me? I keep 'em pretty damn cold in this new refrigerator I bought.

(BILLY opens up a small white refrigerator, pulls out two beers)

Try this.
(BILLY hands ROB a beer and clinks glass)

BILLY (cont'd): You ah, you travel far to get to me?

ROB: I made some miles.

BILLY: What you drivin?

ROB: Got me an Indian Scout Bobber.

BILLY: No shit, really?

ROB: Built it myself.

BILLY: Where is she?

ROB: Just outside.

BILLY: Let's have a look at her.

(BILLY and ROB step outside)

(BILLY admires the motorcycle)

You really put this thing together yourself?

ROB: Sure did.

BILLY: Must run in the family.

ROB: Mom's dead.

(pause)

BILLY: Is she?

ROB: She died last month...cancer.

BILLY: Shit, I...shit.

ROB: She made me promise to see you.

BILLY: How did you find me?

ROB: We always knew where you was...just never thought to tap you on the shoulder, till now.

BILLY: Right. Well...how old are you?

ROB: Eighteen.
(ROB downs his beer, hands it to BILLY)

ROB (cont'd): I just have one question I want to know and I'll be off. (beat) Why'd you leave us?

BILLY: ...I was using.

ROB: And?

BILLY: ...I was changin'. I wasn't the same...needed to get away cause the drugs and because I didn't want you to see me in a different light...I got away...far, far away and I struggled, nearly left for dead once or twice, but I couldn't tell you how or why but, I continued on the path of destruction, like some rabid dog and I, I wanted to die. I was hoping to give out and one day I was found lying in some gutter. Some elderly man took me into his home and cared for me...musta been some sort of war vet cause he had all kinds of memorabilia around his place and he moved and spoke a certain way, but he helped me, I'm grateful. One could say it was an intervention that I was forced to experience. Ha. He was a tough old bastard and I'm not about to go into all the torment and torture I endured but I, I prevailed, I got better, I found work, started a new life, opened up this tiny motel here and that's pretty much my story.

ROB: Why didn't you ever come back?

BILLY: It's not that I didn't want to come back, it's that I couldn't come back. Call it a deep level of humiliation, fear of falling back on my old habits...I don't know...this life wasn't planned.

ROB: Not even a fucking phone call, a letter, something...

BILLY: ...You're right from your point of view, but if you were sittin' in my seat you'd see things a bit, well, VERY differently.

ROB: I find it hard that as a man, you could abandon your family, forever. I don't think I could ever do something like that.

BILLY: I can't disagree with how you feel, son.

ROB: Don't call me son.

BILLY: Right...Robert.

(beat)

ROB: I want you to know that I think you're a piece of shit. You were never a man. You fucking ditched us for your own selfish needs and I hate you for it. I was hoping you'd be dead. The only reason
ROB (cont'd): why I came this way was for the promise I gave my mother...she was the most beautiful, kindhearted, loving human being a person could ever be lucky enough to know. She raised me. She made me who I am today. If it wasn't for her playing the role of a father and a mother, God knows what I would have turned into. I used to go wait on welfare lines with her, used to watch how she fought tooth and nail just so I can have food in my stomach. Used to take the bus to get to town and she'd pawn whatever valuables she had, to make the rent, and she'd always buy me an ice-cream, which somehow made me feel like everything was gonna be alright. I'd chip in as soon as I was old enough, worked at the local deli making sandwiches and I'd hand over every dime to my mother. She never dated, never left the house other than to make a dollar. She was a great woman and you gave up, you quit and walked away, you never fought for us because you are a weak man, because your fucking pride was hurt and I say fuck your pride when it comes to your wife and kid! What pride? Why break a family? Why start a family to begin with if you aren't strong enough to keep em?

I know I'm comin' at ya and I didn't even think about sayin' the things I'm sayin' to ya. I'm pissed off I'm even sayin' 'em! But damn it, somebody's gotta tell you what you did wrong!

Mom wanted me to come here and be nice to you and start some kind of friendship. She was all too worried that I'd be left to my own devices and that's in spite of knowing what you were...imagine? She still forgave you...and loved you.

I'm not as strong as my mother. I see you for who you are and I promise you I will never be anything like you, and maybe for that I should thank you. Thank you for showing me how NOT to be in my life. Thank you for giving me the example I needed to make an honest living, to at least treat people with a bit of dignity, and knowing how to be aware of my own integrity.

Thank you.

(ROB gets on his bike)

BILLY: We can!

ROB: What?

BILLY: We can be friends. I'm not the man I used to be. I didn't think I'd be healthy enough in my mind to have you in my life but I'm willing to try. Yes, you came out here to find me, and I ain't dead, I'm very much alive, son.

ROB: Don't call me son!!

BILLY: I regret leaving. You--if you drive away now than you're no better than me!
ROB: What did you say? I am nothing like you!

BILLY: You are the spittin' image of me. I even had that same dumb hairstyle you're sportin'.

ROB: What?!

BILLY: Shit you sound just like me. How tall are you?

ROB: Are you serious?

BILLY: Bet you're six foot one. Am I right?

ROB: You're mental.

BILLY: Six foot one and let me ask you somethin', do you ever sing songs while doin' dishes? (beat) Just tell me.

ROB: So, what?

BILLY: That's my favorite pastime. Oh hey, when you put your jeans on in the morning, you put your left leg in first?

ROB: I've never thought about it.

BILLY: Okay, you a righty?

ROB: Yeah, most people are.

BILLY: But do you do things with your left? Like, like, like when you throw a baseball, you usually throw it right but you can also throw it left with equal power. You still have that birthmark on your left thigh?

ROB: Yeah.

BILLY: I got the same exact one!

ROB: What?

(BILLY pulls his pants down and shows the birthmark on his left thigh)

That's weird.

BILLY: Tol' you, I tol' you boy...we got a lot in common if you give us a chance. HEY! That Indian Scout Bobber you built yourself, well I built an Indian Chief...

ROB: You're lying.
BILLY: No, no, she rests in the back, in my storage unit. Hasn't been ridden in a while but I bet she could still spark up and roar.

ROB: Can I see it?

BILLY: That all depends.

ROB: On what?

BILLY: That all depends if you're willing to try....

ROB: ...Let me see the bike first.

BILLY: How bout we race for friendship? I know a perfect straight away not far from here, smooth as glass. I beat you our friendship begins, you beat me, well, you keep ridin' into the night, but I gotta start her up first and get her runnin'...think you can give me a hand?

ROB: I'll try...

BILLY: ...That's all any of us can do Robert, try.

END OF PLAY