

# The Proverbial Man

*Martin Krzywinski*

## **ACT I Apt of Bill & John**

*John returns home after work and finds Bill in roughly the same position as this morning. The exception being that the TV is pouring mind-numbing analgesia from a different channel and the volume is turned slightly higher. There also appear to be some signs of food that missed Bill's mouth and, as a result, seem to be feeding the worn-out carpet.*

*Although Bill appears to be in a depressed state, there is something about the way he looks over at John coming in that belies his apparent physical and mental stupor. His look says "I've fallen and I can't get up. And on top of all that, this TV has crushed me. It's too late for me now, but save yourself."*

*As a commercial is about to air, Bill rapidly switches to another channel to avoid the advertisement.*

John: Good to see that your reflexes are still at their peak. Bill. You know, as you age they just go downhill from here. So I figure this is about as reactive as you can ever hope to be. And to think that your glory passed away on a couch in the middle of daytime television.

Bill: My instincts can only improve. While it appears that I'm only watching, in fact I am looking out.

John: Looking out for what?

Bill: It would be better to say looking out into what?

*John has meanwhile dropped off his jacket and bag at the door, fetched a water bottle from the fridge and sat himself near the couch that Bill and his reflexes are occupying. The apartment is only sparsely furnished and now, that both are sitting down, it is standing room only.*

*John relaxes into another pointless discussion with Bill. Although overtly inactive, Bill always manages to pay both the rent and respect to the inconsequential. If people could indeed make mountains out of mole-hills, then Bill has started an economic recession by losing a penny.*

John: You're looking out into what, then?

*Bill sits up slightly. Some long-inactive parts of his brain are being stimulated.*

Bill: I'm assuming that you're expecting me to say that I'm looking out into the society's soul as projected onto the canvas of the mass media. But you know ... that's not it. I'm looking out into space and the tube happens to be just in front of me. The fact that I register and react is merely instinctive. I would think that it's some modern survival instinct, manifesting itself technologically.

John: Ya, you're being lazy and averting your eyes and focussing would be no lesser challenge then a marathon.

Bill: Think what you will. I'm attempting to clear myself from the influences of others. I've almost got this commercial avoidance thing worked out. I can pretty much predict when a blank screen is one which precedes a commercial. In that brief moment of time, I switch channels accomplishing two things: keeping my mind unadulterated.

John: That's only one thing.

Bill: I was being terse. I meant keeping my mind and making sure it's unadulterated.

John: How much terser can you be? You're barely moving and now you're contracting ideas by replacing conjunctions with imperceptible pauses.

Bill: Efficiency. I don't think you should really do anything unless all action is being directly applied to your goals, you see. Right now, I feel that I'm not efficient enough to focus, or as you'd put it "achieve".

John: Hey, don't single me out, here. We're doing so well keeping things general.

Bill: Exactly right. But, conversation shifts and you must adapt, less you should be found following it. The last thing you want to be is a slave to words around you.

Why are you drinking water? Wasn't there something else? You know, people who take special care to drink water out of bottles make me uncomfortable. I am always thinking that in their quest for purity, they are cleansing me of any individuality and all that remains is an odourless, tasteless and perfectly colourless image of my former self, deprived of all the perfectly unique additives.

John: Well, odourless wouldn't be so bad.

Bill: I was using the word for effect only. Why don't you get something with colour? Something with flavour?

John: I'm thirsty and we're all out of flavour. Although I did see colour in the fridge, but it was stuck to the glass shelf.

Bill: Oh... so had there been something else you're saying you'd have taken

it?

John: I don't know. That's a pretty big "if". Are you saying that you could have gone out and bought something to put in the fridge?

Bill: Not unless I had done it efficiently.

John: Ya, I know. I'm not out for purity, at least not from this water, as much as I just gotta get some liquid satisfaction. Everybody at work is so terribly dry.

Bill: That's what happens when you get an education and then a job. I don't know how you can do it.

John: Well, all work and no play makes Johnny a sad boy.

Bill: Proverbially?

John: Yes.

Bill: How does it feel to be named after the proverbial man?

John: I don't know.

Bill: Have you thought about it?

John: Not really. I mean, I don't have to live up to it. Or set any examples.

Bill: But the proverbial man always gets treated terribly. He lives out his life merely to fuel ridiculous sayings that underline his plight. Johnny is always suffering, missing the point, late, hungry, sad, dejected. Does the proverbial man ever experience happiness?

John: Hmm....

Bill: How are we to survive as a species if our proverbial representatives are entirely unsuccessful? Who's the proverbial woman?

John: I think it's Mary.

Bill: They both sound rather English, don't you think?

John: I guess.

Bill: An odd perversion.

John: Only if we're the perverts.

Bill: I think we know whether we are.

*At this point the door bell rings. John gets the door. His friend, Ezekiel, enters.*

Ezekiel: Hey, look I'm just back from work. I noticed you left a little early. I'm gonna grab a beer. You wanna come?

John: Eerr...

*John has been manipulated into a light friendship with Ezekiel, although he doesn't really know how it happened.*

John: Bill, you want to come out?

Bill: Soon. No sense in leaving right away.

John: ...sure, no sense in that, is there? [Turning to Ezekiel] Come in.

Ezekiel: Ok.

*Ezekiel sits down on the only free chair without taking off shoes or jacket.*

Ezekiel: Got any beer?

*John looks at Bill.*

Bill: Would you sacrifice flavour and color?

Ezekiel: Huh?

John: Sorry, just water. [Pointing at a half-empty water bottle in his hand. Turning to Bill] This is a buddy from work, Ezekiel. We go out sometimes. Ezekiel, this is Bill, my charming roommate. He needs an audience.

Bill [To Ezekiel]: Are you Jewish?

Ezekiel: Huh?

Bill: Are you Jewish?

Ezekiel: No. Why?

Bill: Well, you're named Jewish. So I thought you'd be Jewish.

Ezekiel: I haven't thought about that.

Bill: I'm the first person who has thought you're Jewish?

Ezekiel: People usually don't say.

Bill: I just want you to know that you're Jewish in the eyes of the world.

John: Ok, Rabbi Bill let's go.

Bill: Hey, I'm moving. I figure I've walked three times around your friend here already. I've seen every angle and perspective. And the last two times were just to see whether I missed anything.

Ezekiel looks at Bill, but doesn't understand.

Bill: So why did your parents name you Ezekiel?

Ezekiel: I don't know. That's what they did. [To John] So, we're going?

Bill slowly gets up.

John: Glacially, but at least we're going.

Bill: Ok, I need to grab some cash from the machine outside. I'll meet you at Boppy's.

John: Ok. Ezekiel, let's go.

*Ezekiel gets up and heads for the door. It's clear that he's missed much, and not just during the conversation. Perhaps poor nutrition during childhood or a malnourished environment has led to his pedestrian nature.*

*Ezekiel and John leave. Bill is rummaging for his wallet, finds it and shuffles out.*

## **ACT II - ATM**

*Bill is in line for money. Two people are in front of him. A woman currently occupying the limelight at the ATM has been there for some time. Faint beeping is heard.*

Bill [To the man in front of him, motivated by some more beeping]: Is she composing?

*The man looks back and shrugs his shoulders. Bill rolls his eyes, pegging him as another water bottle type.*

*Some time passes and the woman is still at the machine. The man in front of Bill has given up and left and he is now standing behind a woman, who appears to have more patience.*

Bill: Attrition rate is high in the line up. Have you enough food?

*The woman turns around. Bill notices recognition in the way she's looking at him, not of him but the words.*

Woman: I'm down to my last ration, actually. I'm also concerned that I won't be able to pitch the tent on this concrete. [Pointing at the clear sky.] Looks like a cold night.

Bill: Maybe we're not meant to withdraw money at a rate faster than we make it? I figure a good 3 hours to get out twenty bucks.

*The woman appears to be done ... and just then another card appears from her voluminous wallet and slides into the ATM. The magic of multiple*

accounts.

Woman: That'd make a long wait for me. I just got laid off today.

Bill: A wonder how much difference one word can make.

*Bill has never been good at empathy. Apparently, the woman isn't in need of any because she smiles. Bill gets the idea that she is understanding him in a way that he does not.*

Woman: Before today, I expected both to be just as unlikely.

*She smiles. Another thing Bill has never been good at was picking up girls. The woman at the ATM is fervently licking a deposit envelope. How much more can she lick?*

Bill [Pointing to the ATM woman with his gaze]: You think....

Woman: I do.

*Just then the ATM woman beings to walk away from the machine. It is not certain whether she's done. He hesitates with each step, as if there was one last important thing she's allowed her mind to forget. Only when she's clearly further from the machine than both Bill and the woman in front of him, is her departure sealed. The woman smiles at Bill and proceeds to the machine. She withdraws her money and leaves. Bill is a little too nervous to see whether she's looked back. He sensed natural interaction with her. He feels like he did not take advantage of the opportunity.*

### **ACT III - Boppy's**

*Bill enters and sees John and his friend already drinking at one of the tables. There is a pitcher of beer, now half-empty in front of them. John waves him over. Bill sits down.*

John: So? [This gets him an inquisitive, almost guilty, look from Bill].  
Did you get money? With you ... you never know.

Bill: Ya I got some ... [he seems to want to say more.]

John: And?

Bill: There was this girl... [John rolls his eyes. Ezekiel's attention towards the beer is briefly pulled away. Clearly he responds to at least two things.] We clicked.

John: At an ATM?

Bill: Making it all the more special.

John: How?

Bill: I made some joke about having sex and she got it.

John: And you consider yourself shy?

Bill [Chuckling]: You know what I mean. I alluded to having sex, not with her but just in general. It was ideal. Done in such a way that if the person didn't get it then they had no idea what I was saying ... and if they did get it ...

John: Let me guess, she got it.

Bill: I think so.

John: Maybe she was playing with you in the same way?

Bill: I hope so.

Ezekiel: Did you look at her balance?

Bill: What?

Ezekiel: Did you check out her ATM receipt. Maybe she's loaded.

Bill: She's loaded alright, She shot her wit out at least twice. [Ezekiel's eyes magically glare over again.]

John: And then?

Bill: Then she took money out and left.

John: You should have asked her to join us.

Bill: You don't ask people out at the ATM. Dealing with money already makes people reserved.

John: And so that's why they joke about sex?

Bill: It's not like that.

John: Then like what?

Bill: I don't know, but NOT like that.

John: Whatever. You gotta grab these chances. How often do you come out of the house, withdraw cash and meet a girl. I don't know about you but I count at least three statistically improbable events.

Bill: Now you're making me feel like there's nothing left to live for.

John: Only if you've lived for what just happened. Anyway, you can always deposit the money you took out and try tomorrow. Maybe she'll be there.

Bill: I can't stalk the ATM. Besides, I'm not going to waste my time recycling money through the machine. The bank will get suspicious. They'll see

the same bills taken out and then deposited. There's a little camera. They'll raise my service charges, adding a suspect-behaviour component. If your moral state drops below a certain level, wham!, you're hit with all the consequences of all actions, moral or immoral, that month. People will think I'm weird.

John: Well, definitely you're not normal.

Bill: But you can fall off the curve in both directions.

John: Potentially ... yes. Ezekiel, what does this sound like to you?

Ezekiel: Was she hot?

Bill: I didn't really get a chance to look.

Ezekiel: So she wasn't.

Bill: I was paying attention to the woman hogging the ATM. She was holding up the lineup.

Ezekiel: So you were checking out two chicks at the same time?

Bill: Only in the vernacular. [Ezekiel's input into the conversation was certainly limited and with that comment any further participation was deterred.]

Ezekiel: I gotta go.

John: Ok, see you tomorrow.

Ezekiel leaves. Rather abruptly.

Bill: God knows to where.

John: Oh, relax. He's ok.

Bill: If ok means dull, then he's ok. How did you meet up with him?

John: Met him at work. You know, you walk around and find people to talk to and you wind up with the Ezekiel of the world sometimes.

Bill: You sound like he sought you out.

John: I don't know. Seem like a good idea to form some casual friendships at work. You know, the proverbial buddy. You go. You drink a little. Talk about cars and guns and then go home.

Bill: You don't talk about cars or guns.

John: I know. But that's how envision these things to be.

Bill: Well, you can talk about cars and guns if you want. If this is what



your vision is like.

John: I don't know if I want that.

Bill: Then why imagine it?

John: I don't know. Seems to me like there is some ideal state of interacting with people like that and I don't have it well defined.

Bill: So what did you talk about while I was cavorting at the ATM? [Laughs.]

John: Not much.

Bill: And that's your idea of a good time?

John: Sometimes sacrifices have to be made.

Bill: So that...

John: Dunno. Anyway, everytime I drink you depress me. Look at that. Vegetated in front on the couch all day. Then two steps later you land yourself some divine withdrawer who sees into your soul.

Bill: Is that what happened? Somehow the whole thing seemed a little more secular.

John: Do you think that I would have had water if there was something else?

Bill: Yes.

John: Why?

Bill: You're afraid of flavour.

John: And you embrace it?

Bill: Well, I recognize it and see that I want it. I just don't know how to get it sometimes. On the other hand, you either don't have time for flavour or the urge. And seeing how we're both here on a Friday night, you've got the time.

John: Christ, alcohol gets me down.

Bill: You just have an excuse now.

John: You think?

Bill: I do.

John: I gotta do something to cheer up. Going out and getting a degree and then working doesn't seem all that it promised to be.

Bill: You were promised something?

John: You know what I mean. It's not what I expected.

Bill: You were expecting something?

John: Well, yes. Some degree of satisfaction.

Bill: From what? Following the proverbial man through his life. You know, just as your friend there hasn't embraced the Jewish ways, you too, my friend, do not have to embrace Johnny. You know what your problem is?

John: What?

Bill: Your name has dictated your life. Subconsciously you're are living Johnny. That's why you're so obsessed with "Johnny" sayings.

John: I'm obsessed?

Bill: Yes. Count on someone who has a firm understanding of these things to tell you. Even your buddy, who distinguishes himself through his average composure, has resisted the most fundamental, and insidious, form of marketing. Why do you think I was fiddling with the channels when you came in?

John [chuckling, but not happily]: Sounds like there's a lot more going on then I'm lead to believe.

Bill: You know the saying..."There are fires within fires and wheels within wheels."

John: I don't believe in iterated sayings.

Bill: Your belief is not required, merely your acceptance.

John: That's a good one.

Bill: You have to snap out of it.

John [humourously]: Is it too late to change my name? That'd do it.

Bill: You know what'd happen?

John [sipping]: uh?

Bill: Ok, you'd take out your proverbial name tag and write on the other side ...

John: Robert.

Bill: Robert. Then you'd turn the name tag around so that the world would see Robert. But, what would you see?

John: Robert upsidedown?

Bill: Funny. [Bill is in the middle of a lecture, so he is merely amused.] but you'd really be seeing Johnny. And not upsidedown anymore. It would be facing you for the rest of your life. You'd be more Johnny than ever. You'd be Johnny a.k.a. Robert, which is a thousand times worse than just Johnny. With an alias, it's clear you have something to hide.

John: So you suggest what?

Bill: You must dig deep. Examine yourself and extract only pieces which make you happy.

John: Sounds like a particularly painful vivisection.

Bill: All vivisections are painful.

John: Ya, particularly when you do it yourself. The "hurts me more than it hurts you" adage doesn't even apply. More like "hurts me more and hurts me some more".

Bill: Nobody can cut into your soul but you.

John: You've been doing a good job.

Bill: I was merely scraping.

John [pauses and sighs]: Ok, let's go. I don't want to get to know myself too well.

Bill: History is long. The people were many. You've been written all down before. It's just a matter of looking yourself up.

#### **ACT IV - Apt of Bill & John**

*Next day, morning. End of morning. Just before noon. John gets up. Bill is in front of the TV. There is a TV Guide near him. John sees the TV Guide. He cannot help but comment.*

John [Pointing at the TV Guide]: What? You're actually planning your viewing?

Bill: Nonsense. I am just examining the possibility that even if you're not watching TV, you're watching it when you look in this stupid magazine. They have pictures of little scenes from TV. A more than generous sampling. In stead of telling you what's on, they also show you what it will look like. Ridiculous. I've spend most of the morning removing the stupid cardboard advertisements from the magazine.

John: For those dolls?

Bill: This week it was a native knife with ornate etchings of whales swimming

around an iceberg. All for five easy payments ...

John: I wish my life were as easy as payments.

Bill: Hey, payments aren't easy. Especially when you're paying for your mistakes.

John: Like ordering that knife. [His face takes on a bit of a brooding look] I've decided to be happy.

Bill: I hope you haven't started yet.

John [rather dejectedly]: No. I first want to make sure that it's a good idea.

Bill: Well, don't let it all come out at once. Ration it. No sense in getting all happy for nothing. Imagine the effort.

John: What about that ATM relationship?

Bill: I have a weird feeling about the whole thing. I'm normally not inclined to the chase, but in this case ... I may make an exception.

John: What are you chasing?

Bill: Honestly?

John: No lie to me.

Bill: Anyway, I think the fact that she says exactly what I want her to say without telling her to say it. The link between two minds of people which cannot be taught, obtained through habit or time, or explained to anyone's satisfaction.

John: That sounds pretty serious. And you think the ATM girl fits the bill?

Bill: Funny the way you put it.

John: We really ought to name her, you know. Calling her ATM girl singles out only a small part of her character.

Bill: What? Maybe she's a professional withdrawer.

John: You think?

Bill: No.

John: One of your problems. You speak what you don't think.

Bill: But think of all the things I think that I don't say. Surely, overall there is a balance.

John: Only as defined by you. Anyway, I think we should call her Mary.

Bill: Too proverbial.

John: Oh, c'mon. It'll be great. Now you'll have two people in your life derived from example.

Bill: She's hardly in my life.

John: Not yet.

Bill: Why do I get the felling you're trying to fix me up with someone you don't know?

John: I'm vicariously living through your limited attempts at courtship.

Bill: How limited was my attempt? Each word counted. Each moment valuable and meaningful. I'm telling you, I've got this efficiency thing down packed. I figure in another sentence or two, we would have been getting married. Good thing she left ... I wasn't ready for that kind of commitment.

John: Your heart is running away with your brain.

Bill: There's no shame in that. As long as all my other vital organs follow, I'll be alright.

John: You know, you seem preoccupied with Mary. I really think you should check out the ATM again. How much did she take out?

Bill: I don't know.

John: Well, how much cash did the machine dole out? You can usually tell by the sound.

Bill: Maybe a couple of bills.

John: Ok, so she took our forty bucks. How long does it take a girl, sorry Mary, to spend that much this day and age. I figure she'd be back today, or tomorrow at the latest to feed her cash needs again.

Bill: She told me that she lost her job. It may have been her last withdrawal. At least for a while.

John: This you didn't tell me. How did it come up?

Bill: Right before I made the sex joke, you know.

John: Oh...[hesitantly] I see the connection.

*Bill rolls his eyes.*

John [excitedly]: So neither of you has jobs?

Bill: That would be a thing in common, wouldn't it? You could say we're in the same profession. Or lack thereof.

John: Maybe she's at the employment place down the street? What do you think she did before?

Bill: As work you mean? I don't know. It's not easy to figure these things out. I'd be inclined to say, that because she got my sex joke, she was a prostitute. [Laughs.] But they usually don't lose their jobs.

John: Maybe her pimp changed his mind?

Bill: She's not a prostitute. She doesn't have a pimp. Why do you have to expand so vividly on casual humour.

John: Whenever I think of a prostitute, there's the pimp right behind her. It's the ying and yang of the trade, you know. The big fedora. The coat. The tinted glasses. You know the pimp is always there, even if you can't see him. Pimps have presence.

Bill: You sound like you've done research into this? Possible career option?

John: Anything sounds better than what I'm doing now.

Bill [humourously]: Ok, so you pimp Mary to me. Do I pay you? Maybe just add it to the rent, eh? You'd give me a break, right? As a friend?

*The conversation takes a more serious note.*

Bill: You know you've got troubles when you dream of being a pimp. This is another Ezekiel thing. You got this view of a career in your head, the vision of a pimp, and you go with it. You know, there's a little bit more to it than just the hat and the glasses. Sometimes the job takes a nasty turn. Did you think about that?

John: I'd be a nice one, you know. Set the stage for something different.

Bill: You know, the proverbial pimp isn't so nice. You know, so far you're looking like a pimp, but you're not acting like one. You gotta follow up the style with some substance. It's not just about walking around and looking so bad that you look good. You gotta talk the talk, too you know?

John: That'll come after the walk.

Bill: They've gotta happen at the same time. Actually, the talk should come naturally, well before the walk. Don't you sometimes look at people and think ... yea, that there is a real pimp. And they don't even have the fedora,

John: Well, I don't really look at people as pimps.

Bill: You should. I mean not JUST as pimps.

