

Letting Go
By Tom Moran

The Place: Jacob's den-cum-office
The Time: Early Thursday evening

Cast of Characters:

JACOB, 30's - 40's. A shrewd businessman.
BILLY, about 11. JACOB's misbehaving son.
JENNY, about 9. An adorable tyke.
MARSHA, 30's. JACOB's wife.

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SCENE 1

(An office in a suburban home: a door sits stage right, a desk stage left with two chairs in front of and a rolling chair behind it. JACOB sits behind the desk talking on the phone.)

JACOB

(into phone)

Yeah? (Pause.) Yeah? Well why don't you just get on the phone with Johnny tightwad-seed yourself and tell him, tell him I don't appreciate these sucker punches outta left field. Tell him recess is over and it's time to come out and cut a rug with the big boys.

(Pause.) What? (nods.) Yes, verbatim. (Pause.) That's a what? (angrier) I'll give you a mixed metaphor!

(There is a knock and BILLY opens the door and peers in.)

JACOB

Look, I have to go. I have some business to attend to here. Just tell him to pony up with both barrels.

(JACOB slams down the receiver, collects himself, then smiles at BILLY.)

JACOB

What is it, Billy?

BILLY

Dad, where's your blowtorch?

JACOB

What?

BILLY

I'm just, you know, working on something.

JACOB

No, absolutely not.

BILLY

Oh. Um, how about the deep-fat fryer?

JACOB

(shakes head)

Billy, no. However ... I'm glad you came in here. I need to talk to you. About something very important. Sit down. (BILLY doesn't move. More emphatic) Sit down.

(BILLY sits.)

BILLY

Great. What did I do this time?

JACOB

(pause)

Well, what do you think you did?

BILLY

I dunno. Is this about the, um, seagull.

JACOB

The what?

BILLY

No, I guess not. The thing with the sock full of nickels and the rabbi?

JACOB

What the heck are you talking about?

BILLY

Oh, uh, just something I saw on Oprah. (Stands.) Can I go now? I've got a couple of raccoon skins drying in the shed.

JACOB

What? No, Billy, sit. (He sits reluctantly.) There's something you need to know. Your mother and I have been talking-

BILLY

Well, that's a first-

JACOB

And we've both frankly been very disappointed with your performance lately.

BILLY

My performance?

JACOB

Yes. Billy, as you know, when your mom and I first took you on here at Morgan and Morgan we set a fairly rigorous set of standards for you, and you simply haven't been living up to them.

BILLY

What do you mean?

JACOB

Let me show you your last few performance evaluations.

(JACOB pulls out a stack of papers.)

BILLY

You mean my report cards?

JACOB

Call them whatever you want, Billy. I call them a wake-up call. (Reads.) Doesn't play well with others. Sucks at dodgeball. Cheating in health class. In *health class*. And this. (Holds up one card.) J-plus? How do you get worse than an F?

BILLY

My teacher's kind of a smartass.

JACOB

(Reads from card)

"Would have given a K-minus but I graded on the curve." Smartass or no, this is not acceptable, Billy. And furthermore - raccoon skins?

BILLY

I didn't kill the raccoons! I just found them!

JACOB

Be that as it may, your mother and I think it's time to take some more severe measures.

BILLY

You're not going to ground me again, are you? Look, I can do better. Honest. Just give me another chance.

JACOB

No, Billy, we're not going to ground you. Quite the opposite.

BILLY

What do you mean?

JACOB

Well, why don't I just come right out and say it. We're letting you go.

BILLY

Go? Go where?

JACOB

I mean your services here are no longer required. We've decided to - move in a different direction.

BILLY

You mean I'm ... I'm *fired*?

JACOB

(shuffling papers, distracted)

Yeah, you could put it that way. Believe me, this is much harder on me than it is on you.

BILLY

But - you can't do this to me. I'm your son.

JACOB

Well, not anymore. You know, for a while I really thought this was going to work out. But, I guess sometimes you make lemonade, and sometimes the bear eats you.

BILLY

I don't understand. How can you do this to me? You're supposed to love me unconditionally.

JACOB

Billy, Billy, Billy. What does that mean for quality control? I mean, unconditional love is all well and good as long as there are a few strings attached.

BILLY

But what am I supposed to do? Where do I go?

JACOB

The world is your oyster, young William. Here. (He hands Billy ten dollars.) We're giving you two weeks' allowance as severance pay. I've written a strong letter of recommendation to help you land on your feet. (Hands him an envelope.) Plus here are a couple PB and J's to get you through dinnertime. (He hands BILLY a paper bag.) I suggest you go downtown, walk around, check some bulletin boards. Possibilities abound for a young go-getter like yourself.

BILLY

You can't do this to me! I'm telling Mom. She won't let you get away with this.

JACOB

Well, actually...

BILLY

What?

JACOB

This was her idea.

BILLY

But mom wouldn't do this! She loves me! She says so all the time!

JACOB

Billy, you have to realize that there is simply no room for sentiment in the world of parenthood.

BILLY

(going for pathos)

But. Aren't you guys going to miss having me around?

JACOB

Oh, we've allotted for that. We've already begun the hiring process.

BILLY

The hiring process?

JACOB

Yes. We're out there looking for Billy 2.0, you might say. We've got an ad out on Monster.com. Really strong responses so far.

BILLY

You're replacing me?

JACOB

Billy! You could never be replaced. You're just being ... supplanted. In fact (he checks watch) I've got somebody coming in for an interview right about now. It's probably best if you clear out. It might be a little, you know, awkward.

BILLY

(losing it)

But I ... I ... I don't wanna ... daddy ...

(A knock at the door. JENNY opens it. She is dressed for a job interview. She sees JACOB, runs up and hugs him.)

JENNY

Daddy!

(JENNY backs off, brushes her suit off and hands JACOB a paper.)

JENNY

You'll be able to enjoy that sort of affection, and more, every day if you decide to take me on as your new daughter. Here's my resume.

JACOB

Thank you. (Scans paper.) Wow! I didn't know they gave Fulbrights to 9-year-olds.

JENNY

They made an exception just for me. I spent four months in South America studying Argentinian children's breakfast cereals.

JACOB

What was your conclusion?

JENNY

They're yummy.

JACOB

(nods sincerely)

Very interesting. Okay, let me tell you about the position. It's full-time, full benefits, including room and board. Ten dollar a week per diem - I mean, allowance.

BILLY

Ten?! I was getting five!

JACOB

Everything guaranteed until you turn 18, at which point we'll of course have to enter into some renegotiations -

BILLY

All right! That's enough. You can't do this! I won't let you do this!

JACOB

Billy, your mother and I brought you into this family and we have every right to remove you from it. If you'd like, I could call in our lawyer-

BILLY

No. Forget it. Forget it.

(BILLY throws the money, reference letter and bag of PB and J's onto the desk.)

BILLY

You can't fire me. I quit.

(BILLY walks out and slams the door. Pause.)

JENNY

I'm sorry, should I come back at another time?

JACOB

No, no, it's fine. Sorry you had to see that.

JENNY

Seems like he isn't taking this very well.

(JACOB opens the bag and starts nibbling on half of a sandwich.)

JACOB

Well, those are the breaks. Times are tough out there. We've got no room for stragglers in this outfit.

(He offers JENNY the other half.)

JACOB

PB and J?

JENNY

Is it organic?

JACOB

(looks at the sandwich)

Skippy, I think.

JENNY

(refuses)

No, that's okay.

(The phone rings.)

JACOB

Excuse me, I should take this.

(JACOB answers it.)

JACOB

(into phone)

Yeah. (Pause.) Uh-huh. Uh-huh. You told him about recess and sucker punches?

(The door opens and MARSHA walks in.)

MARSHA

Hey, have you seen Billy? I need to take him to basketball practice.

JACOB

(puts hand over receiver)

Oh, you don't have to worry about that anymore. I let Billy go.

MARSHA

What do you mean you let him go? (sees JENNY) And who's this?

(JENNY springs up and emphatically hugs MARSHA.)

JENNY

Mommy!

(MARSHA stands dumbfounded. JACOB gives a 'one second' signal and returns to phone, this time whirling in the other direction.)

JACOB

Listen, I gotta go again. (Pause.) What? Tell him to put on his lifejacket, because this train only goes to the top floor. All right. (Pause.) Great.

(JACOB hangs up and whirls back around. His eyes meet MARSHA's. She bears an accusatory look. Long pause.)

JACOB

What?

(Blackout. End of play.)