

CRACKING WISE WITH BILLY WISE

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By Emmett Loverde

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SYNOPSIS: Hot talk show host Billy Wise is in for a shock this evening as his guests get weirder and weirder. Billy finally loses his trademark cool when the final guest actually claims to be Billy Wise himself and tries to take over hosting duties. The surprise ending will knock your socks off!

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(2 MEN, 2 WOMEN, FLEXIBLE)

BILLY WISE
THE INTERVIEWEE
STAGEHAND 1
STAGEHAND 2

SETTING

A television talk show set, complete with garish colors. Two comfortable chairs sort of face each other. A small coffee table with an ugly potted plant sits between them.

TIME: Now.

PROPS

Two chairs
Coffee table
Ugly potted plant
Two “APPLAUSE” signs
Two buttons that read, “Hi! I’m your host Billy Wise!”
Two nurse caps
Wall art or projected image: Sign for a television talk show with slick logo: “Cracking Wise With Billy Wise”

MUSIC

Cheesy talk show theme music should play (a la “The Tonight Show”) at the beginning of the play and every time a guest is introduced. The music should continue until a character starts talking.

AT RISE:

As the lights go up, STAGEHAND 1 and STAGEHAND 2 are facing the audience holding up two large "APPLAUSE" signs. If the audience doesn't applaud loud enough, the STAGEHANDS gesture, urging the audience to clap harder. The onstage chairs are empty. Cheesy talk show theme music starts up a la "The Tonight Show".

Your host BILLY WISE dashes out, waving. He wears a blazer with a big button on it that reads "HI! I'M YOUR HOST BILLY WISE!" The music ends.

BILLY: Fantastic! Super! You people are great, and welcome to "Cracking Wise With Billy Wise." I'm your host, Billy Wise, and I know you're going to adore our first guest so please join me in welcoming Mr. Blue Cross Butterworth!

STAGEHANDS 1 and 2 display the "APPLAUSE" signs again as THE INTERVIEWEE runs out and greets the cheering crowd. He dashes up energetically and shakes hands with BILLY.

THE INTERVIEWEE: How are you doing, Billy? You look great. I feel great. This is just great!

BILLY: Do we call you "Blue"? "Blue Cross"? "Mr. Butterworth"? "Mr. Great"?

THE INTERVIEWEE: It's a good thing you checked, Billy, because I'm about to change my name.

BILLY: Which part?

THE INTERVIEWEE: "Blue Cross" is working for me but how many people know "Mr. Butterworth"?

BILLY: But they all know "Mrs. Butterworth" - - like the syrup. (*To audience.*) It's thick and rich and oh so delicious.

THE INTERVIEWEE: Starting next week you can call me "Blue Cross X-Box."

BILLY: And they pay you for that?

THE INTERVIEWEE: Oho - - they pay me a lot.

BILLY: What about changing your driver's license? Birth certificate? Social Security number?

THE INTERVIEWEE: The government has a special guy who handles me.

BILLY: Let me just clarify for our viewers . . . you actually sell your name?

THE INTERVIEWEE: I rent it out. But not to just anyone.

BILLY: To the highest bidder?

THE INTERVIEWEE: Usually.

BILLY: How long do you keep a name?

THE INTERVIEWEE: The standard deal is a one-year lease and then we go month-to-month.

BILLY: What was your birth name?

THE INTERVIEWEE: Oreo Tinkertoy.

BILLY: *(Laughs.)* That's great, just great. But seriously.

THE INTERVIEWEE: I am completely serious.

BILLY: So you're just this walking TV commercial. I'm so envious. How did you get this way?

THE INTERVIEWEE: My parents watched a lot of TV.

BILLY: My parents *never* let me watch TV. They hated TV. I used to stand out in front of Circuit City and gaze in the windows. And all I really wanted was to watch the commercials. That's all. Just the commercials - -

THE INTERVIEWEE: You okay, Billy?

BILLY: Fine, fine. Hey, what if I wanted to have my name be just one big commercial all the time? How could I do it?

THE INTERVIEWEE: You like commercials?

BILLY nods enthusiastically.

THE INTERVIEWEE: *(Continued.)* First: stay away from dog food. You don't want to end up with a name like "Alpo Friskies."

MUSIC CUE: Cheesy talk show theme music until BILLY introduces his next guest.

STAGEHANDS 1 and 2 run out again with the "APPLAUSE" signs as BILLY and THE INTERVIEWEE stand up and shake hands. THE INTERVIEWEE walks offstage. BILLY turns to the crowd.

BILLY: When he's not fronting the wildly popular rock band "Guano," my next guest enjoys hanging out in the caves of southwestern Utah, so please welcome Jerome!

THE INTERVIEWEE enters, this time dressed as a bat.

BILLY: *(Continued.)* Wait a minute, Jerome - - you're a bat!

THE INTERVIEWEE: Hey Billy, whatever I am, it's all about the music, dude.

BILLY: *(To the STAGEHANDS, nervously.)* I didn't know we had a bat scheduled.

STAGEHAND 1: Keep it together, Billy.

BILLY: I'm uncomfortable with small flying creatures.

STAGEHAND 2: You'll be fine.

THE INTERVIEWEE: But Billy, I'm so much more than a bat.

BILLY: Do you have rabies?

THE INTERVIEWEE: No - - just *rabid* fans! I made the cover of *Leatherwing*.

Slide or wall art: The cover of Leatherwing Magazine, featuring THE INTERVIEWEE posing in his bat costume along with the caption: "JEROME: 'I DO MY BEST WORK AT NIGHT!'" appears on the wall or somewhere prominent.

BILLY: That's fantastic! Congratulations!

THE INTERVIEWEE: I hate that picture. During the session, I was molting. They had a fur guy there but he didn't know how to do bats.

BILLY: Jerome, how are you more than a bat?

THE INTERVIEWEE: I'm not supposed to talk about it outside the community but let's put it this way: if I don't make it into a coffin before dawn, I'm bat fricasseé!

BILLY: You're a vampire??

THE INTERVIEWEE: Hey, I don't bite. Well I do, but not on the air.

BILLY: How did this happen?

THE INTERVIEWEE: I met a girl bat while Guano was touring Eastern Europe and one night . . . *(Trails off, a little sad.)* Her name was Esmerelda. She sucked the life right out of me. Literally.

BILLY: She was a vampire, too??

THE INTERVIEWEE: You're a little slow tonight, Billy.

BILLY: This just makes me so uncomfortable. *(Tries to perk up.)* Did you two stay together?

THE INTERVIEWEE: I was on the road, she was Transylvanian, we both worked nights . . .

BILLY: It was complicated.

THE INTERVIEWEE nods.

BILLY: *(Continued.)* So how old are you? Three hundred years? A thousand?

THE INTERVIEWEE: I'm only twenty-five. The other vamps call me "Little Jerry."

BILLY: Only twenty-five and yet already you have graced the cover of *Leatherwing*.

THE INTERVIEWEE: It's the music, man. It's like it's not even me. It's like it's being channeled *through* me directly from God. So intense. I keep thinking I'm going to get up one morning and poof! It'll be all gone.

BILLY: Don't get up too early or *you'll* be all gone!

THE INTERVIEWEE: Righteous, Billy! So you know about the legend.

BILLY: Why don't you fill in our viewers?

THE INTERVIEWEE: *(To audience.)* If a vampire is touched by sunlight, they instantly waste away to nothing.

BILLY: Ouch! That must be why your new album is called . . .

THE INTERVIEWEE: "I'll Be Gone by Morning."

BILLY: And tomorrow night you're playing at Spooky McDark's.

BILLY and THE INTERVIEWEE stand up and shake hands.

THE INTERVIEWEE: My kinda place.

BILLY: I wish I could join you, but it seems like I can never get away from this show. It's all I ever do, always. I do nothing else. Only this show. I can't get away . . .

THE INTERVIEWEE: I guess it's just a case of . . . say it with me:

BILLY AND THE INTERVIEWEE: *(Together.)* It's just a case of *bat timing!*

Slide or wall art: Sign for a television talk show with slick logo: "Cracking Wise With Billy Wise" - - RESTORE.

MUSIC CUE: Cheesy talk show theme music until BILLY introduces his next guest.

BILLY and THE INTERVIEWEE laugh as STAGEHANDS 1 and 2 run out again and hold up the "APPLAUSE" signs. THE INTERVIEWEE walks offstage with a parting wave. BILLY turns to the crowd.

BILLY: Now my next guest should be familiar to all of you . . . *(Squints at teleprompter or his notes.)* There seems to be a mistake.

STAGEHAND 1: We're live, Bill. Keep it together.

BILLY: My next guest is . . . Billy Wise.

THE INTERVIEWEE runs back onstage, this time dressed as BILLY WISE himself, and imitating BILLY'S mannerisms. He, too, wears a blazer with a big button on it that reads "HI! I'M YOUR HOST BILLY WISE!"

THE INTERVIEWEE: How are you, Billy? *(Waves to crowd.)* You gotta love this crowd. How is everyone?

BILLY: This is very strange.

THE INTERVIEWEE: No it isn't.

BILLY: But you're me.

THE INTERVIEWEE: I could say the same thing about you.

BILLY: I get it. I get it. This is a joke. The whole show tonight is a joke. Playing on my thing with commercials, my fear of bats, and you, you . . . whatever you are. *(Laughs.)* You had me going for a moment there, I'll admit it.

THE INTERVIEWEE: *(To audience.)* Isn't he great, ladies and gentleman? *(To BILLY.)* Billy, thanks so much for being on the show and we'll see you soon, all right?

STAGEHANDS 1 and 2 run out and hold up the "APPLAUSE" signs.

THE INTERVIEWEE: *(Continued. To audience.)* Now my next guest is from Wisconsin, where she - -

BILLY: I'm not going anywhere! This is *my* show!

THE INTERVIEWEE: It's my turn to host now, Billy. My turn to be Billy Wise.

BILLY: But I'm the *only* Billy Wise!

THE INTERVIEWEE: Until someone else gets a turn. That's how we do it.

BILLY: You're an impostor!

THE INTERVIEWEE: *(To STAGEHAND 1; petulantly.)* He's being weird.

STAGEHAND 1: *(To BILLY.)* Now now, I thought we discussed this.

BILLY: Discussed what? You work for *me!*

STAGEHAND 2: Okay, time to go back.

BILLY: You're all crazy! *(To audience.)* You're all impostors!

STAGEHANDS 1 and 2 put on little nurse hats and gently start to lead BILLY off stage. BILLY spots THE INTERVIEWEE'S bat and Mr. Butterworth costumes behind a piece of set. He grabs them.

BILLY: *(Continued.)* You pretended to be Mr. Butterworth and the bat guy!

THE INTERVIEWEE: *(To STAGEHAND 1.)* Nurse, he's totally using up all my time!

STAGEHAND 1: You're going to have to explain it to him again.

THE INTERVIEWEE: Billy, you have this little habit of imagining that you're on TV and forgetting that you're a patient at . . . *(Snaps fingers.)*

Slide or wall art: Logo for "MOUNT BIGHUGE HOSPITAL FOR THE TOTALLY CLUELESS" appears on wall or somewhere prominent.

THE INTERVIEWEE: *(Continued.)* . . . Mount Bighuge Hospital for the Totally Clueless. Part of today's therapy was about facing your fear of bats and your obsession with TV commercials.

MUSIC CUE: Cheesy talk show theme music as BILLY is led off stage.

STAGEHAND 1 leads BILLY off stage.

BILLY: But I'm Billy Wise . . . I have my own TV show - - I know I do . . . I know I do . . .

STAGEHAND 2: *(To THE INTERVIEWEE.)* You, too. Tell the other patients.

THE INTERVIEWEE: *(To audience.)* Okay, everyone back to your rooms. The nurses will be around to check on all of us in a few minutes. *(To STAGEHAND 2.)* How did I do?

STAGEHAND 2: You're getting much better.

Lights down. Curtain.

THE END