

He knew him well

Time: weekday afternoon
Place: quiet locals' pub

Cast:
BILLY BILLY Glaswegian male
 OLD JOHN male local to area, 78
 ROB 50s, the barman [half a dozen lines]
 IVAN customer [3 or 4 lines]

Three in the afternoon and the pub is quiet. The BARMAN is behind the counter polishing glasses, staring up at the television, the volume turned low. OLD JOHN is at a table in the corner. In front of him is a bottle of stout, a glass three-quarters' empty. He was reading a newspaper, the racing page, squinting at it as if his glasses weren't strong enough, a little bundle of blank betting slips nearby, a pen positioned on top. His tobacco tin and lighter are next to the bottle of stout and on the tin lies a half-smoked roll-up. He sips at the beer and his hand trembles a little. There is very little beer left in the bottle.

At another table sits another older fellow, IVAN, he also reads a racing paper he has spread on the table

BILLY enters, goes to the bar. He gives his order and waits while the barman pours it, and he sees OLD JOHN.

BARMAN serves BILLY with the half pint of lager. He gives the correct money and carries it across to OLD JOHN's table.

OLD JOHN glances at him and nods, but guarded.

BILLY
Hi John

OLD JOHN
[BY WAY OF A GREETING]
How do!

He wipes at his mouth, lifts the half-smoked roll-up from behind his ear, watching BILLY

OLD JOHN
Still raining?

BILLY
Yeh

OLD JOHN nods. He watches BILLY sit down.

OLD JOHN
Doing okay?

BILLY
Yeh...

OLD JOHN smiles for a moment, still guarded, watching him

BILLY
It was Missis Fitzgerald, she said I should see you...

OLD JOHN
POLITELY
Did she, that's nice.

BILLY
Just about Dennis

OLD JOHN watches him, then glances at his beer, almost nothing left, he sees BILLY's glass of lager still three-quarters full

BILLY
Only because ye knew each other so long

OLD JOHN
Yeh, he drank in this place...

OLD JOHN sniffs and lifts his glass without drinking. BILLY sips lager, then shrugs

BILLY
I was just wondering about him

OLD JOHN just waiting, still guarded

BILLY
Did ye know him well?

OLD JOHN
SIGHS]
Not really, no

BILLY is surprised. OLD JOHN sees his reaction

OLD JOHN
Never did get to know him. [SHRUGS] never really spoke to him
apart from Evening Dennis, Night Dennis.

BILLY drinks a mouthful of beer. OLD JOHN glances at him, still guarded

OLD JOHN
He'd been in the navy

BILLY
SURPRISED
Had he?

OLD JOHN
Torpedoed, far as I know.

BILLY
Aw

OLD JOHN
yeh

BILLY
I never knew

OLD JOHN
Well you wouldnt would ya. Never spoke much about it, not that I
ever heard. Dont blame him... Talk too much they do. Yap yap yap.
Never bleeding stop. It's no good.

OLD JOHN lapses into silence. He lifts the half smoked cigarette and glances towards the window then murmurs to himself without looking at BILLY. But BILLY is watching him.

OLD JOHN
MURMURS
Yeh...old Dennis...

BILLY waits a moment before speaking

BILLY
The navy eh...

OLD JOHN
Yeh...

OLD JOHN SWALLOWS THE REMAINDER OF HIS BEER, SNIFFS AND LOOKS ABOUT THEN GLANCES AT BILLY

OLD JOHN
You want a glass of beer?

BILLY
Eh, yeh, okay

OLD JOHN
What is that?

BILLY
Lager

OLD JOHN
Half pint?

BILLY
Yeh, thanks

OLD JOHN
CALLS TO BARMAN]
Hey Robbie!

BARMAN turns from the television screen. OLD JOHN gestures at the two drinks on the table.

OLD JOHN
Me and eh....

OLD JOHN points to Billy

BARMAN
Same again?

OLD JOHN
Yeh...ta

BARMAN nods, gets the bottle of stout, pours the half lager

BILLY
Thanks John

OLD JOHN grins, with a sarcastic edge to it, jerking his thumb in the direction of the BARMAN and speaks out the corner of his mouth.

OLD JOHN
Slate. Pay him pension day.

BILLY smiles. OLD JOHN glances at his half smoked cigarette, then at the empty bottle

OLD JOHN
Not supposed to be drinking; says it's bad for me gut, the doctor.

BILLY
Yeh?

OLD JOHN
Yeh, that and the smoking, said it would kill me if I werent careful... Seventy eight I am, know that? Kill me! Ha - bleeding nut-case.
[PAUSE] Yeh, them doctors

OLD JOHN fingers the empty glass,, nervously, glancing at he bar

OLD JOHN
Where's he got to then...! Bleeding carsie? Everytime ye look for him

BILLY
WHISPERS]
He's coming

OLD JOHN twists to see the BARMAN who walks from the other side of the bar, puts down the new bottle of stout and the half pint of lager

BARMAN
Alright?

OLD JOHN looks to BARMAN but is unsmiling

OLD JOHN
Good health Rob

BARMAN
Still raining outside

OLD JOHN shows no interest. He is raising the new bottle and pouring a little into his old glass

OLD JOHN
Is it...

BARMAN
Yeh {GRINS}

OLD JOHN ignores him, places the bottle back on the table. The BARMAN watches him for a moment then returns to the bar by way of one empty table, he pauses to give the surface a wipe. Billy indicates the new glass of lager

BILLY
Thanks John

OLD JOHN raises the fresh bottle in salute

OLD JOHN
Good health son!

BILLY
Cheers

Both sip beer. OLD JOHN'S attention wanders to the half smoked cigarette and the window

OLD JOHN
Still raining

OLD JOHN sees Billy looking at him

BILLY
Did you like him?

OLD JOHN
What's that?

BILLY
Old Dennis...did you like him?

OLD JOHN lets the question sink in

OLD JOHN

Well, never really knew him did !! I would've though. Yeh, I would've liked him [EMPHATICALLY, if we had spoke... Yeh...

A few tables away IVAN rises from his table, and OLD JOHN's attention is distracted

OLD JOHN

Woops, there goes Ivan.

BILLY sees IVAN who will head to the exit. IVAN glances at OLD JOHN

OLD JOHN

Wotcher Ivan! Give em laldy!

IVAN

I put a bet on for you?

OLD JOHN

Nah, thanks all the same.

IVAN exits, closing the door behind himself

OLD JOHN

He's a Ruskie; somethin like that, Ukrainian

BILLY

Ivan?

OLD JOHN

They call him that, Ivan. It aint his name. They just wind him up. He aint no commie, he hates them

BILLY

Huh

OLD JOHN

Ask him about them, when he comes back, the old vladimirs. [CHUCKLES, THEN SERIOUSLY] They used to come round here

BILLY

Yeh?

OLD JOHN

And the anarchists, drank down the cross. Ask Ivan about them. The old anarchists [AMUSED, DRINKS] He likes them bleeding horses!

*BILLY
Does he win?*

*OLD JOHN
Sometimes he do. [SHRUGS] Well, everybody wins sometimes.
[PAUSE] Them anarchists, old Ivan knows about them*

OLD JOHN notices BILLY is watching him

*OLD JOHN
No, old Dennis.. we never talked much him and me.*

*BILLY
I thought ye did*

*OLD JOHN
I knew his brother better. Couple of years younger than Dennis. A real villain he was.*

*BILLY surprised
Yeh?*

*OLD JOHN
Oh yeh. Had a nice wife too. I used to work the racetracks back in them days, sometimes met him down there; Epsom or Lingfield., And Kempton. Course I was young...*

OLD JOHN lapses into silence, fingers his glass of beer, looks to BILLY

*OLD JOHN
What age are you then? you're young aint ya?*

*BILL
No that young*

OLD JOHN smiles

*OLD JOHN
We were, we started young; back in them days we did. Of course Dennis's brother was older... [PAUSE] He used to tell me a few*

things... He did make a living! Had a nice house someplace - Clapham I think. Yeh... [SIGHS]

BILLY

Did they get on the gether?

OLD JOHN

What was that?

BILLY

Dennis and his brother. Did they get on together?

OLD JOHN

GUARDED

Well... (SNIFFS) Dont rightly know...

BILLY

Okay

OLD JOHN

They didnt speak much you see, not to each other. Some brothers dont you know. They'd just sit drinking, sometimes laughing, you know, not speaking though. Not much - probably said everything I suppose. Course Dennis might ask after his family, his wife and kids, something like that you know, that's what it'd be. You got brothers son?

BILLY

Yeh, two

OLD JOHN

Two? That's nice

BILLY

yeh

OLD JOHN

Sisters I had, four of em! Bell, Mags, Doreen and Doris. Doreen and Doris were like cats and dogs. [CHUCKLES] Fought all the time they did, wohhh! I had to duck for cover

BILLY chuckles

OLD JOHN

I was only a kid

BILLY

Was Dennis never married?

OLD JOHN

I couldnt rightly say; the Guvnor now, he'd tell you.

BILLY glances at the bar. The BARMAN is wiping down the counter

BILLY

Him? [PAUSE]

OLD JOHN

Him! (SNORTS) The Guvnor! Yeh he would like that, bleeding Guvnor! No, Jackie Moore's the Guvnor... [INDICATES BARMAN] He's his brother-in-law [WHISPERS] Bleeding ponce. Ye.. [PAUSE], Jackie's been laid up now nearly a year. Something like that - broke his leg and it aint never healed, not proper.

BILLY watches him at all time and worries OLD JOHN will speak too loudly. Now OLD JOHN stares in the direction of the BARMAN and shakes his head, almost with menace.

OLD JOHN

Thinks he'll get this place if Jackie packs it in...

BILLY

QUIETLY

Oh

OLD JOHN

BECOMING EXCITED)

No chance; no bleeding chance. Even his sister hates his guts. Know what I'm saying son? His sister, yeh! What d'you think of that?

BILLY

Mm

OLD JOHN guesses BILLY'S worries about him talking too loudly

OLD JOHN

Yeh... He hears me alright. You worried about that? Dont be. Bleeding ponce Dont you worry about him. Yeh.. he hears me alright. Won't let on though. Ponce. [SHAKES HIS HEAD] What was I ...? Old Dennis, yeh. He could drink. Scotch he liked, drank it all the time. Dont care for it much myself. Drop of rum now and again, yeh, that does me. (LIFTS THE HALF SMOKED CIGARETTE) You know he played football

Again BILLY is surprised

BILLY
what do ye mean professional?

OLD JOHN
Yeh

BILLY is taken aback

OLD JOHN
The old Palace I think it was. Yeh, the Palace...

BILLY
Hh!

OLD JOHN
Didnt you know that?

BILLY
No

OLD JOHN
Yeh

BILLY
I wouldnay have figured it at all

OLD JOHN
What because of his arm?

BILLY
Well...yeh

OLD JOHN
That was the navy thing son where that happened

BILLY
Right...

OLD JOHN
SARCASTIC
What d'you think he was born that way?

OLD JOHN shakes his head and swallows a mouthful of beer. Billy is smiling at his own foolishness

BILLY
Stupid...

OLD JOHN

*Yeh [SNIFFS] Mind you, now I think on it, could've been the Orient.
[PAUSE, AND FIRMLY] No, it was the Palace. [PAUSE] Jackie'll
know. [SNIFFS] You like football son?*

BILLY

Yeh, I suppose

OLD JOHN

*The Marshes was as far as I got, that was my limit! Sunday
mornings. [CHUCKLES] The old Marshes, them were the days!*

The door opens and in comes IVAN, showing signs of the rain from outside

OLD JOHN

Wotcher Ivan! Still raining!

IVAN does not reply, pauses at the bar and mutters inaudibly to the BARMAN, then IVAN heads for his table. OLD JOHN watches him, grinning

OLD JOHN

CALLS

Woops! dont tell me!

IVAN

Horses...!

OLD JOHN

Yeh! Down the tubes?

IVAN

Down the tubes!

OLD JOHN

CALLS

What about old Uncle Joe my son he's down the tubes!

IVAN nods his head politely, looks down at his racing paper spread on the table

OLD JOHN

QUIETLY TO BILLY

Old Uncle Joe son, you heard of him, Stalin?

BILLY

Stalin, yeh

OLD JOHN

GESTURES AT IVAN
Hates the commes he do, old Ivan there, he's a Ruskie

BILLY
Ye were saying

OLD JOHN
Hates them commies

BILLY glances at both drinks, now about ready for another. BILLY gestures at OLD JOHN's bottle

BILLY
Ye take another yin?

OLD JOHN
MATTER-OF-FACTLY
I dont mind, yeh, yeh son, bottle of stout there, a guinness

BILLY
Okay

OLD JOHN
Yeh, that'd be nice

BILLY shifts his chair back and makes to rise

OLD JOHN
No, he sees you, he'll come.

The BARMAN is looking over. BARMAN gestures at their drinks

OLD JOHN
CALLS
Yeh! [THEN MUTTERS TO BILLY] He sees you

BILLY smiles

OLD JOHN
*Yeh, if you got money to spend, he sees you, you better believe it.
[PAUSE AND SARCASTIC] Is that money? wohh, he sees you
alright*

BILLY nods. OLD JOHN leans back in his chair, gazes towards the window, then round the interior of the bar, and he sighs

OLD JOHN

Yeh...old Dennis...[LEANS FORWARD] Now his brother he made a living. He was a villain. Back in them days. Well, you had to be son that's how it was, you want to survive. It was a bit of this and a bit of that. I used to work the tracks mysel, Kempton, Epsom. (CHUCKLES) Done a bit of whispering. You know what that is? The old whispering, yeh... (EXAGGERATED WHISPER, ADOPTING VOICE OF RACING TIPSTER):

I got the goods on the third, you want the goods on the third! I got the goods! Old Prince what-do-you-call-him, he was there. Old Tommy Devine, the old Coal Porter, that's what they called him, he was a coal man till then he went to the races. Yeh, he was there, old Tommy. They all were, Old Prince what-do-you-call-him. Yeh, Dennis' brother now, he used to tell me things. Kept me on the straight and narrow... Woops!.

OLD JOHN sits back on his chair and BILLY glances sideways to see the BARMAN who knows from OLD JOHN'S actions that he is discussing something of interest

BARMAN politely, as a greeting
Alright John?

OLD JOHN
Yeh

OLD JOHN winks to BILLY

BILLY seems not to notice OLD JOHN and smiles to the BARMAN

BILLY
Thanks

BARMAN
to OLD JOHN
Alright John?

OLD JOHN
Yeh Rob, you?

BARMAN
Doing fine, yeh

OLD JOHN
That's nice, how's the missus?

BARMAN
Oh she's good

OLD JOHN
Yeh?

BARMAN
Yeh... [LINGERING]

OLD JOHN
Glad to hear it

BARMAN
Yeh

OLD JOHN
Still raining?

BARMAN
Looks like it

OLD JOHN turns his attention directly to Billy now, lifts the new bottle, refreshes the old. BILLY finishes the last of his old lager and lifts his new one

OLD JOHN
Good health [SIPS BEER]

Billy
Cheers John [SIPS HIS]

The BARMAN returns to the bar

OLD JOHN
MUTTERS
Bleeding ponce... It's his hooter bothering him

BILLY
Yeh

OLD JOHN
He wants to know about you

BILLY
Me?

OLD JOHN
Yeh, what's your story, that's what bothers him

BILLY
I've been in before

OLD JOHN
Not much you aint.

BILLY
Couple of times

OLD JOHN
What you sitting with me for, that's what he wants to know. Yeh...
[DRINKS BEER, SIGHS] Yeh... [TWIDDLES HIS HALF SMOKED
ROLL-UP, CONSIDERS A WHILE BEFORE SPEAKING] Funny he
should've waited so long. Course his arm, maybe his arm had
something to do with it. What d'you reckon?

BILLY
I dont know

OLD JOHN
*Talk in this place they do. Wouldnt if Jackie was here. Not bleeding
likely they wouldnt.*

OLD JOHN pauses, looks like he is awaiting a comment from BILLY

OLD JOHN
You dont say much

BILLY
Me?

OLD JOHN
Yeh

BILLY nods, raises his eyebrows, shrugs. OLD JOHN waits a moment further

OLD JOHN
You Scotch then?

BILLY
Yeh

OLD JOHN
Got a sister married a Scotchman. He's dead now. So's she... [PAUSE]

BILLY
Hh!

OLD JOHN,

PAUSE

*Where d'you find him then? What I mean like when you found him...
where eh...[SNIFFS]*

BILLY

Just like it said in the paper

OLD JOHN

I read it

BILLY

*I just hadna seen him for a couple of days. Missis Fitzgerald as
well, so she got a bit worried.*

OLD JOHN

musing

She would, yeh

BILLY

*Usually I seen him somewhere, down the kitchen or whatever,
going round the dairy, walking about.*

OLD JOHN

Yeh?

BILLY

Just whatever. He liked going for walks.

OLD JOHN

Yeh, yeh he did, he did like a walk

BILLY

So when she said to me, I just thought it best to just find out

OLD JOHN

Well yeh...

BILLY shrugs

I went up the stair and banged on his door.

OLD JOHN

Good, good for you

BILLY

*Nay answer. I banged and banged. Missis Fitzgerald was there. So
I took a walk to the library*

OLD JOHN glances at BILLY, nonplussed

BILLY
That's where he went.

OLD JOHN
What the library?

BILLY
Yeh

OLD JOHN
Hh

BILLY
I saw him there a lot

OLD JOHN studies BILLY a moment

OLD JOHN
Yeh...expect you would, now I think on it.

BILLY
He went maist days. As well as that I suppose I was wanting to think about it, just about what to do, I was nay sure. So I thought the walk would be good, just I was wondering what to do.

OLD JOHN
QUIETLY]
Yeh...yeh...

BILLY
So just figuring it out, so then I went back and saw Missis Fitzgerald. She didnay want me to force the door in but there was nay option

OLD JOHN
EMPHATICALLY
Yeh!

BILLY
I told her, I would just have to do it. Unless maybe she got the police, but they would do the same

OLD JOHN
Course they would

BILLY

Or else maybe get a joiner, and he would do it with the hinges, a chisel or something. I didnay know. I just thought it best to do it right away, no to waste any mair time

OLD JOHN is concentrating intently on what BILLY tells him

BILLY

So I went ahead ye know I just - I stuck the boot on it, twice, that was that, broke through the lock and that and it just snapped open. He was lying at the side bed

OLD JOHN nods

BILLY

It was terrible,

OLD JOHN nods

BILLY

Terrible seeing it, him like that.

BILLY gulps at his lager. OLD JOHN now glances at BILLY, he sniffs, then a brief pause

OLD JOHN

MATTER-OF-FACT

And the eating, in the paper, it said about the eating?

BILLY

That's right. The doctor said he couldnay have been eating for a while.

OLD JOHN

A long while

BILLY nods

OLD JOHN

The coroner said it?

BILLY

The coroner, yeh

OLD JOHN

SHRUGS

Well you see it's the post-mortem, they got to do it, it's the law. [SNIFFS, SHAKES HIS HEAD] Bleeding fool. [SLOWLY] He should've ate. That's one thing you gotta do you gotta eat. I eat

something every day. I make sure of that. [SHRUGS] Well you got to.

BILLY
Yeh

OLD JOHN
A drop of soup's good.

BILLY nods, swallows the last of his lager, rises from the chair, OLD JOHN watching him

OLD JOHN
You heading?

BILLY
Yeh

OLD JOHN
Okay

BILLY
AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT
It was Missis Fitzgerald eh, she said I should eh...

OLD JOHN
That was nice, yeh, I appreciate that

BILLY
Okay John... [SMILES]

OLD JOHN
Yeh, alright

OLD JOHN watches BILLY head for the exit. He glances to the window, then to the bar, fingering the half-smoked roll-up

end