

# Happy and Biff

A play in two acts

by John Scavone

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**Characters** (in order of appearance)

Hap Loman, 72

Biff Loman, 74

Linda Loman, late 30's - early 40's / late 50's - early 60's

Luis, 30's

Patty, late 60's - early 70's

**Setting:** Hap Loman's fourth floor studio apartment, grown dingy with age, perhaps once having been considered nice for a young bachelor or a couple starting out. Upstage windows look out on a decaying neighborhood. The apartment's entry door is of heavy wood, with a deadbolt, chain and peephole. There's a closet nearby. Opposite, a kitchen table and two chairs are seen through a small arch, with the rest of the kitchen hidden. The bathroom is downstage of the kitchen. The living room has been furnished from resale shops. There are a sofa bed with an end table, a recliner with an afghan laid over it, a lamp on a table next to the recliner, a television on a coffee table across the room. A dresser stands near the closet. Elsewhere is a small bookcase containing three or four paperbacks and some magazines, pictures of Willy and Linda, Happy and Biff as kids and young men, possibly a couple of odd knickknacks. There should be a radiator on one of the walls and a push-button dial phone somewhere. Articles of clothing, newspapers and magazines, unopened bills, etc., create a general clutter. There's a dead plant on a window sill.

Note: Linda enters from and exits into the kitchen.

**Time:** 1988

## Happy and Biff

### Act I

*At rise, Hap is asleep and snoring in his recliner. He wears a sweater over a t-shirt, pants and slippers, a watch. On the table next to him are half a cheese sandwich on a plate, a nearly empty can of beer, three pill bottles and his glasses. The tv is on; the Tonight Show theme song plays.*

### VOICE

From Hollywood, it's the Tonight Show, starring Johnny Carson. Johnny's guest host tonight is Jay Leno. This is Ed McMahon, along with Tommy Newsome and the NBC orchestra, inviting you to join Jay and his guests... *(fade and continue under)*

*A knock on the door. Pause, then a louder knock. Hap stirs. More persistent knocking.*

### BIFF

*(off)*

Hap, that you in there? Hap, hey, open up! Hap!

### HAP

What the hell— what time is it? Crap, I was almost asleep. That you, Luis? Knock it off, you Mexican bastard, I'm coming!

*He looks around for the remote, finds it in the chair under him, shuts off the tv, goes to the door.*

Quit it already, you're gonna wake up the whole damn building! I told you I'd be down tomorrow with a payment!

*He looks through the peephole, unlocks and opens the door to Biff, wearing a suit, no tie, a cowboy hat and boots.*

You're not Luis.

BIFF

No.

HAP

You've got the wrong apartment, Tex. Get out of here before I call the cops. What's so funny?

BIFF

The mailbox only says Loman, but I'd know you anywhere. Harold Loman, in his golden years.

HAP

How'd you get up here? The door downstairs is supposed to be locked.

BIFF

It wasn't.

HAP

I'll speak to management about firing our super.

BIFF

You don't want to cause a man to lose his job.

HAP

Why not? I've lost a couple.

BIFF

Aren't you gonna ask me in?

HAP

Who the hell are you? It's past eleven thirty, what do you want with me at this hour?

BIFF

Don't you recognize me, Hap?

HAP

Am I supposed to?

BIFF

I thought you might.

HAP

*(getting them from the table)*

Let me put on my glasses. No one calls me Hap or Happy

anymore. Mostly Mr. Loman, if they talk to me at all. Supposed to show respect for age or something, but I don't buy it. Nope, can't say you ring a bell.

BIFF

You've gotten downright cantankerous in your old age.

HAP

Cantankerous, that's a hell of a word for it.

BIFF

I guess I should've expected you'd change over this much time. Anyone would, except maybe me.

HAP

We knew each other where, in high school? Or that company I used to work for, what was the name of it? Don't tell me, I'll get it, that sales job I had.

BIFF

Sales, Pop would've liked that, he'd have liked it a lot.

HAP

Huh? *(pause)* No way. Biff? No way, I'm dreaming. Holy crap, Biff, is it really you?

BIFF

One and the same.

HAP

I can't believe it, Biff!

*They hug.*

BIFF

Good to see you again, Hap.

HAP

After all these years. Come in, c'mon in. Why are you standing there? Holy crap, Biff! If someone had told me you were coming, I'd have thought he was nuts. I didn't even know if you were alive or not. You're looking fine.

BIFF

I'm looking old, same as you.

HAP

No doubt about that. Beats the alternative, they tell me.

BIFF

Unfortunately. Sorry to come over so late, I just got into town a little while ago.

HAP

No problem. Where's your bag, you forget it in the hall? Age, pal, it's a cruel thing. I swear, one of these days I'm gonna go out and forget my pants.

BIFF

I don't have a bag with me. It's at my hotel downtown. I planned to stay the night there and come in the morning, but I just couldn't sleep, I had to see you right away. It's been so goddamn long.

HAP

Way too long. Not since— I can't believe it. Look at you, wearing your ten-gallon hat, a regular cowboy. You must've made it big as a rancher, we always knew you would.

BIFF

I have, I've done pretty well for myself. Hang on a second, I brought something for you.

*He reaches back outside the door for another hat.*

What do you think?

HAP

Check that out. Shut the door and lock the deadbolt for me. Nice, what a nice present. How's it look?

BIFF

Perfect. You're now an honorary cowboy.

HAP

The kids in the building will be jealous as hell. I'll charge 'em a quarter apiece to try it on. Sit, make yourself comfortable.

*(starts picking up some of the clutter)*

And you're spending the night here, I won't take no for an answer. I know it's not what you're used to, obviously not as fancy as a downtown hotel. I was meaning to clean up some today, but I didn't get to it.

BIFF

Leave that stuff where it is, you don't have to stand on ceremony for me. The place is fine.

HAP

You'll take the bed, most nights I sleep in that chair, anyway. We can go get your things in the morning, make the whole week of it, or whatever you're here for.

BIFF

Thanks, Hap, I'd like that. I don't really care much for hotels. After all the time I've spent out on the range, they make me uncomfortable. You sure it won't put you out any?

HAP

Not a bit, not one damn bit. Oh, before you sit down, though, there's something I want to give you. I've been saving it for years.

BIFF

Really? Something for me? What?

*Hap punches him in the jaw.*

Ow, shit! What's that for?

HAP

For Mom, you bastard.

BIFF

I'll have to find a damn dentist tomorrow, I think you loosened my bridge. You've kept in pretty good shape.

HAP

I'm a wreck. I'd give you another if I could, but I just threw my shoulder out.

BIFF

Mm, boy, lucky for me. Okay if I sit down now, or you want me to go?

HAP

I want you to stay, but going's what you do, isn't it?

BIFF

I'm sorry, Hap, honest to God I am. I mostly came to tell you that. I'm sorry about everything, especially about Mom.

HAP

A fat lot of good it does her now. Want some ice for that?

BIFF  
No.

HAP  
I've got a beer left.

BIFF  
Maybe, if you'll split it with me. I don't drink much anymore, I can't.

HAP  
I can't, either, but I do, anyhow.

*Hap goes into the kitchen,  
returns with a can of beer and a  
glass. He pours out half and  
gives it to Biff.*

BIFF  
Thanks. So when did it happen? Mom, I mean. How long after the old man— you know.

HAP  
I wrote you about it, practically begged you to come home, even if just for her funeral.

BIFF  
I never got the letter.

HAP  
I know. I sent it Special Delivery to the last address we had for you. It came back marked "addressee unknown".

BIFF  
I've moved around a lot in my life.

HAP  
And what, you never left a forwarding address? Or you just didn't want to be found, was that it?

BIFF  
I wanted to be found from the day I left. For the longest time I couldn't find myself.

HAP  
So you always said. Pop died trying to help you.



BIFF

Don't put that on me. I didn't make him end things like he did, and you know it.

HAP

I don't know why anything happens, it just does. I know that after it happened we needed you, Mom and me both. And when she went, I needed my big brother. Maybe didn't need, I was old enough to get past her dying, but I sure as hell wanted you.

BIFF

I wish I had known.

HAP

Bullshit.

BIFF

I mean it. Of all the people in my life, you're the last one I ever wanted to hurt.

HAP

I was alone, Biff. Alone with her funeral, alone with that crummy old house on my hands, alone with my own rotten thoughts. There were times I was ready to follow in Pop's footsteps, but I was damned if I was gonna give life the satisfaction.

BIFF

I'm glad you didn't.

HAP

Me, too, though lately I've been wondering if I made the right decision. I have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, some kind of thyroid thing and probably a dozen other problems the doctor won't even tell me about.

BIFF

I wake up with pains in places I never knew I had before. The other day I hurt my wrist and my back, pulling on my boot.

HAP

I wear my slippers around the house, go out as little as possible, so I won't have to put on my shoes.

BIFF

You didn't answer my question. When did Mom pass?

HAP

She hung on eight, nine years after him. Going through the motions of life without being alive. Maybe we all reach that stage sooner or later. He did.

BIFF

And then took the coward's way out.

HAP

Fuck you, he was in despair, grieving over his whole damn life, including the two of us.

BIFF

Especially us.

HAP

Mom's was another kind of despair. She died an ounce at a time, it's a lousy thing to have to watch.

BIFF

He left the whole family something to remember him by.

HAP

He knew it was over for him, and it was the only way he could think of to leave us something to live on, to provide for us one last time.

BIFF

His thinking was twisted.

HAP

It was fucking crazy. I don't forgive him for it, but at least I've learned to understand him some. I doubt you ever tried.

BIFF

When did he ever try with me?

HAP

You jerk, he loved you the most.

BIFF

Cut it out, he did not.

HAP

I'm not saying he didn't love me and Mom, I know he did. But the sun rose and set on you, the football hero, bound for a college scholarship, gonna tear up the world. Even after you

blew it, he kept the faith. When his dreams for himself were gone, he never gave up the dreams he had for you.

BIFF

That's why he was always riding me about what a failure I was.

HAP

He was desperate for you to prove his dreams right. Maybe if he could've been right about one stinking thing in his life, it would've saved him.

BIFF

How was I supposed to live up to his stupid dreams? He had no damn business laying that shit on me.

HAP

I remember wishing he'd lay some of it on me. I took my share from him, we were both Willy Loman's sons. But I was only supposed to be a success, you were supposed to be his damn legacy. God only knows why.

BIFF

I can't believe it.

HAP

Can't believe what?

BIFF

You're still jealous, you still haven't given it up.

HAP

Jealous of what? A lame-brained jock who couldn't buckle down enough to pass high school math?

BIFF

You always wanted to be me, to have the other kids cheer for you and follow you around, only they didn't like you the same way they liked me.

HAP

So I can't play football, I can do plenty of other things the kids all like me for, especially the girls.

BIFF

The girls are only using you to get close to me. You know it, and you're jealous.

Am not. HAP

Jealous. BIFF

Take it back! HAP

Jealous, puking green with it. BIFF

Take it back, I said, or I'll slug you! HAP

C'mon and try, chubby. BIFF

*Hap rushes him, Biff grabs hold, they topple onto the couch and to the floor, grappling with each other. Younger Linda enters.*

Boys, stop it! Boys! Stop it, I said, stop fighting!  
*(pulling them apart)*  
Get up! On your feet, the both of you! Now!

*They rise, she slaps each hard across the face. They scamper away.*

That's right, run away. That's nothing compared to what you'll get if I ever find the two of you fighting again. Imagine, brothers at each other's throats like animals. It makes me sick!

He started it. HAP

Did not. BIFF

Shut up! I don't care who started it, I'm finishing it for good. For the next two weeks you are both getting extra chores, and you're forbidden to go out except for school. LINDA

And when your father comes home I'm going to tell him you're being punished and why. Then you'll find out what punishment really is.

HAP

Pop won't be home 'til Saturday.

LINDA

Which means he'll be that much madder when he hears about this.

BIFF

Please, Mom, don't tell him.

LINDA

Why shouldn't I?

HAP

He'll kill us.

LINDA

If you're lucky. I just don't understand it. Brothers are supposed to be the closest two people in the world. You share the same blood, all your secrets together. Nobody will ever know you like your brother. And when your father and I are gone, you might be all that's left to each other for the rest of your lives.

BIFF

We're sorry, Mom. It won't happen again.

HAP

We promise.

LINDA

Promises aren't worth anything. It's action that counts.

BIFF

We'll act like it from now on.

LINDA

You'd damn well better. *(pause)* Come here, boys. I won't hit you again, come on.

*They do, she hugs them.*

I hate it when you make me get so mad at you. Whatever your arguments are about, they're silly, and nine times out of

ten, they only happen because of some mixed up male pride. When you realize that, you'll be a lot closer to having grown up. Now the two of you clean this room, I want to see it spick and span. Then get yourselves washed up and come down for dinner, it'll be ready by then.

HAP

We really are sorry, Mom.

LINDA

Apologizing to each other would help. *(pause)* Do it!

HAP

Sorry, Biff.

BIFF

Me, too, Hap.

LINDA

Thank you, I feel a little better. Your punishment stands.

*She exits.*

BIFF

You've lost weight since I saw you last.

HAP

Should've seen me in my fifties. Put a bunch on the last few years. Eating and drinking the same, but not moving around as much.

*He starts eating the half a sandwich.*

BIFF

What is that, cheese? You wouldn't have any more, would you?

HAP

You hungry? I'm sorry, Biff, didn't think to ask. It's in the fridge with the bread, help yourself. Mustard's in there, too.

*Biff goes into the kitchen.*

Had some baloney, but I finished it up for lunch. I need to go grocery shopping.

BIFF

*(off)*

Cheese is fine.

*(coming to the table with cheese, bread  
and mustard)*

I haven't eaten today.

HAP

No? Why not?

BIFF

Oh, uh, you know, traveling and all, making connections, I never got a chance to stop for something.

HAP

They didn't feed you on the plane?

BIFF

Passed it up. I don't like airline food.

HAP

Where'd you come in from?

BIFF

Dallas.

HAP

That where you live now?

BIFF

Most recently.

HAP

Real cowboy country.

BIFF

*(returning to the living room)*

Only in old western movies. I guess there's still some ranching in the general area, but Dallas-Fort Worth is modern, cosmopolitan.

HAP

What have you been doing, then? I thought ranching was your big dream, the whole reason you left home.

BIFF

It was. When I left home, I did go back to working with horses again, this time on a real ranch. And, pal, it felt

just as right as it had the first time around on that farm. No city noise, no crowds, plenty of air to breathe. No one to please, really, but myself and a few dumb beasts.

HAP

Me, I don't mind the noise, it keeps me company. But being your own boss, working for yourself, that's a life I've never known. Must be great.

BIFF

I had bosses, lots of them, ranch owners, foremen, all the guys who'd been on the job longer than me.

HAP

But you're your own man now.

BIFF

My own man, what I always wanted. The funny thing is I genuinely liked most of the people I worked for. There just always came a point when I got tired of listening to them, of having to listen to them. When that happened, I knew I either had to leave a job or eventually explode. It took a long time to get where I am now.

*Older Linda enters.*

LINDA

Where do you suppose he is now, Happy?

HAP

Biff? I don't know, Mom, working his horses somewhere.

LINDA

You'd think he'd at least answer our letters. There's no place anymore that doesn't get regular mail.

HAP

You want my honest opinion? He'll contact us when he's made good, when he's a big rancher or discovers a gold mine or something.

LINDA

He has made good, I'm sure he has. Your father always believed so strongly in him. That kind of faith doesn't go unrewarded.

HAP

I know.



LINDA

He believed in you, too. And look at you, you're making good.

HAP

Whoopee, I've made it all the way up to assistant buyer. It's still just a job, not a career.

LINDA

But you're the senior assistant now, and I know you'll be made head buyer as soon as what's-his-name retires.

HAP

You're thinking of Rollins, he retired about five years ago. I've worked under two head buyers since.

LINDA

Are you sure I can't fix you a real dinner? A cheese sandwich and a beer is hardly enough for you.

HAP

I had a big lunch, this is all I want. What about you, did you eat?

LINDA

I made scrambled eggs for myself. I wasn't sure when you'd be getting home.

HAP

Inventory, everyone stayed late tonight.

LINDA

I just wish I knew where he is, and that he's alright.

HAP

He's alright. You know Biff, he's always alright.

LINDA

Of course he is.

HAP

I've been thinking about something, Mom. Maybe it's not really such a hot idea, I don't know.

LINDA

Tell me.

HAP

I think I'd like to go to night school. I'm pretty sure we can swing it, we still have most of Pop's insurance money.

LINDA

Night school? What for?

HAP

To study something that'll get me a real career. The age we're living in, there are all kinds of things I can study, brand new fields opening up. I want to really make something of myself.

LINDA

Hap, you are something. You're a good son and a good brother to Biff, you always were.

*She exits.*

HAP

Still thinking about you, because you left. Maybe I should've left, too.

BIFF

You ever do it?

HAP

What, leave?

BIFF

Go to night school.

HAP

No.

BIFF

What happened?

HAP

Life, that's what happened. Mom started getting sick. The old house was falling apart, and I couldn't keep it up by myself the way Pop could. Between the two, his life insurance money disappeared.

BIFF

You still had your job.

HAP

Some job, a dozen years of fielding phone calls and filling out forms for peanuts. It paid the everyday bills until Mom died. After that I quit. I buried her, walked into work the next day and told them to shove it.

BIFF

I'll bet that was something.

HAP

It was something, alright. In my forties and trying to put together a resumé. That's when I sold the house.

BIFF

Must've gotten you a decent profit. They were free and clear on it when Pop— went.

HAP

After a new roof and furnace, back taxes and all the selling costs, it got me enough to barely live on for a couple years while I looked for another job. I aimed high and finally had to settle low. That sales job I took, what was the name of that place? Crap, I can't even remember what I was selling for them, appliances or something. I'll remember. That's how it goes, when I'm not thinking about it, it'll come to mind.

*A knock on the door.*

LUIS

*(off)*

Mr. Loman?

*(knocking)*

Mr. Loman, it's me, Luis. You alright?

HAP

Crap. Keep quiet, maybe he'll go away.

LUIS

Mr. Loman, you hear me? You need help? Mr. Loman!

BIFF

Better answer.

HAP

Alright, hold it down, I'm coming!

*(opens the door to Luis, whose hair is wet)*

What's the idea of yelling like that? You want to wake up

the whole building?

LUIS

I thought you might be in some trouble.

HAP

My only trouble is you. I told you I could pay something tomorrow.

LUIS

I didn't come up for that. The people downstairs called me, got me out of the shower and everything. They heard a noise like someone falling and rolling around on the floor. They thought you might be having a heart attack or something.

HAP

You could've given me one, pounding on my door that way.

LUIS

Sorry. Long as you're okay.

HAP

I'm okay. This is my brother, Biff, he's visiting.

LUIS

Nice to meet you.

BIFF

Likewise.

HAP

We were horsing around, got our feet tangled and tripped each other up.

LUIS

Horsing around? Two old guys like you?

BIFF

We were recalling our youth.

LUIS

No harm in that, I guess. But you should be more careful what you're doing, you're not kids anymore. You'll kill each other.

HAP

That's good advice, Luis. Go on and finish your shower or whatever, we'll keep the noise down.

LUIS

Long as I'm up here, maybe you can give me some money now? Save you coming downstairs tomorrow.

HAP

I knew it! You sneaky bastard, pretending you were worried about me.

LUIS

Don't go calling names, Mr. Loman, I was worried.

HAP

Liar.

LUIS

Listen, if it was up to me, I'd let you slide. I can't help it if the boss wants his money. He's entitled.

HAP

I don't have it here, I have to go to the bank to get it.

LUIS

Okay. But he says you need to pay all of last month and at least half of this, or out you gotta go. I'm just following orders. If I don't, I'll lose my job.

HAP

The executioner is always a guy just following orders.

LUIS

Why do you have to say things like that? Tomorrow, for sure. Even if you can just give me last month's, I'll try and make it square with him. But next month's will be due in another couple of weeks.

HAP

Yeah, yeah, tomorrow. Now get out of here and let us go to sleep, or I won't make it to the bank.

LUIS

Just get together whatever you can, okay? *(to Biff)* Nice meeting you.

BIFF

Nice meeting you, too.

*Luis exits.*

You in trouble, Hap?

HAP

I managed to get a little behind. My Social Security check doesn't go as far as it used to.

BIFF

No savings?

HAP

If I had any savings, I wouldn't be living in this place.

BIFF

I know how it is.

HAP

What do you know? Big shot, you can afford to be traveling the country dropping in on people.

BIFF

I only meant since I'm not working anymore, I have to watch every penny, too.

HAP

Then why are you buying cowboy hats for people?

BIFF

If you need some help—

HAP

I don't want any help, yours or anyone else's! My life is my own, and I'm stuck with it. I'll work things out, I always have.

BIFF

Sure, I only thought—

HAP

You thought after forty years you'd make everything right by riding in to rescue me. I don't need it, pal. I'm a man, goddamn it, I take care of my own problems. It doesn't matter how any of us got where we are, the question for all of us is, "What are you going to do now?"

BIFF

I'm gonna make something of myself. Not Pop's way, not anyone else's way but mine.