

CHANGING BILLY

FADE IN:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - BRONX N. Y. - DAY

Greyish-white fog hangs above tombstones covered with a light blanket of morning dew. In the far distance stands a tall, sturdy FIGURE expelling rings of breath into the air.

INT. BILLY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

BILLY -- that's his nickname, his real name is William Kowalski -- 17, shoots up, his dark bristly hair sticking out in every direction. Pearls of sweat stand out on his forehead. Breathing heavily, he needs a moment to recover.

He examines his sparsely and cheaply furnished room, and if it weren't for the walls covered entirely with posters of runners, it would be like any other teenage hangout.

A knock at the door. Rozalia Kowalski, lovingly known to everybody as NANA, rushes in. She's in her seventies, good-hearted, petite, with a full head of white hair.

Nana shuffles over to a chair, takes a t-shirt and throws it at him

NANA

Billy, hurry, you gonna be late.

She leans over to kiss him, touching his sweaty hair.

NANA

Another nightmare?

He nods.

NANA

We'll talk tonight.

BILLY

You have to stop working like this.

NANA

We need the money and I'm strong like a kon... a horse.

Swaying her finger through the air.

NANA

And you have to study more Polish.

BILLY

Stop changing the subject.

NANA

I don't change anything. Hurry!

BILLY

What about me taking on some extra hours?

NANA

No. You promised. You do your best in school so that you become something good -- like a doctor or a judge.

Nana disappears as fast as she appeared. And with one more glance at the alarm clock on his side, Billy heaves himself with great effort off his floor mattress. He's tall and fleshy. Actually, he's fat.

EXT. STREET - SOUTHEAST BRONX - DAY

Hell on earth -- paper, plastic bottles, garbage bags and gum litter entire stretches of sidewalk. Pumped up cars with booming rap music screech around the corner.

The guys and girls rambling along look identical in their baggy pants, sneakers, huge T-shirts printed with obscenities, and too-short skirts.

It's here we find Lyman High School, one of the worst in the country.

INT. LYMAN HIGH SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Billy rushes along. The barren hallway is frighteningly empty and silent.

A couple of guys in black T-shirts reading: 'LIFE IS A FUCK' crouch in a corner, whispering. One guy hands a tiny plastic bag to the other -- they exchange high-fives.

Chatting teenagers fill the hallway. Pretending not to see anybody or anything, panting, Billy dashes past them as fast as he can.

DIEGO RODRIGUEZ, the same age as Billy, but a head shorter, each muscular arm tattooed with a naked woman, steps in his way.

Billy ignores him and sidesteps, but Diego grabs him and pins him against the dirty, chewing gum-infested grey wall.

DIEGO

Billy, little sucker, where're you  
off to man?

Diego grabs a now-paralyzed-with-fear Billy by the t-shirt and slams him against the wall.

DIEGO

Ain't you answering me? Shit!  
Ain't nothin' to say no more, not  
like when missy teacher asked a  
question and Billy motherfucker's  
always there with a fuckin' answer?

And once again he hits him hard against the wall. Wincing Billy touches his head.

DIEGO

You know you're fuckin' nobody, and  
you'll never be anybody, you're a  
loser -- and if the cops askin' you  
the next time you better know  
nothin'.

BILLY

You've got the wrong guy, man. I  
didn't see anything, so I didn't  
say anything.

DIEGO

Listen to me, you shithead -- you  
wanna have a chance to make it  
through this year, you better shut  
the fuck up.

Diego lets go, but then once again shoves Billy, who sways, almost losing his balance.

DIEGO

A' right, ya fat motherfucker.

And with that he turns away, leaving a daunted Billy behind.

INT. HALLWAY

A plastic sign pasted to the wall reads: 11th Grade.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Thirty-five teenagers are all over the place, sitting on desks, on the floor, throwing spitballs around a bare room deprived of any warmth or decoration. The noise level is deafening.

The teacher, MRS. COLAS, too pretty for this kind of place, and desperately, stands in the middle of the room, screaming:

MRS. COLAS

Everybody sit down now. And Kojo,  
turn the music off.

She stares at SUNNIE, a girl with huge breasts squeezed into an itchy-bitsy T-shirt, chewing gum in the most disgusting way.

MRS. COLAS

You're like a walking target. I  
tried to talk to your parents  
but...

SUNNIE

But... what? Bring it on, Mrs. all  
virgin Colas... it's useless  
because my mother just hit the road  
with what she says is the 'fuck of  
her life' and my father just left,  
thank the lord...

Mrs. Colas swallows hard as all the girls sing with powerful voices:

GIRLS

Thank the Lord.

MRS. COLAS

Left for where?

SUNNIE

The can -- five years. Five  
fuckin' years.

Billy enters. With his head down, he winds his way through the crowd. Two guys push him from left to right. He just lets it happen, knowing well that he isn't in any position to fight it, till he finds his place in the front row and outermost corner of the room.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - STAIRS

It's much quieter now, although students still leap up and down the staircase ignoring WALLACE JORDAN, 18, a small African-American guy in a wheelchair.

He heaves himself out of the chair and rolls onto the floor.

INT. CLASSROOM

Diego jumps on the table in front of Billy and crouches down.

Hissing:

DIEGO

What's up, motherfucker, ya took  
your time. For a sec I hoped you'd  
quit.

Still staring at the table.

BILLY

Before I quit I'll have to die.

Gathering all his courage, he looks straight into Diego's eyes, and in a whisper:

BILLY

My chances of surviving here this  
year are slim, but for you...

Mrs. Colas approaches them and glares at Diego.

MRS. COLAS

Cut it out!

DIEGO  
 (to Mrs. Colas)  
 If I was you, I'd watch my cute  
 little ass.

Ignoring Diego, she grabs a sheet of paper from her desk and hands it to Billy, making eye contact.

MRS. COLAS  
 That's good, Billy, real good.

A smile forms on his lips as the class breaks out in artificial gasping and moaning.

A GIRL  
 What's it, Billy, the usual A?  
 (now mimicking Mrs. Colas)  
 Oh, Billy, thank the Lord. You're  
 the best student. You're so smart.  
 You're my only hope among all the  
 losers here.

Mrs. Colas faces the girl.

MRS. COLAS  
 Drop it and get behind your books.  
 Create your own possibilities and  
 you'll have a chance too. The same  
 holds for the rest of you.

She looks around the now relatively quiet classroom.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - STAIRS

Wallace pushes himself from step to step, sweat running down his forehead. Teens passing by laugh at him, but nobody offers to help.

At the bottom of the staircase stands his wheelchair, chained to the railing.

INT. CLASSROOM

Mrs. Colas paces. She passes Billy who concentrates on a textbook and scribbles words on a piece of paper.

MRS. COLAS  
 What is jealousy?

She strides over to a bench where KOJO, an African-American, very tall and thin, is slouching and snoring in his seat. Mrs. Colas bangs on the table in front of him, making him jump up.

KOJO  
What the fuck's goin' on?

Everybody laughs and cheers.

MRS. COLAS  
We were just discussing 'jealousy'.  
Because you all...

She steps over to Billy.

MRS. COLAS  
... can't stand his working to  
become something better one day.

The class turns wild, 'booing'. A GIRL jumps up on one of the tables, yelling:

GIRL  
Fuck it! He's a loser. Gettin'  
A's don't mean shit.

TARA ASHCRAFT, an eye-filling slim blonde who doesn't fit the picture, examines Billy for a second. Glancing at her watch she jumps up and heads for the door.

MRS. COLAS  
Where are you going, Tara?

TARA  
Counseling.

She almost collides with Wallace, bathed in perspiration, who slides into the room. Gasping for air:

WALLACE  
(to Mrs. Colas)  
I guess it ain't looking very good  
to be late the first day in a new  
school. I just happened to  
encounter a huge problem of  
logistics.

He looks around. Total silence.

WALLACE

It's cool, I'm here.

Everybody stares at him, including Billy.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Billy trudges along, his huge backpack pulling on his shoulders. A runner half his size passes him.

Billy stops, and as he watches him disappear a car rounds the curb, slightly swaying and making a screeching noise.

It nearly touches Billy, who doesn't move an inch. He's petrified.

INT. BILLY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

Three guys with lots of gold chains around their necks head for the elevator.

A door opens and SUGAR, a platinum blonde dressed in her working outfit -- high-heeled boots, extra-tight t-shirt, and mini skirt -- appears. She has a swollen cheekbone.

Examining Billy, she places one hand on his butt and kisses him on the forehead.

SUGAR

Hi, Honey, ain't looking good --  
again those freaky pictures?

BILLY

Just sometimes. And what happened  
to you?

She pulls chewing gum out of her mouth and sticks it on the wall. Tears inflate her eyes.

SUGAR

Same old story. Told ya, ya gotta  
face ya fears... that's what I do  
every fuckin' night... and day.

Billy just stares at her.

SUGAR  
Accidents happen, and it ain't  
nothin' to do with runnin'. See ya  
later, honey.

She pinches his butt.

INT. BILLY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN

There's a warmth to this place, although it's miniscule with  
out-dated appliances.

Billy throws his backpack in a corner and kisses Nana, who  
cleans the dishes.

One look at him and she knows that something is wrong.

He opens the fridge. It's empty, except for three cans of  
beans and some mayonnaise.

NANA  
There's some rice left.

BILLY  
You eat it -- I'll get some food at  
'Napoli's' later.

He touches his prominent belly, looking very serious.

BILLY  
Too many leftovers that I shouldn't  
eat.

NANA  
What did they do this time? And  
don't lie to your old babcia.

He kisses her cheek.

BILLY  
Nothing. Don't worry --  
everything's gonna be fine.

NANA  
I wish I could believe it.

Billy grabs his backpack and disappears.

INT. PIZZERIA 'NAPOLI' - NIGHT

Customers sit on simple wood benches that lead to a counter displaying fresh ingredients for the pizza. On the other side stands a wooden bar for the drinks -- mainly beer, lots of beer.

Billy scrubs that counter, fighting the stains. RUTH, about twenty, squeezes past him. She's fleshy, with a warm smile and intriguingly beautiful eyes.

RUTH  
Stop this and go eat.

BILLY  
I'm not hungry.

She takes the sponge from him.

RUTH  
You have to eat.

BILLY  
You aren't serious -- have you looked at me lately?

RUTH  
Okay, you're chubby, and so what?

BILLY  
I'm not chubby, I'm fat.  
(beat)  
Today I nearly bumped into a runner.

Their eyes meet.

RUTH  
And?

BILLY  
He reminded me of my father and that I used to be more like him. He really believed that running would change his life... and mine.

TOM, a trunk of a man, pushes pies into the brick oven.

Copyright 2006 Yvonne Borgogni -- All Rights Reserved

For the complete script please contact Jennifer Brooks at  
[info@filmmakers.com](mailto:info@filmmakers.com)