

The Tell

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. BASEMENT

The camera fades in to a group of friends laughing around a poker table. The light shines bright over head, reflecting the joy on everyone's face, everyone but JOHNNY, who treats every home game like the World Series of Poker.

JOHNNY (V.O.)  
Everyone is here for a good time,  
but I'm here to win some money.

The cards get dealt out, everyone begins to look at their cards.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
When it comes to poker, everyone  
has a tell, and I can read these  
chumps like the Mr. Salman's reads  
Bible passages.

The camera flashes over to TEDDY, who looks at his cards like they are in some foreign language. He begins to pick his nose, sticking half his finger up there.

Johnny's POV: The nose pick indicates nervousness.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
There's Teddy, aka the Booger  
Bandit. He tends to pick his nose  
when he's nervous, and the deeper  
the dig, the worse his cards. If he  
goes for the kill, I'm going all  
in.

The camera flashes over to JOEY, who sits calmly in his fedora, neatly pressed button down shirt and tie. He seems to know what he is doing, but that facade doesn't last long. Joey yanks on his tie, trying to loosen it up.

Johnny's POV: Tie tug shows signs of bluffing.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
And there's Joey, the flashiest  
slob you'll ever meet. In school he  
dresses like he's never seen a  
washing machine. Here, he tries to  
play the part of professional, but  
tugs his tie when he's not telling  
the truth.

The camera then slides over to EDDIE, an extra large senior that still tries to fit into a medium. His belly button lurks over the table, nearly kissing his chips. Suddenly, Eddie sticks his hand into his belly and start digging in his innie, trying to find some lint.

Johnny's POV: the belly button dive shows Eddie is annoyed.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Oh Eddie, Eddie, Eddie. I love him but he needs to cover that gut. He is one happy meal short of knocking his chips over. Although I know when he lingers for lint, he's trying to distract himself from his awful cards.

THE TABLE. Johnny's chips pile high. Cards flick across the table. The sound of shuffling cards and the boys laughing create a friendly game with the excepting of Johnny. He is focused and ready.

Johnny smirks, his hands confidently resting on a mountain of chips. He knows all of their tells and it is like someone playing chess while the rest play checkers. This game will be over soon.

The camera zooms in on each player, their tells getting more pronounced with every hand.

Quick cuts: Teddy picking his nose, Joey grabbing his tie profusely, and Eddie rubbing his belly

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
They don't know it yet, but the game's already over.

Johnny keeps collecting chips remaining focused. The cards get dealt again and he's got Ace King of spades.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Big Slick, this is a hand I love to see. Everyone is weak, so I'll let then try to play the bluffing battle while I hide the strength of my cards.

Teddy leads out with a small bet, one hand on his chips, the other searching for lost treasure. Joey looks down at his cards, and finally realizes its not worth it. He folds his hand and finally lets go of his tie, which was starting to make his face go red. Eddie takes his hand off his stomach and checks his cards again.

He throws his cards in the middle, while his belly bumps his stack over. The action comes over to Johnny, where he decides to raise.

JOHNNY

I raise you ten, Teddy.

TEDDY

Ten! Oh man, alright I'll call.

Teddy sits back to think, and his finger goes back in his nose. He begins to dig and dig, almost like he is trying to scratch his brain.

The flop comes and it is 10 of spades, 8 of hearts and Queen of spades.

JOHNNY (V.O.)

Now I got the nut flush draw, but not a made hand yet.

JOHNNY

I check, Teddy.

Teddy now is staring at his cards still picking away. He then smiles and stares at Johnny.

TEDDY

I'll put in fifty.

JOHNNY (V.O.)

If he wasn't digging for Captain Hook's lost treasure, I would actually believe him.

JOHNNY

Oh wow, fifty? Alright Teddy, I'll give you some action.

The turn card shows a 2 of spades. Johnny pretends to be disappointed.

JOHNNY (V.O.)

And there it is, I got the best hand, but I want Teddy to think he's ahead.

JOHNNY

Oh jeez, I guess I'll check again.

Teddy continues to scrap away in his nose, but finally he to go to eat it. This is what Johnny was waiting for.

JOHNNY (V.O.)  
Bingo, gross. I told you before,  
once he goes in to bite the booger,  
he's bluffing away his chips.

TEDDY  
I'm all in Johnny.

JOHNNY  
Ha, nice try Teddy, I call.

Teddy looks pissed. He stands up and is staring at Johnny.

TEDDY  
What do you mean you call me? Why  
didn't you fold? I went all in, you  
don't think I got it?

JOHNNY  
Why would I fold this?

Johnny flips over his Ace/King of spades showing his nut  
flush. Teddy can't believe it. The river shows a Ace of  
hearts, clean for Johnny. He begins to pull the pot into his  
already enormous stack.

TEDDY  
What the hell, you kept checking. I  
thought you had nothing. And how  
did you know I was bluffing?

JOHNNY  
Come on, Teddy, we have been  
through this. Everyone has a tell,  
either for good or bad hands. I  
picked up on yours faster than you  
picked your nose.

Teddy looks down at his finger, and then immediately sinks  
back down in his seat.

TEDDY  
Well if you only could read a book  
like you can read us, maybe you  
wouldn't be failing your classes  
and graduate on time, moron.

Johnny stands up aggressively, knocking over his tower of  
chip.

JOHNNY  
What did you say Teddy?

Johnny starts crawling across the table towards Teddy, but Eddie quickly picks him up before he gets there.

EDDIE

You know what, Johnny, why don't you just give us our money back. What are you even gonna do with it?

JOHNNY

I'll tell you what I'm gonna go with it.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. SCHOOL LOCKER ROOM HALLWAY.

Johnny is walking down the locker room hallway after school with his soccer bag when he sees a kid getting thrown out of a room.

JOHNNY (V.O.)

I was walking down the locker room hallway after grabbing my soccer stuff, and I saw this kid get tossed out of one of the boiler rooms.

KID

Hey, no, Sturges, let me back in man. I can make it back, I promise. Just give me another chance, man.

MR. STURGES

You know the rule, if you lose in The Game, you're done. No coming back.

JOHNNY (V.O.)

Sturges was the body guard, and he kept referring to it as 'The Game'. It sounded like some underground high stakes game.

KID

Fine, I'll just go to Officer Hart and report all of you.

MR. STURGES

Ha, yeah you can try. Erker pays everyone in town off. Actually, Hart was in here earlier playing poker. Get lost kid, and never come back.

END FLASHBACK.  
BACK TO SCENE

The boys are all gathered around Johnny as he was telling the story.

JOHNNY  
I went to talk to the kid after and he was hysterical. Apparently Erker holds these underground high stakes games called The Game to fundraise for our school. He said you have one shot, and if you lose, that's it. There is a game tomorrow night and he told me how to get in, but he warned me that Erker is the best player he has ever seen.

JOEY  
Well, he's no match for you, Johnny. You go in there and take it down!

INT. SCHOOL LOCKER ROOM HALLWAY.

Johnny is seen walking down the hallway with a jar full of pennies and dollar bills. He sees Mr. Wood moping the floor with intent. Mr. Wood looks and stares at Johnny.

MR. WOOD  
What are you doing here at this hour.

Johnny freezes for a second and then remembers what the kid told him.

KID (V.O.)  
Before you get in, Wood will be lingering around. If he gives you trouble, just start complimenting his work.

JOHNNY  
I'm here to give you a big hug you handsome hunk of a man. I love our hard working maintenance men of Walpole. Hardest workers in the building. Man do you...

Mr. Wood interrupts him.

MR. WOOD

Okay okay enough. You may continue to walk.

Johnny gives a thumbs up to Mr. Wood and walks down the hall. He comes to a door and knocks on the door quickly, making sure no one was watching. A man comes up to the door and peers through the eye slot. The eye slot closes and the door opens and Mr. Sturges comes out quickly and slams the door behind him

MR. STURGES

What the hell do you think you are doing here? It is not school time little boy.

JOHNNY

Uh, I'm here to gamble away my life savings...sir.

MR. STURGES

Oh, are you now? Well what's the password?

JOHNNY

Degenerates.

MR. STURGES

Very good, follow me.

INT. SCHOOL BASEMENT - NIGHT

Sturges opens the door into the dimly lit, dusty basement of the high school. There is poker tables set up in every corner. The air is thick with tension, the hum of fluorescent lights overhead, and the muffled sounds of teachers shuffling chips. It's all teachers, coaches, and administrators around the table—except for Johnny.

Johnny sits at the end of the table, flanked by the faculty. His eyes dart between each of them, scanning for tells like a detective solving a mystery. He smirks, knowing they don't stand a chance.

MR. ST. MARTIN, playing it cool, calm. But Johnny notices it—the slight twitch. He grips his Chill Zone cup and takes a sip, his fingers tapping nervously on the plastic.

Johnny's POV: The sip signals a weak hand.



JOHNNY (V.O.)  
St. Martin... ice-cold until he's  
not. That sip? Bluffing. Every  
time.

MR. CONNOLLY, laid-back, Hawaiian shirt, lounging like he's  
on a beach. His poker face is solid, but... there it is. He's  
rubbing his lucky frisbee clutched to his chest, like a  
security blanket. The faster the rub, the worse the hand.

Johnny's POV: The frisbee rub means anxiety.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Connolly's got the frisbee twitch.  
Nervous hands, nervous heart. He's  
got nothing.

MR. BAKALE, already sweating bullets. He wipes his brow with  
a handkerchief, the sweat pouring faster than the chips he's  
pushing in.

Johnny's POV: The sweat? An obvious giveaway. Bakale sweats  
harder with a good hand, like he's trying to hide it.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Bakale's like a broken faucet when  
he's holding the goods.

MR. MULLANEY, carefully selecting a homemade brownie from a  
Tupperware container. He nibbles slowly, methodically, his  
face blank. Too blank.

Johnny's POV: The brownie—whenever Mullaney eats, he's got  
something strong.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Brownie in hand? Mullaney's packing  
heat. Who eats when they're about  
to lose?

MR. KAMPPER, eyes burning holes into his cards. He squeezes  
them aggressively in his hands, like he's trying to bend them  
to his will.

Johnny's POV: The bend means frustration. Kampper's had it.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Kampper's bending those cards like  
he wants to snap them. Frustration  
city.

THE TABLE. Chips pile high. Cards flick across the table. The  
sound of shuffling cards and the clink of glasses add to the  
suspense.

Johnny smirks, his hands confidently resting on a mountain of chips. He knows each of their moves before they make them. They don't realize it, but they're playing with their cards turned face-up, as far as Johnny's concerned.

The camera zooms in on each teacher, their tells getting more pronounced with every hand.

Quick cuts: St. Martin sips, Connolly rubs the frisbee, Bakale wipes his face, Mullaney nibbles on another brownie, and Kampper bends his cards—each tell growing more ridiculous, more desperate.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
They don't know it yet, but the  
game's already over.

END MONTAGE

Johnny begins to pick up his chips and walk away towards the exit, until ERKER, the notorious gambler and school substitute of the year, calls him out.

ERKER  
Looks like you did pretty well for  
yourself, Johnny.

JOHNNY  
Yeah, I'm pretty happy with my  
winnings, ready to call it a day.

Johnny turns back and heads to the door again.

ERKER  
If only you were as good in school  
as you are at the table, I would  
have to worry about you graduating.

Johnny stops dead in his tracks, and turns around with a furious look on his face.

JOHNNY  
What did you say to me?

ERKER  
Well, you have all of these  
teachers in class. It would be  
helpful if you could take your  
poker skills at their table to  
their classroom.

Johnny starts to walk back into the ring, picking back up the table and pulling up 2 chairs.

JOHNNY

Well, then lets play, Erker. All your money for all of mine.

ERKER

No, I don't want to just take your money, so how about we raise the stakes? Let's play for money and your grades. If you win, you will get a 100 in every one of your classes. However, if you lose, you will fail all of them. Are you willing to risk your graduation, Johnny?

Johnny thinks long and hard, but then he looks up at Sturges with confidence.

JOHNNY (V.O.)

See, most people would take their winnings a leave. However, I'm not most people.

JOHNNY

(to Sturges)

Deal 'em.

The two sit down at the table, both without cracking a smile. Erker takes out his lucky glasses and cracks his knuckles. Quick cut. They play cards for a while. Piles of chips are exchanged with each hand, although Johnny seems to be losing.

JOHNNY (V.O.)

Erker, he's a good player, but even a pro has his tells. With this next hand I'll be able to pick it up.

Johnny looks down at pocket Kings. The board comes out Queen, King, Ten, rainbow. Johnny's got a set of Kings.

JOHNNY

I will raise 20.

ERKER

That is positional, I re-raise 100.

JOHNNY

Ok, Erker, I call.

The next card is a 2 of hearts, both players check. Finally, the last card is an 8 of spades.

Johnny looks up at Erker, who is scratching his forehead aggressively.

Johnny's POV: Simple scratch of the forehead, classic tell.

JOHNNY (V.O.)  
Something as simple as that,  
clearly shows his sign of weakness.

Just then, Erker starts to flick his face with his hand, confusing Johnny and his read.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Wait, maybe that's his tell, or  
does that show strength.

Johnny looks back up, and Erker is not rubbing his ears, and then he starts banging on his chest, and next he pours his classic cup school water over his head. All of these tells are too much for Johnny, as he has no idea what any of them mean.

JOHNNY (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Maybe that's his tell...or it could  
be that....wait, no, it's  
definitely that right there...screw  
it, he's gotta be bluffing.

JOHNNY  
Whatever, I'm all in.

ERKER  
Right into my trap, Johnny. I call,  
and I flopped the nut straight.  
Looks like you lose Johnny-Boy.  
Have fun retaking your senior year!

Johnny stares at the cards at the table in disbelief.

JOHNNY  
But how...you were bluffing. You  
didn't have a good hand. You had  
all these tells, I was sure you had  
to be bluffing.

ERKER  
Oh, Johnny, did you think you read  
my tell? Come on, what do you take  
me for? An amateur? Sure, everyone  
has tells, but the great ones know  
this; It's gambling, Johnny, and  
you just lost.

JOHNNY

You can't really fail me for the year, right? That's got to be illegal. You're just a sub!

ERKER

And I'm the best damn sub there is. Listen, life is not fair, Johnny. But you lost, So take your loses and get out. And don't make a big scene, nobody would like a sore loser.

Everyone watches Johnny take the walk of shame out. He looks defeated, as we see him open the door and it slams behind him.

ERKER (CONT'D)

(Breaking the 4th wall)

Oh, this wasn't the fairy tale ending you thought it would be? When you gamble, you lose more than you win, especially against a seasoned veteran like me. As far as Johnny, I might let him graduate. I'm not that mean, but I also want to keep kids coming back so I can take their money. How else will we pay for the new Field House?

THE END.