

POETRY SLAM
by Fred Coppersmith

INT. - NIGHT

A small audience is seated or milling around folding chairs near a makeshift stage. Nothing fancy -- think "open mike night". Among the audience, sitting next to each other, are NEIL and BETH.

BETH

You know, I'm really glad you decided to come out tonight, Neil. To be honest, I didn't know if you'd like this sort of thing.

NEIL

What, a poetry reading?

(shrugs)

Sure, why not? Men can like poetry, too, can't they?

BETH

Yeah, it's not that, it's just --

NEIL

And besides, it was an excuse to see you again, Beth. You look nice.

BETH

Well thanks. I'm -- I'm glad you came.

NEIL

Me too.

There is an awkward pause as they smile at one another.

DOUG

(trying to break the tension)

So these poets, are they anybody I might

--

He is immediately cut off by the appearance, or rather the sound, of TODD and DOUG, who enter dressed and acting like two rabid sports fans. DOUG is wearing face paint and a "#1 Fan" foam finger on one hand. They are shouting, cheering, and visibly very excited to be there.

TODD

Woo hoo! This is gonna rock!

DOUG

Oh yeah, man! I can't wait!

NEIL
(recognizing them)
Oh crap.

They spot NEIL and stop.

TODD
Whoa! Dude! Neil? What're you doing here?!

NEIL
(trying to hide his
displeasure at seeing them)
Oh, hey, Todd. Doug. How's it going? Um,
what're you guys doing here?

TODD
(indicates their clothing)
Isn't it obvious, man? We're here for
the poetry!

DOUG
Poetry! Yeah! Woo hoo!

NEIL
You are?

TODD
Sure! Didn't you hear, man? There's
gonna be a kickass reading tonight!

DOUG
Woo hoo!

TODD
Doug and me never miss these things.
(beat)
This is so weird, though, man, seeing
you here.

NEIL
Yeah, that's just what I was thinking.

TODD
If we'd known you were coming, man, we'd
have brought more face paint!

DOUG
Face paint! Woo hoo!

BETH
Um, Neil...?

NEIL

Oh! Hey, sorry. Uh, guys, this is Beth. You remember, from my Econ class? Beth, these are Todd and Doug. They, uh, they live next door to me.

DOUG

(extending the foam finger to
BETH)
Pleased to meet ya!

BETH

(hesitantly shaking the finger
but trying to be friendly)
Um, likewise.

TODD

(patting Neil on the back)
Any friend of Neil's is a friend of
ours!

NEIL

Uh, thanks, guys.

BETH

So you guys are big poetry fans?

TODD

Are we -- ?
(laughs)
Hell, only the biggest!

DOUG

Woo hoo! Poetry!

TODD

We come to these things, like, all the
time. Every chance we get!

NEIL

(very surprised)
Really? You do?

TODD

Sure! What, you think we don't have no
culture or something?

DOUG

We gotta do something now that football
season's over.

TODD

Right. And poetry's so cool, man! I
mean, it -- it --

(obviously struggling)
It *rhymes*, man...

DOUG
Or it doesn't!

TODD
Exactly! And that kicks ass, man! Poets
just do what they wanna do! They don't
take crap from nobody!

BETH
Wow, that's -- I don't think I've ever
heard it expressed quite like that
before.

TODD
Hey, I just call 'em how I see 'em,
Bethy baby.

DOUG
Woo hoo!

NEIL
Well that's great, guys, but we were
kind of in the middle of something, so--

TODD
(not listening)
And you know, tonight's the big night.

DOUG
Big night! Woo hoo!

LAURA
It is?

TODD
That's right. Tonight, Penn State's very
own Lloyd Holland is back in the house!

NEIL
Lloyd -- who?

TODD
Lloyd Holland, man. He's one of the
poets! Didn't you see the announcement?
He's gonna be reading tonight. He's been
out for like a month with a groin
injury, but --

DOUG
Woo hoo!

NEIL

How -- how do you get a groin injury
writing poetry?

TODD

Hey, man, we don't ask those kinda
questions. But tonight's he's back.

(beat)

I think he's gonna read his poem about
the swans.

DOUG

Swans! Woo hoo!

NEIL

Well that's great, guys, but --

TODD

Ooh! I think it's starting!

Enter NICOLE. She approaches the stage and addresses the
audience. As she enters, TODD and DOUG each take a seat in
the row behind NEIL and BETH.

NICOLE

Hello, everyone. Thank you for coming to
tonight's poetry reading. It looks like
a really great crowd tonight, and I hope
you're ready for some really great
poems.

DOUG

Woo hoo!

Some of the audience, including NEIL, turn to glare at him.

NICOLE

Right. Anyway, without further ado, it
gives me really great pleasure to
introduce the recipient of this year's
Iambic Pentametrix Award for outstanding
post-graduate poetry -- Mr. Lloyd
Holland.

Enter LLOYD, carrying a notebook. He turns to face the
audience.

DOUG

Woo hoo! Lloyd!

LLOYD

Thank you, Nicole. It's really great to
be here tonight, friends. I'd like to

start by reading one of my new poems,
entitled --

TODD
Dude! You rock!

DOUG
Woo hoo!

LLOYD
(hesitantly)
Um, yes, thanks -- entitled, "The
Loneliest Frog."

LLOYD opens notebook and begins to read ponderously from it.

LLOYD (CONT'D)
Oh, lonely frog.
You who are so lonely.
You who are a frog.
You ribbit in desperate mourning,
Weeping, wailing, warty --

TODD
(standing)
What the hell?! Dude, what is this crap?

NEIL
(angrily, turning in his
chair)
Todd!

TODD
Well, I mean c'mon! We came here for
some kickass poetry, man, not this
"lonely frog" crap.
(to LLOYD)
Dude, do the one about the swans!

DOUG
Woo hoo! Swans!

NEIL
Guys, come on. Give the man a break,
he's just trying to read.

LLOYD
Thank you.

NEIL
I mean, it wasn't that bad.

TODD

Dude, please. Leave this to the real poetry fans, okay?

NEIL

What's that supposed to mean? I like poetry.

TODD

Dude, c'mon. You're not foolin' anybody.
(indicated BETH)
It's obvious you're just here to get in her pants.

DOUG

Woo hoo! Pants!

Everyone, even TODD, looks at DOUG a little askance. He just shrugs.

NEIL

That is so not true!

TODD

Oh yeah? Okay, then who's your favorite poet?

NEIL

What?

TODD

You heard me, man. C'mon, favorite poet. Who is it?

NEIL

I don't know. That -- that guy. You know, who wrote that poem. I -- I don't know! What is this? Who has a favorite poet?

TODD

I do! That's who!

(to LLOYD)

And it used to be Lloyd Tiberius Holland until he started doing these stupid frog poems!

LLOYD

I'll just go.

He leaves.

BETH

Neil, is this true? You're just here
because you want to have sex with me?

NEIL

What? No! No, it's not just -- I mean,
sure, I'd like to, but -- no! No! It's -
- poetry's nice! Really! I don't --

TODD

Dude, give it up.

DOUG

Woo hoo!

BETH

(rising angrily)

You know, Neil, I thought you were
different. When you agreed to come
tonight, I thought -- I thought you were
a decent guy.

NEIL

I am! Beth, it's not me! It's --

BETH throws her hands up in disgust and leaves.

TODD

Dude, that was harsh.

DOUG

Totally.

TODD

We should probably go.

(beat)

I think there's an open-mike night
somewhere downtown.

DOUG

Open-mike night? Dude! Woo hoo!

They exit, talking and cheering amongst themselves. The rest
of the audience, if they haven't already, begin to leave.
Long pause and focus on NEIL, still sitting there.

NEIL

Man. I *hate* poetry.

FADE OUT.