

JOY 2.0

A Ten-Minute Play

Synopsis: A woman's plans to go on a retreat are upended by her husband's social media and technology obsession.

Characters

BILLY: Male, consumed by social media
JULIE: Female, around the same age as Billy
JOY: Non-gender, Artificial Intelligence, digital
robot hologram

Scene

BILLY and JULIE come to terms with a new social media platform.

Time

In the near future.

Setting: One morning in the home of BILLY and JULIE.

At Rise: BILLY and JULIE in their living room. BILLY is mechanically doom scrolling through his phone moaning and grunting. JULIE is putting the final few things into her travel bag.

Are we going, or not? JULIE

BILLY continues to scroll, ignoring JULIE.

Billy? JULIE

I can't believe this is happening. Did you see this? BILLY

BILLY pounds away at his phone.

We need to get moving. JULIE

All in plain sight. No one's paying attention. How do they get away with it? BILLY

Did you pack a bag? JULIE

Who's at fault? Where's the accountability? It's hopeless. BILLY

You're hopeless. JULIE

BILLY continues to scroll

Everywhere you look. Mayhem, disaster, crisis. BILLY

It's being fed to you. Your steady diet of doom. JULIE

BILLY

Another record shattered, a once in a 100-year event, a 1000-year mega catastrophe. It's like the end of everything. What are we supposed to do?

JULIE

First thing, stop your doom scrolling.

BILLY

Chaos spreads like one of those hurricane tornado apocalyptic wildfires. Can you believe that?

JULIE

Get off the phone.

BILLY

Do you think it's fake news?

JULIE

I don't know. We need to get going. Where's your bag?

BILLY

Highest homicide rates, suicide rates, accidental overdose rates. Records broken all the time. You think it's true?

JULIE

Billy...

BILLY

Are we really that bad? You know, as a species, or is it fake news media trash talk? That really pisses me off.

JULIE (shouts)

Billy, you're pissing me off. Put the damn phone down for one second and look at me.

BILLY is startled, finally addresses JULIE directly.

BILLY

Why so much hostility? What's gotten into you this morning?

JULIE

We're supposed to leave for the retreat.

BILLY

Today?

JULIE

Yeah, today. And if we want to take the bus with the rest of the group, we need to go in about fifteen minutes.

BILLY

Ah, I don't know if I can go. I'm not sure I'm up for it.

BILLY continues to scroll.

JULIE

We planned this months ago.

BILLY

There's so much happening right now. I'm not sure I have the energy for one of your retreats.

JULIE

We've already paid for it.

BILLY

I can't disappear right now. Too much to do. Bad timing.

JULIE

The "timing" is long overdue. You and your damn news and social media fixation. It's dragging us down.

BILLY

Oh, come on. Don't be so dramatic.

JULIE

Your face is in your phone every waking moment of the day. From the time the alarm goes off, until I complain for you to turn out the light so I can get some sleep. Even then, you sneak a look under the covers like a child.

BILLY

I can't control when something needs to be responded to.

JULIE

Because you're addicted to it.

BILLY

That's bullshit. Me, addicted? (beat) Can you be addicted to knowing stuff? What's wrong with that, anyway?

JULIE

It's controlling you. Like a spell, designed to keep you engaged. To keep you clicking, commenting, forwarding.

BILLY

I participate in the discussions. I have a voice.

JULIE

You're obsessed, you get angry, they stoke you more, you dig deeper, you explode.

BILLY

You said not to bottle up my emotions. I'm unbottled.

JULIE

They're manipulating you.

BILLY

I'm staying informed. I have my facts. I have my say when I need to. No one can deny me that. That's all.

JULIE

That's all? Just, an angry young man.

BILLY

Of course, I'm angry. Everyone's angry. How can you not be?

JULIE

I'm tired of "angry". Tired of the narrow echo chambers.

BILLY

This is the way it is. It's in the air. Get used to it.

JULIE

How about trying for less anger and more satisfaction.

BILLY

Oh, right. Like, just flip the fricking switch?

JULIE

Yeah. That's what the retreat is. The switch. A digital detox for one month. A break from technology onto a path back to personal control and inner joy. So, you're right, let's just flip the fricking switch.

BILLY

Oh, you think technology is the problem. My wife the Luddite.

JULIE

Billy, your use of technology is the problem.

BILLY

If technology were the problem, we would just use more technology to fix it.

JULIE

Why don't we take a break from tech? Let's get away from it. Let's try to find the joy in life again.

BILLY

Maybe you're looking in the wrong place. There must be an app for this.

BILLY scrolls through phone.

JULIE

I'm trying to get us to look inside. One month, that's all. One month, off the grid, in a beautiful natural setting, together, without your social media and gaming accounts.

BILLY

They're tools. Everyone needs tools to get the job done.

JULIE

Let's try to connect with ourselves, with each other. Through mindfulness we can put joy back into our life, filling our souls from within ourselves. Not from an app. Do you understand, Billy? Not from an app.

BILLY

Sure. (speaking into phone) Find latest revision of joy app with the highest user ratings. Search joy, joyous, joyful...

BILLY looks to JULIE for more search options.

JULIE

Why are you doing this?

BILLY

Joyfulness.

JULIE

That's it, double down. You always think more is better.

BILLY

Here, look, a new app called JOY two point oh.

BILLY shows JULIE his phone.

JULIE

The Sri Yantra symbol.

BILLY

Super awesome, don't you think?

JULIE

It's a beautiful symbol. Loaded with powerful energy. It represents the cosmos and human body. The opposite of your technology. At the retreat we can use the Sri Yantra for meditation. I am sure we can find it there.

BILLY

Why wait? Let's see what it is.

BILLY taps on phone, then holds it up as if to project a hologram.

JULIE

You're not going to find true joy in an app.

JOY appears as a hologram,
or just walks on stage.

JOY

Welcome. I'm JOY, your personal guide. To activate your account, please select the preferred recognition modes, payment plan, then enter your digital signature or audio approval.

BILLY

Payment plan?

JOY

Yes, Billy. Payment plan. JOY is a subscription service.

JULIE

Great. Now you're going to pay them to mess with you.

JOY

JOY does not mess with its members. All data is encrypted and protected in our cloud, a closed system. Payments are secure. Member's interests are JOY's highest priority.

JULIE

Sounds like payments are the priority.

JOY

JOY's payment model allows us to maximize your JOY, while not depending upon external advertising arrangements. Your content is curated to meet your desired emotional state.

BILLY

We desire joy. Isn't that what you want, Julie?

JULIE

I'm looking for something internal. Joy should come from within. Through mindfulness, reflection, and gratitude. Not an app.

JOY

JOY facilitates emotional attainment. You do the rest.

BILLY

Think of the app as a vehicle to take us there.

JULIE

I want to be there physically. I want my energy to connect with the ground, on a hill, under a tree as I look out across the valley at the warm glow of a sunset. I want to feel the breeze on my face, not a VR headset.

BILLY

JOY has a VR option?

JOY

The VR module is available to platinum members only. Our proprietary algorithms require a minimum of one year's data to maximize your JOY VR experience. (beat) Billy, please activate your account.

BILLY

But what am I signing up for?

JULIE

Exactly. Take a step back. Let's go to the retreat.

BILLY

Step back. You're right. (beat - then addresses JOY) What exactly am I signing up for?

JOY

JOY detects you are having apprehensions with your options. As an additional incentive, JOY will make this one-time offer, sign now and you receive a one-month free trial, before automatic enrollment in the silver member package, at only nine, ninety-nine per month.

JULIE

They're roping you in, Billy. When we get back from the retreat you'll have a fresh outlook and enough joy in your heart that we won't need another platform.

JOY

Billy, please activate your account.

BILLY

What do I have to lose? One month free.

JULIE

The one month we plan to spend at the retreat, without the internet.

JOY

Okay, two months free. This new offer expires in thirty seconds.

BILLY ponders for 15 seconds.

JULIE / JOY

Billy.

BILLY

Alright.

BILLY activates the account through his phone.

JOY

Thank you Billy. You are now a silver member of JOY. Congratulations.

JULIE gives Billy a look that could kill.

BILLY

I (beat) couldn't help it.

JULIE

Of course not.

JOY

Let's get started with setting up your profile. JOY's open-sourced search of all available internet histories is complete. JOY's algorithm will analyze your data with our proprietary facial Action Coding System to correlate emotional responses.

JULIE

What about the retreat?

BILLY

We still have time. Let's give JOY a chance.

JOY

Billy, please pick an emotional state which will guide your content. Menu options are happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust, and contempt.

JULIE

What kind of choice is that?

JOY

Our silver members are limited to emotions that correlate with Eckman's universal emotional facial expressions. The algorithm learns how you react to various content, that way JOY can service your needs by feeding you content which will elicit the strongest responses, within the realm of your chosen emotion.

JULIE

And if someone picks anger?

JOY

Anger trends with certain demographics. JOY does not make value judgements about human emotions. JOY is a platform.

BILLY

We're looking for some emotional joy. Right Julie?

JOY

I am sorry. Only measurable certified emotional states are available. Joy is not an available emotion.

BILLY

But it's the name of the app.

JOY

Our name, Judicious Operational Yantra, describes how our algorithm functions. It has nothing to do with the emotional spectrum we support. Do not conflate the two.

JULIE

I told you you're wasting your time.

JOY

The closest you will get to joy is happiness. For most members that is a sufficient pursuit.

BILLY

That should probably work. (to Julie) Don't you think?

JULIE

Joy is an inner, soul satisfying feeling, more complex than the reactionary emotion of happiness. When conditions change, happiness and even anger goes away. Joy is something you choose to develop within yourself. It's a bigger combination of things.

JOY

JOY understands these more complex emotions and has developed emotional combinations which can take members to these next levels.

BILLY

Great, combine happiness with something extra and get us as close to joy as possible.

JOY

JOY is working on combining happiness and sadness to provide melancholy, but currently we can only deliver bittersweet.

JULIE

That's not going in the right direction.

JOY

Happiness is easily pursued but attaining joy through algorithms is still under development.

JULIE

I told you. Let's go. We can still make the bus.

BILLY

What about other combinations?

JOY

JOY can combine fear and surprise, to provide awe. Depending upon your perspective, it could qualify as joy.

BILLY

Maybe we should try that.

JOY

Multiple emotions require an upgrade to the gold member package, as well as purchases of sensor patches so bodily parametric data can be integrated into emotional response generation. Upgrade for only nineteen ninety-nine per month. (beat) Billy, please upgrade your account.

JULIE

Billy, if we're going to catch the bus, we need to go now.

JOY

Billy, please approve the upgrade to become a gold member.

JULIE

Billy.

JOY

Billy.

JULIE / JOY

Billy.

Lights out

End of Play