JERSEY

By Brad Fortman

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CAST

- **BEN** – anxious fiancé
- **LUCY** – confident, funny future wife
- **TOM** – Ben's best friend; well-meaning, clueless
- **MARIA** – Lucy's sharp friend; queen of sarcasm
- **"CAPTAIN" DAVE** – Lucy's old fling; wholesome, polite
- **JERSEY GUY #1, #2** – Ben's hallucinations

SETTING

BEN & LUCY's apartment. Cozy but cluttered with wedding magazines, mood boards, sticky notes, a laptop, an overflowing hamper, and a half-assembled centerpiece Lucy gave up on last night. Kitchen visible. Front door leads offstage. A hallway suggests the bedroom.

Lights warm, welcoming.

Lights up.
(BEN and LUCY sit cross-legged on the couch, surrounded by wedding magazines, an open laptop, and cups of lukewarm coffee.)

LUCY
(checking notes on her phone) Okay—if we cut the ice sculpture shaped like a swan, we can afford the nicer chairs.

BEN
(relieved) Thank God. That swan was staring into my soul. I swear it was judging me every time I walked by.

LUCY
Quit being so dramatic. It was ice. It didn't have emotions.

BEN
You didn't look into its eyes long enough.

LUCY
(laughs; flips a page) Anyway. Maria and I were reminiscing about my early twenties. Lord, what a mess. Fun! But a mess.

BEN
(chuckles)
I mean, who wasn't a mess in their twenties. Right?

LUCY
Right? There were enough partners to start a sports team. (beat) Honestly, if they all wore jerseys, there'd be subs.

BEN
(cheerful) Wow! Maria really was a wild child.

LUCY
Not Maria, silly. Me.

BEN
(freezes mid blink.)

LUCY
(stands, stretching.)

LUCY
I'm going to go switch the laundry.

BEN
(dazed) Subs…

LUCY
(over shoulder) Oh relax—none of them were good enough to go pro!

(She exits.)

BEN
(sits still… then slowly looks to the audience.) Jerseys. Subs. A whole team. Like… a roster? A lineup? Did she have a mascot?! Did she have—*stats*? How do I stack up? Do I stack up at all? Oh god. Do they have a group chat? I'm not a jealous person. I'm not! I'm secure! (beat) No, I'm a plane oatmeal, vanilla ice cream beige cardigan of a human being.(Pulls out cell phone and dials) Hello Tom?....can you come over…I'm in a bit of a panic over here …yes…yes now…to far away?... You live down the hall!….Just.. Now. Please?..

(Suddenly JERSEY GUY #1 walks out that hall across the apartment in a bright jersey, eating Captain Crunch from the box.)

JERSEY GUY #1
(He waves) Yo.

BEN
(staring at the stranger with shock.) Tom, I gotta go. (Puts the phone away absolute horror) WHAT—WHO ARE YOU?!

(Jersey Guy #1 exits through kitchen like he lives there.)

BEN
(hyperventilating) No, no, no. I'm hallucinating. I'm hallucinating about my fiancée's past. I did not just see a man eating cereal with no bowl.

(BEN paces like a Roomba having a nervous breakdown. TOM and MARIA knock, already entering.)

TOM
Bro. You sounded panicked. Is Lucy pregnant? Oh my god! Are *you* pregnant?

MARIA
Tom said you sounded a little nuts in the phone. What's going on?

TOM
Am I going to be an uncle?

BEN
No! Worse!

TOM
I'm going to be an aunt?

MARIA
(To Tom) Shut up. (She rubes hands together) This should be good. (To Ben) Go ahead Ben.

BEN
Lucy's… "number"… is… team-adjacent.

MARIA
Holy hell, you were right, he really *is* off his nut.

BEN
She said... She said. "With the amount of partners she has had, she could start a team!" With subs!

MARI
Oh, we were talking about that yesterday. She was a wild one all right.

TOM
Honestly, that's practical. If a guy sprains his ankle…

BEN
Tom.!

MARIA
Wow. If paranoia burned calories, you'd be shredded.

(Suddenly JERSEY GUY #1 enters, stretching like he's warming up for a big game. JERSEY GUY #2 jogs in place beside him.)

BEN
(standing suddenly, pointing) See?! Oh jeez they're multiplying!

TOM
(startled) Was is it? A bee? Where?! (He swats wildly at nothing.)

MARIA
(realizing) Oh my god… he's *actually* hallucinating.

JERSEY GUY #2
(to Maria, offended) "Hallucinating"? Wow. Rude. We have depth, lady.

MARIA
(to Ben) They're not real. (looking around to Hallucinations) You're not real!

JERSEY GUY #1
That's what my dad said when he left.

BEN
(yelling) Stop trying be funny! You're figments of my imagination and I say stop talking to me!

JERSEY GUY #2
Technically*, you're* the one talking to "imaginary" us. That's on *you*, champ.

(Lucy enters with laundry basket.)

(The Jersey Guys freeze instantly, staring forward like mannequins. Ben looking back and forth between them.)

LUCY
Hey guys what's … (beat) Ben… what are you doing?

BEN
(realizing he looks like a fool. Begins pretending to stretch) Core… stretching. Fitness. I'm sweating out my… uh… toxins.

MARIA
More like he's detoxing from reality.

LUCY
…Okay…. Oh shoot. The fabric softener! Be right back.(She exits.)

(The Jersey Guys immediately unfreeze.)

JERSEY GUY #1
(yelling after her) Miss you girl!

JERSEY GUY #2
Call me!

BEN
Get out! Get out, get out, get out!

TOM
Ok, ok. We'll see you later. Bowling, remember?

(Tim and MARIA walk out)

BEN
AGH!!

(BEN sits on the floor doing frantic breathing exercises.)

A knock.

BEN
(startled) Yes Tom, bowling later, I heard you, yes…If you're not Tom… if you're wearing a jersey…identify yourself… and your number!

(A muffled voice from behind the door)

DAVE
Ummm… Dave…number?

(He opens the door. "Captain" Dave stands there holding a box wearing a huge jersey)

DAVE
Hey! You must be Ben. I'm Dave, Lucy's old, friend. Nice to meet you.

BEN
(whispers) They had a captain…

DAVE
Sorry?

BEN
Carton! Is that a carton? In the box?

DAVE
…No. Lucy asked me to drop off some old stuff from college.

(JERSEY GUYS appear behind Dave, hyping him up like he's Michael Jordan.)

JERSEY GUYS
Yo! Captain Dave! MVP! The GOAT!

DAVE
(to Ben) Uh… you good?

BEN
The goat... (not paying attention to what Dave is saying)

DAVE
Right…. Well…you're Ben, right? It's nice to meet you. Lucy wouldn't stop talking about you. Says you're a good guy. She said you make her feel safe. She needs that.

BEN (coming back to himself) What?

JERSEY GUY #2
He said you're just a benchwarmer, dude!

BEN
(gasp) Stay back, team captain!

(He dives behind the couch.)

(Lucy enters.)

LUCY
Dave! Oh my god! Thanks for bringing my stuff. (to Ben) …What are you doing behind the couch?

BEN
Pilates!

DAVE
I'm…a… I'm going to go. It was nice to see you again Lucy. Nice to meet you Ben.

(He exits. Jersey Guys chest bump on their way out.)

LUCY
You seem jittery. I'm going to go make you a tea. It might help calm your nerves some.

(Ben gets up. He is alone. He tiptoes around the apartment, searching corners like he's looking for raccoons.)

BEN
Okay Ben. You are calm. You are sturdy. You are an adult man who can handle the fact that…(mutters) your fiancée had… hobbies.

(Suddenly the JERSEY GUYS enter in slow motion. Stadium lights strobe. An announcer voice plays. Or can be said by one of the Jersey guys)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Ladies and gentleman entering the field. Averaging 32 panic attacks a season! Ben's anxiety! And behind him, coming in with 1.2 silent sobs a moment its Ben's insecurities!

BEN
Noooo! (He grabs a couch cushion, holds it to himself and rocks back and forth. Then starts to swing it at the Jersey guys)

JERSEY GUY #1
Whoa! Easy big fella! This is vintage polyester!

(Tom bursts in wearing his football jersey. The Jersey boys run to the kitchen)

TOM
Bro! Just wanted to remind you the game is on tonight 8:30.

BEN
(pointing) You too?! A Jersey!?

TOM
It's our team! It doesn't even have shoulder pads!

(Lucy enters with a tea for Ben. But it's still frantically swinging the pillow)

LUCY
What the hell is going on?!

(Lucy hand Ben the tea and exchanges a look with Tom)

BEN
(Teary, tea cup shaking) I'm surrounded by your roster, Lucy! (Whispering) They're in the kitchen right now!

(He gestures. A Jersey Guy #1 is standing in the doorway drinking a tea, mocking Ben).

JERSEY GUY #1
I'm Ben. I like tea…

LUCY
Ben. Honey. There's no one there.

(Ben collapses into the middle of the couch)

Tom
I'm going to go get Maria

(Tom leaves. BEN wraps himself in a blanket like a traumatized burrito. Tom and Maria enter)

LUCY
Ben… talk to us.

TOM
Ya. What's going on here?

BEN
ok…Lucy, your past scares me…Dave scares me

MARIA
Everyone has a past, dude.

TOM
Mine includes a ferret and three misdemeanors. (They all turn to look at Tom) I'm not kidding.

MARIA
Look. Dave peaked at 21. The best thing he ever did was date Lucy.

LUCY
And he messed that up good.

BEN
(Sniffing, to Lucy) Good! (To Maria) Really?

MARIA
A number doesn't define her. Or you.

LUCY
(Lucy sits beside him, close enough that their shoulders almost touch. She hesitates, then turns to face him fully.) Ben… you know me. Really know me. Better than anyone ever has, better than I ever knew myself for a long time. And yeah, I had… a few partners. A few chapters I didn't always understand while I was living them. There was chaos.

MARIA
Oh ya there was!

LUCY
There were late nights, bad choices, wrong turns I thought were right at the time. I messed up. I learned the hard way. Just like everyone else does when they're trying to figure out who they are.(She exhales, a small, nervous smile.) But every one of those moments—the stupid ones, the beautiful ones, and the ones I wish I could redo—they all pushed me forward. They shaped me. They taught me what didn't fit, what didn't last, what wasn't real. And somehow, all of it led me here. To you. You, ya nut. (She nudges him lightly, then grows serious.)

Those people? Those places? All those misadventures I thought meant something at the time? None of them ever got *this* version of me. None of them got the me who knows herself. The me who isn't running or guessing or pretending. You're the only one who's seen me like *this*…steady, honest, unguarded. My path wasn't straight. It twisted and doubled back and scared me half to death sometimes. But no matter where it went, it always ended up pointing here. I didn't know what I wanted back then. How could I? I was still learning how to listen to myself. (Her voice softens.)

But I know now. (She reaches for his hand.) I want you. Only you. Not the idea of you, not the comfort of not being alone…you. Everything I went through led me to this moment, to you and me. No noise. No chaos. Just us.

(The Jersey Guys appear silently behind them)

JERSEY GUY #2
I think I'm going to cry…(burp) …never mind.

BEN
Just like everything in my life. The good and the bad, lead me here, To you.

(The Jersey Guys begin walking out the front door, waving goodbye. Ben watches, emotional.)

LUCY
Ya. Do you get it? We okay?

BEN
I think so.

Lucy
Ok. (To Tom and Maria) Thanks for coming over. (To Ben) You just sit and relax. I'm going down to the store for a sec. We're out of milk and I'll grab you some more Captain Crunch. (Beat) You've been going through that stuff like you have two stomachs.

Maria
I'll walk with you.

(Tom, Maria and Lucy leave)

(Ben sits alone on the couch, staring into a mug of cold tea like it's giving him visions. The room is silent… until JERSEY GUY #1 pops his head out from the kitchen.)

JERSEY GUY #1
You're out of Captain Crunch. (beat) again.

(Ben jumps)

BEN
(strained whisper) Oh. I thought you guys were gone.

(Jersey Guy #2 enters holding a clipboard)

JERSEY GUY #2
Yeah, about that. The paperwork for exiting your subconscious is… backed up.

BEN
Backed up? Wait. You have paperwork?

JERSEY GUY #2
We're hallucinations *Ben*. Not savages.

BEN
(Frantic) Please leave. I'm trying to be a better man.

JERSEY GUY #1
You keep saying that. But we are literally fueled by your insecurity.

JERSEY GUY #2
And carbs.

(Ben buries his face in his hands)

BEN
I can fix this. I have to fix this. Lucy deserves someone confident, not someone who needs… (Glances at Jersey Guys)…a ref, a coach, and a whole bench just to survive his own thoughts.

JERSEY GUY #1
Aw, buddy. We believe in you. (Beat) But also…no we don't. That's why we exist.

BEN
(Standing) Will you guys just leave me alone!

JERSEY GUY #1
Yes! Strength! Conviction! Emotional maturity! (Turns to #2) Mark that on his chart. "Attempted growth." Partial credit.

(They retreat into the kitchen, leaving Ben alone)

BEN
I hate those guys. (Fallows into kitchen)… Hay… That meatloaf is mine!

(Lucy and Maria enter main door with a couple of small bags. They both plop down on the couch)

MARIA
So. Do you think Ben is actually ok?

LUCY
I don't know. I hope so. He was looking at Dave like he was a quarterback of the Apocalypse.

MARIA
To be fair, Dave does look like a man who says "Hut!" when he sneezes.

(Lucy laughs.)

LUCY
I love Ben. Completely. But I don't know. Can I marry someone who thinks my past is a haunted house full of numbered men. I want a partner, Maria. Not a referee.

MARIA
Sweetie… love is work. Sometimes ridiculous work. You and Ben? You've got the important stuff. Humor. Respect. A shared fascination with videos of raccoons doing people-things.

(Both laughs)

MARIA
He'll get there. And if he doesn't? (Beat) I'll hit him with my car.

(Lucy laughs loudly {snorts})

LUCY
Thanks.

(Lucy and Maria head to the kitchen as Ben comes out.)

LUCY
We'll be right back. Got to put the food away.

Ben
Right.

(The Jersey Guys follow Ben out)

JERSEY GUY #1
Alright team! Ben wants to be a better fiancé, so we're doing Relationship Drills!

BEN
God help me.

JERSEY GUY #2
Drill One: "Eye Contact Without Panicking About Her Past."

(He blows the whistle. Ben instantly looks stressed)

BEN
Please don't do that.

JERSEY GUY #1
Drill Two: "Repeat After Me — Her past has nothing to do with me."

BEN
Her past has… some things to do with (catches himself) …*Nothing* to do with me.

JERSEY GUY #2
Progress! That was almost healthy!

JERSEY GUY #1
Drill Three: "No more jersey hallucinations."

BEN
Lets do it!.

JERSEY GUY #2
Name *one* sport.

BEN
(cheerfully) The one with the orange bouncy ball…

JERSEY GUY #1
BEEP! VIOLATION!

(They circle him like disappointed coaches)

JERSEY GUY #1
Son, you're a hazard.

JERSEY GUY #2
A complete disappointment.

JERSEY GUY #1
Utter failure.

(The door knocks. The Jersey Guys snap into hiding. One behind the chair, one under the table, one attempts to squeeze into a cupboard)

BEN
(whispering)
Why do you hide when others show up?

JERSEY GUY #2
Hey it's your subconscious. You make up the rules.

(Tom enters with a brown paper bag full of snacks)

TOM
Bro. Are you ready for… FEELINGS?

BEN
No.

TOM
Great. Because I brought trail mix and a TED Talk DVD.

(Tom sits Ben down on the couch.)

TOM
Bro. You got two options. You can: A) Keep hallucinating Lucy's romantic history like it's the Superbowl of Bad Decisions…

JERSEY GUY #2
We're selling merch, by the way.

TOM
Or, option B. (Beat) You face your insecurities like a man. A grown man. A grown man with a wedding deposit that is non-refundable.

(Ben winces deeply)

BEN
I'm scared she'll realize she could've done better.

TOM
Bro. She already *did* better. That's *you*. You're the "better."

BEN
Am I though?

TOM
Ben. Listen. You love big. You care big. You overthink big. You're like… if a golden retriever had anxiety and a 401-k. Lucy didn't choose you because you're perfect. She chose you because you're good. Consistent. Kind. Safe. And because she thinks your laugh is cute. (Mutters) It's not, but she thinks it is. She loves you, man.

(Ben cracks a tiny smile)

BEN
What if she regrets choosing me?

TOM
Then she would've already left. She didn't. She here, with you.

(Ben breathes deep. Taking it in)

TOM
Now go tell her you're not afraid anymore.

BEN
I'm still afraid.

TOM
That's fine. Just don't be stupid and tell her that.

JERSEY GUY #1
Oof. Big ask.

(Ben turns to the Jersey guys)

BEN
Get out.

(Tom stands up)

TOM
Hey man, I was just trying to help.

(Grabs the snacks and walks out front door. Ben turns to Tom)

BEN
Shit. Tom! I dint mean you…(to himself) I'll call him later. (Turns back to the apartment)

BEN
Tom's right…Lucy's right…Hell, Maria is right I'm being stupid. If I keep on going like this… I'll lose Lucy.

(Lights flicker.)

(BEN suddenly finds himself alone. The apartment transforms into a surreal "arena" — lights dim, a gentle stadium hum, maybe a fog machine.)

BEN
Oh no. Not again.

(A spotlight hits center stage.
The Jersey Guys enter wearing referee stripes now)

JERSEY GUY #2
Welcome to the Emotional Playoffs! Tonight's matchup: Ben's Insecurities… versus Ben Actually Trying His Best!

BEN
I hate this!

JERSEY GUY #1
You asked for character growth! This is what it looks like!

(They huddle like football players._

JERSEY GUY #2
Game plan: Ben walks up to Lucy. Ben tells truth. Ben does NOT mention jerseys, teams, mascots, or athletic metaphors.

BEN
(frantically nodding) Okay.

JERSEY GUY #1
And if you don't panic… We'll be gone.

(BEN freezes.)

BEN
Gone?

JERSEY GUY #2
We only exist because you're scared.

JERSEY GUY #1
Lose the fear, you lose us.

(A beat. BEN looks emotional.)

BEN
But… you've been with me through all of this.

JERSEY GUY #2
Yeah dude but we're LITERALLY your neuroses in mesh tops.

BEN
(pointing) You. (Pointing again) You ate my pasta.

JERSEY GUY #2
And it was mid.

BEN
Hey!

JERSEY GUY #1
Talk to her. We'll be watching from the stands. Metaphorically. In your heart's cheap seats.

(They blow a gentle whistle. Exit out front door or hallway)
(Lights shift.)

BEN
Lucy?... Can I talk to you?

(Lucy walk in and up to Ben. Ben directs her to the couch. She looks at him, guarded)

BEN
I'm sorry. Truly. Not the kind of sorry you say because things got quiet or awkward—but the kind that comes from knowing you let fear speak when it had no right to. I let my insecurities get loud. Way too loud. Louder than reason. Louder than what was right in front of me every day. Almost louder than our love. (He swallows, shaking his head slightly.) Almost. I kept replaying your past like it was a whole team lined up against me. Faces I didn't know, stories I made bigger in my head than they ever deserved to be. And I think… I think I did that because deep down, I didn't believe I could ever be the person you'd actually choose. Not fully. Not when you had so many other chapters before me.

(A weak, self-aware smile.) Turns out I was wrong. About that, at least. The jersey hallucinations? Unfortunately very real. I stand by that trauma. (Lucy softens. He notices.)

I can't change your past. And I don't want to. It's not something to erase or compete with. It's part of what shaped you—every wrong turn, every lesson, every version of you that existed

before now. It made you *you*. (He looks at her, steady and open.) And I love you. Not a cleaned-up version. Not a simplified one. All of you. The history, the growth, the strength it took to become who you are today. I don't need to be louder than your past anymore… because I finally understand something. (Soft but certain.) I'm the one you chose.

LUCY
(quiet, moved) Ben…

BEN
You chose me and I chose you. I… I choose to trust that. I choose to trust in us. Every day. I wasn't your first, second or third… but I am the last. You're my last. And that, is amazing.

(A long moment)

LUCY
Come here.

(Ben sits beside her and hold each other. The Jersey Guys appear in the kitchen door, smiling.

JERSEY GUY #1
(to #2) Well damn. He did it.

JERSEY GUY #2
I'm Proud of him. (sniff) Do we… fade now?

JERSEY GUY #1
Yeah. Slow fade. Let's make it "classy".

(They wave at Ben. He gives a tiny nod, smiles. They back into the kitchen slowly)

LUCY
So…no more hallucinations?

BEN
(Smiling looks around a little and listens) No. Just us. No jerseys. No mascots.
No full-blown internal sporting events.

LUCY
Thank goodness.

BEN
Just us.

(They settle into a snuggle on the couch. Tom bursts through the door in his bowling jersey)

TOM
Hey, the Bowl- A-Palooza just called. They have a cancelation. You two want to hit the lanes?!

(Ben shrieks and throws a pillow)

BEN
Out! Out! Just get out!

LUCY
(Yelling over Ben) Not tonight, Tom!

TOM
Dude, it's only BOWLING.

(Tom exits, Lucy laughs as Ben's breathing calms down. They settle back in)

BEN
Just us.

Blackout.

END