

BEHIND THE MAGIC 8-BALL  
an original screenplay by  
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FADE IN:

INT. TYLER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Very neat and clean, maybe TOO neat and clean. A shelf full of books. Barren walls showcase a lack of decorative care. The window stands slightly open. Outside, a JACKHAMMER is annoyingly loud.

In bed, a large lump moves beneath the covers. A little at first, but moving more and more as the person grows restless.

TYLER MATTHEWS (20s), nerdy appearance, a walking disaster, tosses down the covers. His hair is a mess. Immediately, the sound of the JACKHAMMER draws his attention to the window. He jumps out of bed and lifts the pane.

Three stories below, a city construction CREW tears up a section of street.

Tyler leans out.

TYLER

Hey!

A WORKER looks up.

TYLER

You can't be doing that before eight.  
City law!

WORKER

It's after ten, pal!

Tyler pulls back from the window, confused. He looks to his nightstand, where the digital clock is blank. He goes around the bed, his eyes freezing on what he sees on the floor.

A rat lies dead, a burnt appearance. The alarm clock's cord has been chewed in half. Tyler examines the half attached to the clock. He picks up the rat by its tail, grimacing. Flings it out the window.

O.S. A woman SCREAMS.

MAN (O.S.)

(angered)

Hey! Who's throwing rats at my wife?

Tyler shuts and locks the window. Yanks the curtains closed.

MOMENTS LATER

Tyler wears a pair of pants. He opens an empty dresser drawer. Hesitates. His eyes go to the hamper. It's running over with dirty clothes. He grabs a random button-up shirt and throws it on. A mustard stain is visible on the front. Tyler frowns at the stain, but there's nothing he can do.

INT. TYLER'S BATHROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Tyler brushes his teeth. TOM, his cat, watches from the sink top. Tyler rinses, then combs his hair, parting it straight down the middle. It only adds to his nerdy look.

Tyler grabs a spray can of deodorant from the medicine cabinet. He attempts to spray under an arm. Nothing happens. He shakes the can and tries again. Empty.

He drops the can into the trash, takes a whiff of his shirt. His face scrunches at the odor. He rummages through the cabinet, accidentally knocking various things to the sink and floor.

Tyler stoops before the lower cabinet and looks through it. Extra toilet tissue, band-aids, rubbing alcohol, and a bottle of Windex. He grabs the bottle and sprays his shirt, several squirts. A final sniff at the material satisfies Tyler. He buttons up the shirt.

O.S. A TV is suddenly heard.

BOY (O.S.) (ON TV)  
Will my dad take me to a baseball  
game this weekend?

Curious, Tyler follows the voice into the--

LIVING ROOM

Just as neat as the bedroom. A kitchenette is off to the side. A commercial for a Magic 8-Ball plays on the TV.

INSERT - TV

Two BOYS (6) sit on a couch, playing with the infamous Magic 8-Ball, a black ball with a glass window built in.

Boy #1 turns over the 8-Ball, window-side up. An octagon-shaped die floats to the top, reads, "Without a doubt."

BOY #1  
All right!

Boy #2 takes the 8-Ball. Turns it upside-down in the process.

BOY #2  
Will my mom let me get a hamster?

BACK TO SCENE:

Tyler slowly closes in on the TV, entranced by the commercial.

Tom follows him into the room and jumps on the couch. He MEOWS, but Tyler is distracted by the commercial.

On the TV, Boy #2 turns over the 8-Ball. The die floats to the top, reads, "Don't count on it."

BOY #2  
Ah, man.

The boys laugh. They continue asking questions MOS and turning over the 8-Ball for their answers as the announcer speaks.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.) (ON TV)  
Need a little guidance in your chaotic  
life? Buy a Magic 8-Ball. It can  
be the only friend you'll ever need.  
In toy stores everywhere.

The TV shuts off on its own. Tyler gazes at the blank screen.

MOMENTS LATER

Tyler opens the main door, pauses there to take a look back at Tom as he prances to his owner. Tom MEOWS.

TYLER  
Catch the rats BEFORE they eat my  
stuff, huh?

Tyler turns to leave. MRS. PETERS (40s), classic landlady persona with the robe and slippers, hair in rollers, a cigarette hanging from her mouth, stands before him. She slaps a "notice to vacate" on his chest.

MRS. PETERS  
Oh, Tyler. I didn't know you were  
home.

Tyler takes the notice and scans it.

TYLER  
You're evicting me?

MRS. PETERS

You're late on the rent, AGAIN.  
It's nothing personal.

TYLER

I'll come up with the money, Mrs.  
Peters. I had to pay for water damage  
to the restroom at work... it's a  
long story.

MRS. PETERS

You're a nice kid, Tyler but the  
rent must be paid on time every month.  
No exceptions.

TYLER

If you would just give me...

MRS. PETERS

I have to allow you ten days before  
taking legal action, but I hope you'll  
move out before then. My taxes are  
coming due and I have a renter lined  
up.

Tyler slumps at his misfortune. Mrs. Peters starts toward  
the stairs nearby. A MEOW comes from Tyler's apartment.  
Mrs. Peters whirls around, a tight-lipped look on her face.

Tyler steps into the...

HALL

... and closes his door quickly.

MRS. PETERS

Was that a cat?

Tyler is very uneasy with the question.

TYLER

A cat? Of course not. Pets aren't  
allowed in the building.

Mrs. Peters steps closer, face-to-face. Intimidating.

MRS. PETERS

I LOATHE animals. If I find anyone  
in the building with so much as a  
goldfish, they will be out on the  
street faster than you can say,  
"evicted."

Glancing back at Tyler, she moves to the steps, pauses for one last warning look at her tenant, then walks down them.

Feeling the coast is clear, Tyler starts to open his door. Tom's nose and whiskers poke through the crack. He MEOWS.

Mrs. Peters suddenly re-appears at the top of the steps. Tyler hears her and closes the door hard. Tom barely pulls his nose inside in time.

MRS. PETERS

That WAS a cat.

TYLER

No, it was... it was me. Meow.  
See? I'm practicing for a contest  
at work... a contest to see who can  
imitate an animal the best. Think I  
have a shot at winning?

Mrs. Peters remains skeptical. She gives Tyler a long, piercing glare before walking down the steps.

Tyler leans back against the wall and sighs.

EXT. TYLER'S APARTMENT BUILDING - PARKING LOT - DAY

Tyler walks through aisles of cars. He heads straight for a sweet little sports car that is completely out of character for him.

Last moment, he changes course for the vacant bike rack hidden on the other side. A cut chain dangles from the rail.

Tyler's pace slows. He grabs the chain, lock still intact. In a moment of anger, he flings the chain with all his might, back toward the cars.

O.S. A CRASH as the chain breaks a window. A car alarm WAILS.

Worried, Tyler scrunches low as he trots out of the lot.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Tyler approaches a bus stop bench, where two PASSENGERS wait. The bus pulls up to the curb. Doors open. The two passengers board.

Tyler reaches into his pockets, feels around, pulls them inside out. All he finds is a small ball of fuzz. The BUS DRIVER grows impatient.