

An Excerpt From:

ALL DOGS MUST HEEL
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CLARE
I'll get it. I'll do it.

She exits down the hall. Dag looks at
Billy who still has his head down.

DAG
Billy, you can help me fix the fence.

BOBBIE
Billy?

BILLY
I'm here.

She touches his hands.

BOBBIE
I know. I knew it all the time. You breathe! So heavy!

DAG
Billy just needs to help me. For a minute.

He grabs the wood board.

DAG
Billy?

Billy lets go of her hand and stands.
Dag puts his hands over Billy's
shoulder and heads him to the backyard.
They exit. Moments. Clare enters.
Dejected, lost in thought. After
awhile she looks up and sees that Billy
and Dag are gone.

Clare?

BOBBIE

Clare doesn't answer. Now she's on tiptoes. She puts the rose and vase back on the table but careful not to make a sound.

Clare.

BOBBIE

Clare almost drops it. It hits the table with a sharp thud.

Yes.

CLARE

Who was at the door.

BOBBIE

Nobody. Kids, probably. Ding dong ditch.

CLARE

No one was there.

BOBBIE

Clare is at the window.

That's what I said.

CLARE

I thought it was your parents.

BOBBIE

It wasn't them.

CLARE

Your parents should be here.

BOBBIE

They're always late. They think they're on time.

CLARE

We'll have to tell them a half hour early for the party we're planning.

BOBBIE

A pause.

BOBBIE

Billy wanted you as maid of honor but we couldn't wait. Just went to the judge on Monday after a beautiful weekend camping in the Dells. My girls don't even know.

Clare snorts.

BOBBIE

So we should know each other. I'd like you over for dinner next week.

A pause.

BOBBIE

Are you waiting for something?

CLARE

I'm not.

BOBBIE

You're at the window.

CLARE

Don't you stay blind or does it come and go.

BOBBIE

Well I'm wrong then.

CLARE

Yeah. You don't know everything. You don't. We don't even know you. We're protective of Billy.

BOBBIE

From what?

CLARE

From girls.

BOBBIE

Girls? He's almost forty isn't he?

CLARE

Yeah. But you don't get it. He's my brother. You go through me.

BOBBIE

What?

CLARE
I-Know. I know what he likes. And who he's gotta stay away from.

BOBBIE
 Decent women.

CLARE
 What did you say?

BOBBIE
 Not the bar whores? Or so ugly and grotesque you're looking for their rat tails poking out the skirt? Billy's told me. Of the whole parade of them.

CLARE
 He's not George Clooney, okay? Obviously!

BOBBIE
 Are his looks that important?

CLARE
 In the seeing world, *yes*.

BOBBIE
 All these women will never see him more than once.

CLARE
 I don't know that.

BOBBIE
 Clare.

CLARE
 Yeah.

BOBBIE
 You should be happy your work's over.

A pause.

BOBBIE
 Aren't you happy.

A car horn. It sounds like a ghost. Clare rushes to the window. She doesn't see anything and withdraws. A pause.

CLARE
 Your sex must be wild. With all that addiction.

BOBBIE

What does Billy tell you?

CLARE

You're lousy. Like you can't see *anything*. Men like that for so long. And my brother knows what he likes.

BOBBIE

I thought that was your job.

CLARE

His life's right here. In this house.

BOBBIE

That's not what he told me.

CLARE

Did you see what he did to himself? If you did, you'd know about Billy. You don't fuck around with what people have. He's an emotional orphan who's only understood by someone who was there. We've never been apart one day since we were teenagers.

BOBBIE

Is that why you hate him?

CLARE

Hate him?

BOBBIE

You treat him the way someone treats someone they deeply hate.

CLARE

How do you treat him?

BOBBIE

I love him.

CLARE

(snorts)

Love?? Love?? We're not sophisticated enough for love around here!! Gimps and babies and newlyweds make people like you think everyone's got it coming. Like it's a right. You should know better.

The doorbell "rings." The dog barks.

CLARE

Shame on you. Use that word around here. Think it gives you some sort of grace.

The glass doors open. Dag and Billy enter. Dag quickly surveys the situation. The doorbell "rings." The dog barks. He stops at the basement door but decides against it. He exits down the hallway to answer the door. Billy stands, looking like he'd like to disappear. The dog barks.

CLARE

(re: herself and Billy)

We found a way to live without delusions! We've been through this already! Once before! And we found something better that's more respectful and isn't going to lead us down the same rose torn path just to bleed. Have you looked at him lately?

A car horn. In the distance. Sounding like a ghost like from the play's beginning. It calls softly out. Clare goes to the window. She can't see out. She rubs the "glass." She peers through. Dag enters. The dog still barks.

DAG

Clare.

She doesn't answer. The dog barks.

DAG

Clare.

Clare can't see anything, dejected. The dog barks.

DAG

Clare.

She doesn't answer. She is lost. The dog barks.

DAG

Clare, the dog. *Please.*

Clare turns and walks slowly to the basement door. She opens it.

MUFF FOR CHRISSAKES!
CLARE

All is silent. She slams the door shut. A beat. Dag reaches for the grape juice and pours himself a tall glass. He drinks.

DAG
I love grape juice.

BOBBIE
Aren't the fireworks about to start?

DAG
Any time, Bob. Any time I bet.

CLARE
Who's at the door.

DAG
No one.

BOBBIE
Ding dong ditch?

DAG
Guess so. It's a classic.

BOBBIE
I can't imagine my girls playing that game. I raised them on Kick the Can.

DAG
Do you want to find them Bob?

Clare rolls her eyes.

DAG
They're around the house somewhere. Billy and I saw their tracks.

BOBBIE
In the dog shit?

A pause.

DAG
It's mud. It rained this morning.

BOBBIE

I don't remember rain.

DAG

It rained here. A sudden, very short, unexpected, zippy rain. But powerful.

BOBBIE

I guess. I'll go. My girls hate the dark. Billy?

Billy is looking like he'd like to shrink into himself. He looks at Clare. She glares at him.

BOBBIE

Billy.

DAG

He's in the bathroom, Bob. He'll come out.

Bobbie stands. She looks in his direction.

BOBBIE

I hope so.

She and Dag exit. A beat. Billy and Clare stare at each other.

CLARE

Sit!

Billy hesitates.

CLARE

Sit!

Billy sits on the couch. He hangs his head.

CLARE

You owe me. Oh, how you owe me again. This was supposed to be the day, the day Billy! We love to see mom and dad stutter over their words, then pass out the guilt money and stumble home like two forlorn fools! Fourth of July!

BILLY

I know. I'm ready.

CLARE

With her? Tell me you're not married. She's delusional.

BILLY

She has ideas.

CLARE

I knew it. I knew not to flip 'cause you're not wearing a ring. Then I thought, "maybe he *did* marry this bitch but couldn't afford a ring so he just *told* her he's wearing one because--you know--you won't get caught. But that's not it, is it.

BILLY

No.

CLARE

(smiling)

You're not dumb. I should give you a beer for that.

BILLY

Really?

CLARE

Really. You never want to marry a keeper. Mom did and she fucking blew it. I found letters she wrote--in Russian--to language schools. She had dreams of being a diplomat, if you can believe that. She just met daddy, saw herself in him and found an excuse not to go. Shit.

She puts her head in her hands. A pause. Billy puts his hands over her's. They are large, engulfing her own. She stops crying, lifts her head and examines his horribly scarred hands.

CLARE

See what happens? By one bad decision.

BILLY

I don't even remember deciding...

CLARE

I'm not talking about you! You were fucked up! You always had an excuse.

Billy stands.

BILLY

What you got's better than grape juice?

CLARE

Oh, I forgot my "kid gloves." Well, I'm entitled to speak my mind to my own brother. I earned that, buddy.

BILLY

Do you think Bobbie's okay?

CLARE

Do you care? My son smeared her in shit, I spooked her to death and you sunk into the walls.

Billy beelines it to the kitchen.

BILLY

I didn't know! I didn't know what to do!

CLARE

Oh, I heard that before. It's okay Billy, you forever earned it.

Billy slams through cabinets.

CLARE

You're like a cop who takes a bullet--a lifetime of free lunches while the rest of us pay.

Billy slams through the cabinets.

BILLY

Don't say that!

CLARE

We just got Fresca. No Coors.

BILLY

I'm not looking for that!

CLARE

We found the cans in the shed. Least you can find classier stuff.

BILLY

That's not true!

CLARE

Everything's a memory.

BILLY
No.

CLARE
Everything's a fog.

BILLY
No.

CLARE
Everything's history everyone else has gotta live.

BILLY
No! No! No!

Billy backs away and cries. He hits the cabinets.

BILLY
I live it, Clare! I live it!

Clare stands. She holds his hands.

CLARE
You like it warm?

He nods.

CLARE
Above your head. We still got two cans from Christmas.

She walks away and sits back down. Billy finds the beer. He cracks one open and kills it in one gulp. He cracks the second open and kills it in one gulp. A pause. He is out of breath.

CLARE
I was young. Young enough to know when people said your retard brother torched himself behind a currency exchange, what *that* means. I mean, I wasn't fuckin' stupid, Charley. I got all the time, all-the-time, mom's shriek in my head when she answered that phone. Shot out my nerves forever. We shout instead of talk around here if you noticed. I was told you lit up like one big flare.

A pause.

CLARE

I couldn't believe what that was until I saw you all bandaged up with no face and I knew that scary thing could not be big brother but yes you were, mommy said and at that moment I got so pathetically *old*. Once a little girl excited by the school picnic. Now, horrors.

In the distance, a baby cries. The lights shift. Billy fades away. Clare hears the baby in the distance. Growing louder. She looks around for the baby. She moves faster, thrashing through the toys and furniture as the baby's cries grow louder and louder. Then, she finds Jamie's doll. She gently picks it up. She whispers to it. She holds and rocks it. The baby quiets. Clare smiles. She and the baby are in perfect harmony. Moments. The baby cries again. Clare tries to do what she did before and this time, nothing works. She grows more frantic, holding it away from her. Then, she flips up a cushion from the couch. She gently puts the baby down. Then, she gently puts the cushion back on the couch, pressing down, as if giving it a burial. The baby's cries fade away.

Clare moves backwards from the couch, step by step. The lights slowly shift back.

CLARE

I did have a thought in that hard rain, Billy. That all people are cursed. That no matter how free our friends and neighbors waiting outside for the fireworks think they are, that they are not free. That one day the rain will find where they live. But Billy, there are chumps that the rain got from the start. That were born in water, like everyone is, but the water they were born in--I swear, Billy--the water they were born in was cloudy. And soiled. And is the type of water that was never purified because it got used again and again over generations past who didn't know how to clean it. So their children got stuck being born time and again in the same used dreck. Babies forming in a stew of filth. These people, Billy. These people don't stand a chance the first day they're born. At their birth, their arms might as well be snapped in two like branches.

She stands frozen. Billy walks to her. He hugs her awkwardly. She feels his arms.

CLARE

What you did to yourself then...was poetry.

A car horn in the distance. Billy holds her. She looks in the direction of the window. The car horn. It sounds like a ghost.

Billy won't let her go. She looks at the window. The car horn. Finally, she tears away and goes to the window, searching. Dag enters from the hallway. He moves slow, holding a piece of paper. He sees beer cans. He looks at Billy. He walks over and smells his breath. He looks at Clare, who is searching out the window.

DAG

There's no one there.

CLARE

I heard something.

DAG

It must have been a ghost. I came from outside. There's no one there.

Clare turns from the window.

CLARE

I was looking for the kids.

DAG

Oh.

He sits. He stands. He arranges his magazines neatly. He sits. Moments.

DAG

They aren't there, either.

BILLY

Is Bobbie outside, Dag?

DAG

Oh, Billy. We split up. She stayed by the fence so the kids could know which one's ours.

CLARE

In case they forgot.

Dag nods. A pause.