

The Bad Dog

The yellow Labrador retriever paced, stopping every so often to look out the front window of the old farm house. He could feel the buildup of urine in his bladder, painful now, each step being felt as the liquid inside him swirled about, making the need to pee all the more urgent.

He turned from the window and whined, a sound heard only by him. It was a whine of equal parts discomfort and fear—the fear being from what would happen if he were to urinate inside the house. If he were to do so on a rug, or on the wooden floor of the front room, or on the tile floor of the kitchen, the dog would be beaten again. There was no place, other than outside, that was satisfactory to his owner; they were all bad.

"You fucking dog!" Billy would yell. The dog named Blue had no idea what the words meant, only that the tone and volume meant that Blue was in trouble. At those times, the look in his owner's eyes would instill Blue with terror, as if Billy would end the dog's life at that moment in whatever painful way he could muster. And those eyes were even more frightening if Billy had a bottle with him when he came home, which was often the case. He'd come through the door yelling and staggering. Blue would be beaten if he tripped

on one of Blue's toy bones, or if he simply got too close to his drunk owner. Worse was the time when Billy stepped into a spot where the canine had urinated. Blue remembered being beaten so badly that blood oozed out of his mouth and nostrils. He hadn't been able to walk quite the same after that. The dog didn't want a beating like that to happen again; he *had* to avoid making Billy mad.

The dog spun around, panting rapidly, while little drops of saliva fell from his tongue. The Lab felt hot, burning with fear of not being able to hold it any longer and the fear of what would happen if he didn't.

The wrath would be terrible. There would be yelling, kicking, things thrown at him. Blood might come out of his mouth again. Whatever temptation Blue might have to fight back was quickly squashed. Billy was in charge, and the dog was at his mercy. Billy was his source of food and water. He was the person who let him in and out of the house when needed—provided Billy wasn't passed out from the liquid in those bottles. The dog now worried if he peed on the floor again it would be one too many times. What if Billy *never* let him back in or *never* fed him? The canine had dreams of such things. They would seem so real and frightening that the dog would wake up, not entirely sure if what he had just witnessed was real or not. But they were vivid and terrifying enough to convince Blue that he had to obey Billy despite the violence. He had to try to be the best dog he could be. He had to be a *good dog*. Those were the words Blue recalled a young Billy saying when the dog did right.

Blue went to the kitchen and put his snout to his food dish. It was still

empty, just as it had been the previous four times he had checked since Billy left. He was hungry but he could deal with that. Once outside, there was always food to be found somewhere: bugs, a slow rabbit, or leftover meat in the garbage cans out back. His hunger, though painful, was nothing that couldn't wait. And it was nothing compared to the beating he would be subjected to if his owner found Blue peed on the floor again.

The Lab went back to the window to look outside. Still no vehicle. The dog whined again, knowing there wasn't much time left. Pacing wasn't helping anymore. The fluid was going to have to come out very soon.

The dog went upstairs, struggling with each step due to the pain in his back leg. Once at the top, he turned right toward the back rooms, whimpering in fear as he went through the darkened hallway. His legs were shaking in terror now, aware of the inevitable wrath that would come for this decision. But there were no options..

To his right, the door to one of the bedrooms was open. The dog walked inside, the first time he had been in this room in a long time. This had been the room where the older couple once slept, the two people who brought him to this house when he was a puppy; a gift for a little boy named Billy. Although the older couple had been gone for several years, the dog could still smell faint traces of their scent on the dresser and the bed, though they didn't always smell like this. The older man would occasionally smell like saw dust or motor oil or the hay that he had bundled earlier in the day. The woman might on one day smell like laundry soap, or baked goods or on another day, like hair dye.

Then one day, the woman wasn't there anymore. The longer time went on and she didn't show up, the more Blue became upset and confused.

"The Mrs. went and died on us," the man told the dog, petting him as the dog leaned on the sofa chair that the man sat on more and more in the woman's absence. "And I miss her so," he would say, more to himself than anything. Not long after that, the man was gone too and Blue imagined that he had left to go find the woman. Blue believed one day they would both return and things would go back to the way they were.

That day never came.

The farm was a pleasant place back when they were here. If he were an exceptionally well-behaved dog or when there was a strong storm outside - one with the loud explosions of thunder that scared him so - the couple would let the dog jump up on the bed to sleep with them. They were never cruel, never kicked him, never let him go all day without going outside to relieve himself. They would pet him, walk him, and teach him tricks. It was the way Billy *used* to be, long before he became attached to the liquid inside those bottles and cans.

On the table next to the bed there was a picture of the young Billy. The boy was smiling in it, the way Blue remembered him. Blue didn't remember the man and woman bringing him home as a puppy for Billy. But he remembered that he and the boy were inseparable in their early lives. They would go out on hikes, down the path that led into the woods behind the farm. It was a path filled with adventure and wonderful smells that never ceased to amaze the young dog. They'd find anthills, rabbit holes, deer

droppings, and the scents of squirrels and chipmunks. Blue would chase after birds, coming so very close but never catching one. Farther down the path they would come to a small brook where sometimes they'd find frogs, or spot small fish in the water.

At other times he and Billy would go to the front of the farm, although that was discouraged by the man and woman. Something about the road was bad. The older couple would shout, "Stay away from the road!" whenever the boy and the dog got too close to it. The dog didn't understand the words, but understood the tone. But Blue didn't like the road anyway. It was often loud there, at times sounding like thunder when a vehicle would race past. But sometimes he and the boy couldn't resist the mystery and adventure that was there, and he and the dog would search the tall grasses at the side of the road. One time, on culvert next to the road, they found a mangled mess of an animal. Blue could smell the rotting meat of it from far away and wanted to get closer, but Billy pulled him away. "It's dead, Blue. It's dead."

The smell of death was always around the road. They would find things such as flattened frogs or the remnants of birds squashed thin on the pavement. Other times there would be a half-crushed squirrel or a lifeless raccoon. Clearly, there was some great danger involved with the road, but the dog didn't know why, didn't quite understand the connection between the vehicles and the danger of being on the pavement.

One day, in the front yard while Billy was driving Blue silly with a boomerang, they spotted some movement far down the highway.

"Let's go see," the child said to Blue on that autumn day.

When they approached they found a dog, still alive at the edge of the pavement. Because so many odors were obscured by the smell of fresh blood, it took Blue a moment recognize the injured dog's scent. It was the Carlton's dog that would sneak away from his own home and would come around the farm every so often; inquisitive to explore new territory, anxious to sniff Blues' body parts or to beg for handouts. Billy and the older couple used to call the dog by the name of "Rex." When Billy and Blue found Rex on the side of the road he was desperately trying to use his front paws to crawl away. The bottom half of Rex was a mangled mess of meat and blood, one body part indistinguishable from the next. The dog was making pathetic attempts to get off the road, trying to get to the crushed gravel at the side, a glassy look of terror and agony in the golden retriever's eyes. Its efforts were futile; what little movement it managed kept the dog in a small circle. Billy started sob.

"Oh no, Rex! You've been hit by a car!"

Billy pulled Blue away. Blue didn't understand this. He wanted to get closer, smell Rex more.

"Come on, Blue. We have to get my dad!"

They both took off running to the house and brought Billy's father to the scene, where Rex was still trying to claw his way to the side of the road. A couple of approaching cars occasionally would slow down then continue on their way once the driver realized the horror. Blue studied the face of Billy's father, trying to read his expression—all the dog could tell was that things were grim.

“Billy, I want you to go back in the house. And take Blue with you. Don’t come out until I say so, understand?”

“Why? What are you going to do?”

“Just do as I say,” his father said a bit louder. Blue knew that louder words usually meant anger or a command of some sort.

“Come on, Blue,” Billy said to the dog. Blue followed behind him, head low, wondering if he had done something wrong. The boy and his dog returned to the house and went up to Billy’s room.

Billy threw himself on the bed, face staring at the ceiling. Blue jumped up to comfort him, still wondering why they weren’t with Rex right now. Moments later, they both heard the front door downstairs open, followed by rustling noise in one of the closets. Blue lifted his head off Billy’s calve to listen more carefully. When they heard Billy’s father go back out the door, Billy jumped up to look out the window.

“Oh, no! Not that! Not the gun!”

The Lab leapt off the bed and joined the boy at the window, the sill low enough that Blue could look out as well. Billy’s father was carrying a rifle; an object Blue recognized as the thing that would make a noise and bring down ducks from the sky. Blue didn’t like the noise it made, but liked that it caused prey to fall from the sky. He watched him carry the rifle toward the road, not comprehending what was about to happen, wondering why he was now pointing the end at Rex. He heard the boy at his side gasp.

Billy had his hands at his ears, closing his eyes, turning away from the window.

“NO!” Billy screamed.

Pow!

Billy ran and collapsed back on his bed, sobbing. Blue went to try to comfort him but the boy pushed him away, for a reason Blue couldn't understand. Was this his fault? Had he been a '*bad dog*'? Did Billy think Blue hurt Rex? Was this why Billy treated him so poorly now?

The dog was relieving himself when he heard the door of the pickup slam close.

Billy was home.

The dog's muscles shook in terror as he tried to stop the stream of urine, but fear made him pee even more. He knew he had to stop and get out of this room or he would be caught in the act. He ran out of the room, several drops of urine leaving a wet trail of evidence behind him. He was in the hallway when he heard the door to the house open. Trotting down the hallway, Blue wagged his tail in a hope that acting the part of a happy dog might somehow pacify his owner, distract him, or make him think how cute and adorable Blue is.

It didn't work.

Billy had come up the stairs and was staring at him from the other side of the hall. He had that look; that terrifying gaze in his eyes.

“Where the fuck were you?” he asked the dog. Blue didn't understand the meaning of the words, only the meaning of the tone: *You're a bad dog*.

The canine continued his slow approach, head down, tail wagging. He hoped that the good Billy would resurface. Maybe he'd remember the fun

they used to have: the walks, the chases—

Smack!

The dog didn't see the foot coming. The kick was hard, swift, and straight to the bottom of his gut. The dog yelped, and for a moment was unable to catch his breath. Little stars streamed across his field of vision. There was another kick. Billy came at him again, but this time Blue scampered out of the way, and Billy's foot connected with the wall at an angle, sending him his own dose of pain.

"You bastard dog!" he yelled.

While Billy rubbed his calve, Blue took off, skirting around him. Billy tried to grab on to the dog but was too drunk.

"Come back you fucking dog!"

Blue turned and raced down the stairs, feeling pain in his back legs with each step, but fearing what would happen if he were too slow. Once at the bottom, the dog had no plan other than to run around the house away from his pursuer, who was now coming down the steps. Panicked and confused, the dog went next to the front door and waited, hoping for mercy from his owner, or that he had forgotten his anger.

Billy stormed down the stairs, stopping halfway.

"So you want to go out, do you? Let me help you with that."

Blue noticed his tone had shifted. Was he no longer mad? Blue wagged his tail.

Billy came down the stairs, stepped around the dog and pulled the door open

"There you go, little buddy," he said. He was even smiling.

The dog wagged his tail more rapidly now, feeling a sense of relief. He was going to be outside. He was going to be okay.

Blue took his steps toward the outside world

Smash!

Instantly, he felt the crushing pain in both flanks at the front of his hips.

The door was crushing him halfway. Billy continued to push hard against it.

Blue let out a high pitched scream, louder than he had ever cried out before. Blue was unable to breath, the pain overwhelming.

"You little shit! Peeing on my floor! I ought to crush the hell out of you!"

Blue thought the agony might last forever but then the door opened and Blue fell forward. He staggered from the kick of his owner's foot, sending him tumbling down the three wooden steps, landing on the ground at the bottom.

"And don't come back till you can hold your goddamn piss!"

The door slammed, and Blue jolted at the sound. It was loud, like a gunshot.

Blue dropped his head to the ground, delirious and in agony. It would take several minutes before he began to appreciate the cool fresh air. It was torture in the house but he had survived and at least he was now outside.

This was *his* world. He struggled to get to his feet, feeling pain at each

movement, but pushing through it, smart enough to know he had to get away from the house soon, knowing that Billy could change his mind at any moment and come out and beat the dog some more.

Blue took a couple of steps forward, feeling new damage to his legs, but pushing through the pain, conscious of his growing hunger. With Billy being so angry, there was no telling when, or even *if*, he would be fed again. The Lab walked around the house to the side of the garage where Billy sometimes left black garbage bags on top of the cans. Often, there would be old food inside these: an old donut or a half eaten burger. At times, Blue would rip into these bags when he felt hungry enough, and he rarely got in trouble, Billy thinking it was the work of wild animals.

But today he wasn't so fortunate. If there were any bags, they were secured safely in the cans under the lids. He would have to find food elsewhere. He looked towards the woods at the far end of the property, often a haven for small animals. Occasionally he'd even find discarded sandwiches or other food that a hiker lost or discarded. Blue lifted his head and took a sniff in that direction, the light breeze suggesting a host of possibilities.

He started off along the path that separated a section of dormant farmland from the acreage of dead corn stalks. During the trek, he stopped to give his sore hips a moment of rest. While doing so, a memory of walking along this same path with a young Billy entered his mind. The images were vague, blurred by time, but he could still recall the youngster talking to Blue while they walked, speaking to him as if the dog could somehow understand every word. At times, Blue would act as if he actually *did* understand, by

wagging his tail, or by running on the trail a little faster, or stopping when he got too far ahead.

In those days he and the boy were like one. But when Billy became older and started drinking from the bottles, everything changed. When Billy had the smell of those liquids on him he would act strange. He would yell, fall down, become mean, and throw things. He would fall asleep and forget to let the dog in or out or to feed him. The dog thought that if only that smell would go away, the Billy he remembered would come back. Maybe Billy would take him for walks again, or toss him balls, or chase him in the field.

He did none of those things anymore.

As he approached the edge of the woods Blue saw a stick lying on the side of the path. When Billy was a child, he was always tossing sticks for Blue to chase. Every time he saw one the boy would pick it up and say, "Fetch it, Blue!"

This one would have been no exception. The Lab went and put his snout to the stick to see what odors it might offer, hoping he might pick up the scent of a younger Billy's hand on it. When he was younger, Billy's had often possessed the smell of a certain kind of soap, and other times of peanut butter that he always ate, or the toy rifle he would play with. But this stick smelled like of none of those things. The only noticeable smell was that of a bird that had once used it momentarily as a perch.

Disappointed, the dog entered the edge of the woods and moments later thought he saw a bit of movement within the brush. He crept carefully in a dark area of the woods, picturing the prey he might capture: a squirrel,

a raccoon, or maybe even something larger, something that would earn him the praise of Billy. He took a sniff again and analyzed smells: leaves, foliage, bugs, deer droppings.

It took off running. Blue leapt after it, suspecting it was either a rabbit or a squirrel, but excited just as much at the mystery of what it might be. Whatever it was, the dog expected Billy would praise him for it.

Such praise was in the back of his mind as he moved farther from the path, deeper into unknown territory, to a place in these woods he had never been before. New smells grabbed his attention, unlike he had ever experienced before, to such an extent that Blue became suddenly cautious.

Something was wrong here.

He stopped running, finding himself almost on the edge of fear. Almost instinctively he sensed something bad had once happened in this spot. He could smell the *death*, the once rotting flesh, the meat that had eventually become a rotting liquid, the worms and insects that eventually fed on the decomposing corpse.

In a way, these odors in this area were similar to smells of blood and death that he occasionally picked up near the roadway by the house. And yet there was something about the smells here that drew him closer; something exotic and alluring, almost playing on his instincts to investigate further.

He followed the aroma, entering into an area of mushrooms sprouting from the ground, their caps dotted with dark spots and wavy lines. He smelled those only briefly, not finding them particularly enticing (he had eaten one once and coughed up his stomach contents). Instead, he found

himself drawn to the edge of a tree, where some sort of greenish ooze pooled on the ground. The gel-like substance expanded and collapsed from fermentation, looking to Blue as if the ooze was almost *breathing*.

He approached the substance cautiously. He couldn't tell which smell was stronger; the smell of death that had once occurred here or the cocktail of rich sweetness that was fermenting in the tragedy's spot. The dog moved closer to the ooze, a light shade of yellow to him, but a florescent green to the human eye. He sampled it with his tongue, too hungry and in awe at this point not to.

The taste was unusual: similar to the meat in the cans of dog food he would sometimes get, but with a bolder, sweet taste. As he lapped at it, he noticed he began to feel different. In fact, he was beginning to feel wonderful. Though he didn't quite realize it, all the pain his hips, legs, and gut had faded away. He ate till nourished and walked away from the ooze, turning his attention back to the animal he was searching for, not realizing his limp was gone, that his gate was back to normal, like when he was once again a young energetic dog.

He returned to his mission of tracking the scent of the animal. It led him to the trunk of another tree. He took a careful sniff of its bark.

A squirrel was here recently.

But he was able to tell more than just that. Everything was suddenly clear and intense to Blue; as if his senses were stronger than ever. He simply *knew* where the squirrel was - even without the scent.

The squirrel jumped off a branch and took off running as if it sensed

this epiphany in the dog. Blue immediately chased after it, through twists and turns, up and over fallen trees, until both of them eventually end up back to the path. Blue was twenty feet behind it when suddenly the squirrel stopped, as if suddenly frozen in fear, but Blue feeling as if he had stopped the animal with just his will.

Blue ran full speed, expecting the animal to take off running again at any moment.

It didn't.

The dog was about to catch it with ease, a prey frozen in time, and for a brief moment the dog was disappointed that the chase had ended so abruptly. At that same moment, the very instant that he wished the chase had gone on longer, the squirrel took off again, disappearing into the long grasses along the path. Blue picked up speed, but it was too late. Blue followed the scent up a tree where the squirrel had reached safety. Blue moaned. Part of him felt as if he had let him get away merely by wishing it so.

The Labrador stood at the base of the tree for awhile, barking and scratching at the trunk, but ultimately becoming bored with the hunt. Besides, his attention was distracted by the ooze again. He wanted some more of that wonderful taste. And because he wasn't sure when he might get to eat again, he went back and consumed more of the fermenting gel.

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It was late afternoon when the dog began to head back to the house, hoping Billy had forgotten about how bad Blue had been. Enough time had

passed that even Blue himself had forgotten what he did that was so bad. But he also didn't care. Something was different now. He felt rejuvenated though not sure why, unaware of the connection between the ooze and his increased metabolism and new attitude. All the canine knew was that he felt new joy, happy to be alive, his tail almost unable to stop wagging. He felt young again, powerful, and pain free.

As he walked along the path he saw the same stick he had passed earlier, the one that had brought memories to his mind of Billy throwing him sticks. Now, in his mind, he pictured the stick flying through the air, across the grass, like that black bird that flying to the right of him.

Blue stopped. It wasn't a bird. It was a stick.

He looked behind him. There was no one around.

Something wasn't right.

The Lab looked back to the stick, carefully studying its scent from a safe distance. He was sure it was the same stick, the one he had just passed a moment ago. There were no new scents on it and no one was around that might have thrown it. And it matched the soaring image of a stick flying in the air that he had viewed in his mind.

The dog felt a shudder of fear flow through him. He didn't understand any of this.

He backed away from the stick, terrified it might move. Was it alive? He summoned the courage to inch closer. He smelled it again, just to be sure. It smelled normal, just as it had earlier. No one had touched it. No one had thrown it. Had this really happened, he wondered? Had *he* caused it to move

just by *wishing* it so?

It occurred to the dog to find out. He stepped back, circled around a couple times, then repeated the vision in his mind, this time concentrating on the word young Billy used to say when the boy would throw Blue a stick.

Fetch!

The black stick stood upright a moment, lifted in the air, then sailed thirty feet in the direction that Blue had willed it, the same way he had pictured it in his mind. The dog wagged his tail in delight, howled as if to talk at it. Blue looked around, searching for approval from someone or something, but there was no one to witness this. He turned back to the stick

Fetch!

Again it sailed through the air, this time in another direction. Next, he made it suspend in air motionless.

He spun it horizontally.

Then vertically.

The dog ran in circles, howled to the sky. *He* was doing this – just by his thoughts!

He could get things to move merely by *wanting* them to do so.

Blue raced back towards the house, actually running this time, his ailments healed by the power of his thoughts. He felt like a new, vibrant dog, almost human; able to do all the things he had ever wanted to do. His new-found energy had created an urge for a snack. He went to the front of the house, about to bark to be let in when an alternative came to his mind.

The garbage cans!

He raced around the side of the house, over to the side of the garage where the garbage cans were kept. Blue stood ten feet away and with just his mind made one of the cans fall over to its side, the lid falling away. Next, he mentally removed the twist tie and pulled items out of the bag one after another: lunch meat wrappers, empty potato chip bags, empty beer cans. Then the prize: some chicken bones that still had some meat on them. Blue raced over to it and began pulling apart the meat and bones. He was happier than he had been in a long time. He ate till he was satisfied then realized how thirsty he was. He went to the front of the door where Billy usually let him in. He barked twice. No response. Then two more barks.

The dog whined thinking he was stuck outside until he remembered his new skill. He wagged his tail and pictured the door opening.

Rip!

It opened, but with tremendous inertia and power, causing the door to rip off its hinges sending it flying twenty feet into the air. Blue leapt to his right to avoid being hit by the large aluminum door.

The dog didn't think about the consequences. Instead, he relished his new ability, anxious to have a drink of water and to show Billy his new talent. Maybe finally Billy would like him again now that he could do such things. Now Billy would be proud.

He rushed to the kitchen but found his aluminum water bowl empty. That didn't matter; he could take care of such things himself now. The dog wouldn't have to bother Billy anymore. Far too often he'd get yelled at or beaten by Billy if he bothered him about such things.

Anxious to please him, Blue telepathically picked up the silver dish and moved it up and over to the kitchen sink and mentally turned on the water. When the dish was full, he concentrated on moving it to its original spot on the floor. As the dish moved through the air, water sloshed from side to side, some of it spilling onto the floor, but the majority made it. Next it was time to fill his other dish with dry food. He used his thoughts to open the cabinet and visualized pulling out the bag of *Dog Chow*, but in doing so the bag fell over sideways, knocking over cans and spraying bits of kibble all over the kitchen. The cans went bouncing off the counter and on to the floor. Another can landed in the sink, shattering a drinking glass. The cacophony of sound was like an avalanche of drums and cymbals.

“What the fuck is going on?” Billy yelled from upstairs. Blue could hear the marching footsteps. The Lab panicked, not knowing which item to clean up first. He tried to concentrate but Billy soon entered the room. When he saw the mess his eyes became filled with fury, the muscles in his face clenched with rage. The dog hung his head low, terrified of that look.

“Did you make this mess? Come here you little brat!”

When the dog didn't do as told, Billy took a step forward then stopped abruptly. He lifted his foot to look at his wet sock.

“Oh, you are so fucking dead!”

Billy came after the dog. Blue took off around him and ran into the front room. He considered racing up the stairs but Billy had already stepped around there to block his way. Billy then grabbed a bottle of vodka from a nearby snack table, taking steps toward the canine, lifting the bottle in the

air and ready to strike with it.

"You're going to pay for this."

Blue pictured the bottle shattering. At the instant he did so, the bottle did just that, exploding in Billy's hand, sending glass shards and vodka spraying through the room and onto Billy's clothes. Some of the finer particulates of glass embedded into Billy's cheek and on his arm, but he was too drunk and perplexed by what happened to notice. He stared at his empty palm and the mess around him.

"What the--?"

The dog now felt empowered to destroy the remaining bottles on the snack table. First he popped off the cap on a bottle of vermouth then knocked it over. A half-empty bottle of scotch erupted, its contents soaring to the ceiling. A container of Bloody Mary tomato juice smashed against the wall, oozing down like blood.

Billy stared dumbstruck. He turned to the dog.=

"You're a goddamn demon!"

The dog lowered his head. He wanted the drinking of those fluids to stop. He wanted the *young* Billy back. He believed he was doing a good thing, thought he was helping.

"You did this, didn't you?"

He didn't understand the words. He wanted Billy to smile, to hug him like he used to.

"You have the fucking devil inside of you, don't you? You need a goddamn exorcism!"

Billy was suddenly smiling. Blue began to wag his tail, thinking his owner's smile was sincere. Maybe because Billy was smiling everything was going to be all right. Maybe everything would be like it used to—

Smack!

Blue hardly saw the kick coming. Instead he felt Billy's boot smash into his face, heard the crack of his own neck as the rest of his body slammed against the couch. He bounced back and landed hard on the floor. It was a moment before Blue realized that he was unable to move his legs or his head.

Now Billy's smile was even wider.

"That will teach you. I'll show you who's the boss, you bad dog."

His owner picked up a broken shard of a bottle, eyeing the sharp edge of the glass.

"I'm going to slice you open: bleed the devil right out of you."

Blue didn't know what Billy meant but could tell it was something bad. The Lab tried to move but couldn't. But he could use his mind. He made the glass shard that Billy was holding grow hot, so hot that Billy had to let go, yelling in pain at the burning sensation on his hand. As he did so, Blue concentrated on his own inability to move. Picturing himself getting up, he could hear the bones inside him seal together, the nerve fibers reassemble. After a few moments, he was able to move his head, his paws, and then his legs. After a few moments, he was able to rise again.

Billy was still looking at his hand and fingers, turning pale from the burn. He studied the dog then began to move closer to him.

“I’m going to make you pay for this.”

Billy took one step backward, as if ready to kick the dog harder than ever. But Blue was having none of it; he had enough of being abused.

As Billy’s leg began its upward trajectory, Blue moved out of the way. The dog then pictured Billy’s leg becoming a projectile, like a stick being tossed. As he did so, his owner’s leg went up one hundred and eighty degrees, pulling out of Billy’s hip socket, the muscles tearing away, pant leg and all, into the air and across the room. Blood sprayed out of the small stump that was left, mixing with the spilled vermouth, scotch, and beer on the floor.

Billy screamed out in agony, sobbing between cries of pain. Blue watched him wobble and fall over. Billy then grabbed hold of the stump below his hip, trying to slow the blood loss. He took off his belt and used it to create a tourniquet around the small stump, then fell back taking a moment to capture his breath. When he regained himself, his anger was worse than ever and Blue could see that he had no intention of giving up: Billy was crawling toward the knife-like shard of glass again. Recognizing what he was up to, the dog felt rage of his own growing inside him.

Blue mentally grabbed the severed leg.

He held it high near Billy’s head.

“No!” Billy yelled between his cries of pain.

With his mind, Blue kicked Billy’s face hard with the own severed leg, the impact from the solid boot causing blood to spray from his mouth. He kicked him again. He then kicked him in the gut and in the chest and then in

the face again. He let loose all the rage that had been bottled up all these years, until he finally noticed that Billy had dropped the shard of glass. Thinking Billy had given up Blue stopped his attack and let the leg fall to the ground.

But Billy had *not* given up. He started to drag himself along the floor, seeming to work his way to the closet now. Blue looked at the stub of Billy's leg still continuing to drain some blood, despite the belt Billy wrapped around it, leaving a wet trail behind him. The dog's attention shifted when he saw Billy open the closet, reach inside, and pull something out. The dog instantly recognized what it was.

It was the hunting rifle; the thing that ended Rex's life.

He watched Billy, still laying on the floor, check the chamber then turn to point the end at Blue.

"Say goodbye, you dumb fuck!"

Blue understood what Billy was about to do. But Blue wasn't going to let him.

At the moment Billy went to pull the trigger, Blue locked it in place. Frustration filled Billy's face. The trigger wouldn't move.

"Goddamn piece of—"

Nor did Blue didn't stop there.

First Blue made Billy's entire body shake violently. His eyes and head rolled around wildly. And then, in an explosion of flesh and blood, Blue caused his arms to rip off, his left arm landing near the couch, the right one, still holding the rifle, fell idly to the floor.

Blood shot out from both sides of his torso like a fountain. His screams of agony were so loud that it hurt Blue's ears.

He watched Billy fall over on his side, sobbing almost like the way he did on his bed that day so long ago. Now the dog let out a whine of his own. He hadn't wanted it to come to this. Billy was screaming in pain. He watched Billy making futile attempts to move his body using his one worthless leg, reminding Blue of Rex that day on the roadway, trying but getting nowhere.

Blue saw the connection now.

Billy was suffering terribly. And Blue recalled Billy's father using a raffle—a rifle such as this one—to make the cries of agony stop.

Blue's head sank. The dog knew what he had to do.

It was Blue's turn to end the suffering of Billy.

The dog whined as he used all his mental strength to turn the rifle around. He didn't know why it was so difficult. The dog wasn't aware that the ooze he had consumed was now losing its potency. He could barely move the rifle high in the air. But he managed enough of an angle to point it towards Billy's head.

Billy's eyes grew wide with fear.

"No don't! Don't Blue. Please!"

The dog turned away, whimpered, and pulled the trigger.

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Blue stepped outside and studied the landscape. A few steps away from the porch lay a small twig. He tried to move it with his mind but it didn't move. It didn't even budge. Whatever power he once had seemed to be gone

now. And he realized that without Billy, there would be no one to feed him, no one to give him water, no one to let him in and out of the house. He didn't realize that it was the ooze that gave him the power, that all he had to do was consume some more and his power would be restored. Instead, he saw himself completely alone in a world where he couldn't take care of himself.

Blue hung his head down and walked down the drive. He became aware that his aches and pains had returned now. Every few steps he would let out a whine, not just about the pain but about the terrible thing he had just done to Billy. Billy was gone, the same way Rex was gone. The same way the old couple was gone. And now, the beatings didn't really seem that awful. Maybe he could have endured it; or used his ability to prevent the beatings, rather than hurting Billy with it.

Blue realized Billy was right; he was a bad dog.

The dog reached the highway, thinking about the little boy and the fact that he was never able to please the older Billy. He stood at the side of the road, enjoying the strong breeze blowing through his hair, listening to the sound of a distant semi-truck approaching. The boy that he loved so much was gone, and Blue had destroyed any hope of him ever coming back. In his mind he pictured the boy tossing him a ball in the big field, the boy hugging and petting him after each catch.

"We'll *always* be best friends, won't we, Blue?"

He didn't know what that meant. He just wished he could hear it again, wished he could see the smiling face, the deep delight in the boy's face.

And knowing such wishes would never happen, Blue stepped out onto the highway in the path of the approaching truck.