

# Billy



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## BILLY

### Prologue

3 Years Ago

He felt strange that morning, dizzy and weak, and this time not just because he didn't want to go to school. When his mother came in to wake him, he told her he was sick. She laughed and said, "All right, I won't make you go to school on your birthday." He fell back to sleep, hoping he would feel better, but woke up feeling worse.

Everyone had gone when he finally stumbled into the kitchen for breakfast. Opening the refrigerator, he began unloading food onto the table. An intense hunger overcame him, and the clock read 1:15 the next time he looked at it, after all the food had been devoured. He got an empty garbage bag out from under the sink and filled it with the empty meat wrappers, egg cartons, soda bottles, fruit cores and rinds, and various jars. After bringing the trash out to the sidewalk, he ran back inside, his stomach lurching dangerously.

All day he thought his head was going to explode, especially when he tried to do the homework he hadn't done the previous night. The letters in the story he had to read for English were mixed up worse than ever, and he put away his math when he started seeing black spots instead of numbers. He sat with his head between his knees for a long time, feeling miserable.

By seven o'clock that December evening, night had fallen and all of his relatives had arrived. He wore a false smile on his face to hide the pain as his mother told him to sit

in the head chair, in front of the china cabinet. Nausea took hold of his stomach and the pressure in his head rose when a fiery birthday cake was placed before him. Playing with the thirteen candles, he raised and lowered the flames, expelling some of the pressure as he used that strange kind-of muscle in his head.

Suddenly his father snarled, "Aren't you going to blow them out, retard?"

It came without warning.

The china cabinet exploded behind him. Shards of glass sliced through the air, embedding themselves into the table, the walls, and human flesh. Screams arose and blood flowed, but he neither saw nor heard any of it.

As his uncle jumped up, the dining room door slammed shut. His uncle tried the handle, pounded his fists against the wood, and swore. The door would not open in this windowless room. They were trapped.

His mother could not stop screaming. A piece of glass was lodged in his father's throat, and he was gagging on his own blood.

The flames grew in front of his face, but he did not feel the intense heat. Sparks flew out, setting fire to the tablecloth, the curtains, and several shirtsleeves. The dining room now contained nine flaming, flapping adults, and one motionless 13-year-old boy.

Sweat poured from his brow. He was trying to stop it, but it hurt so much. Amid the screams and fire, he laid his head back and fell asleep. Giving up was the only way to keep

his sanity.

It did not sleep.

### One

The scent of wet hay and the pounding rush of rain overhead confuse me in my first moments of wakefulness. I open my eyes with a start, and find myself in the hayloft of a rundown barn. Straining my ears, I can barely hear beyond the deafening rain on the roof, but I'm sure there's no screaming, and no fire.

My clothes and hair are soaked, and when I sit upright, rivulets of water trickle down my face and neck. Even the shirt I wear beneath a ripped winter jacket clings to my skin. How long have I been here, I wonder? My cracked watch, stopped at 7:03 as it has been for the last three years, offers no answer.

A sudden creaking raises my fear, and I crawl to the edge of a hayloft that appears to have no ladder. Peering down at the deserted aisle and its rows of empty stalls, I feel relief. No people. Better yet, no animals. Animals always seem to know.

This place should be safe, at least for now. Moving deep into the shadows of the loft, I curl up tightly, trying to still the shivering. The damp air and dull roar in my ears chase my thoughts inward, to last night....

"What's your name, boy?" A large man, 6'2", 220 pounds, mid-fifties.



"Dan." In a rusty blue pick-up. The windshield wipers scraping the rain away with a steady ticking. Cold, though the heater's on high.

"How old are you, Dan?" Driving along a bumpy dirt road, farms on both sides.

"Sixteen." Nightfall, no moon.

"Where are your parents?" Nosy old man. Wishing he would stop asking stupid questions.

"Don't have any." Not anymore. A dark farmhouse, maybe deserted, on the horizon.

"You shouldn't be hitchhiking at night. Too dangerous, never know who will pick you up. You're lucky it was me and not some crazy."

Slight dizziness. Oh, no.

"What was that?" Nausea.

"Can you let me off here?" The weakness....

"I'm not going to leave a young boy stranded on the side of the road at night. Not this close to the city."

Can't you feel it coming, old man? "Please, sir, let me off?"

"You can stay the night with me, eat something. Look at you. You're nothing but skin and bones. Yes, you stay at my place, and you can head out in the morning." Increasing pressure in my head.

It's coming! Get away!

"Please, sir...."

My memory ends there. I gave up the fight before it began. Maybe it's better that way.

## Two

My stomach growls. I have to find food, now.

The only way down from the hayloft is to jump. I carefully lower myself over the edge, shortening the distance from 20 feet to 14. Letting go, I await the impact with eyes squeezed shut. I feel suspended in mid-air. Then I open my eyes and the floor greets me. The landing knocks my breath away, locking me in that position until the hunger brings me to my feet again.

A search of the barn turns up only moldy hay and a small bag of rotting grain. Beyond the barn door lies that dark farmhouse I'd seen from the road. I dash through the sheets of rain, attempting to minimize the wetness, but failing. The back door of the house is unlocked, and I drip on a carpet in a dingy hallway that smells of old people. My sneakers slosh in their waterlogged state as I make my way to the front of the house, to the kitchen.

The house isn't deserted after all. Though devoid of the numerous knick-knacks that appear on every shelf and table in the place, the small, dirty kitchen is fully stocked with food. I reach up to pull a loaf of bread off a shelf and find myself in blackness....

Sometime later I awaken on the linoleum floor, surrounded by opened cans and boxes and bags, all empty. Gripping the countertop for support, I pull myself up, feeling weak and disoriented. A stray glance out the window shows me the man's truck, the worst omen I could have ever received.

I pause at the doorway, following the trail of blood up the worn wooden staircase with my eyes, knowing that I must discover what It has done, but still hesitating for what seems like hours. Unwilling to venture towards this familiar future, I step back into memories....

"Your son has dyslexia, Mrs. Foster." Waiting outside the guidance counselor's office, knowing that her report isn't good.

"We can enroll him in special-help classes...." Remembering how the other kids laughed when I couldn't read that small part in English.

"Daniel will be fine, dyslexia can be corrected." She didn't know how the other kids tease, how I hear the word "retard" everytime I can't answer a question.

Jerking myself away from this scene, I ascend the stairs and enter the only room with an open door, and blood smeared on the handle. I look down upon the man and his wife in their bed, their horrified expressions staring up at me blankly. The nausea arrives; I begin to vomit, not stopping even when only dry heaves rack my body.

Finally I step back, exhausted, tasting the bile in my throat. At least now Its work is covered.

I can't stay here. Too much death, too many conveniences for It to use. Walking out the front door, I leave many clues behind. Maybe enough so the police can find me and put me somewhere safe.

## Three

My sneakers sink deeply into each mud puddle, sticking in the ground as though even the dirt wants me to stop and let it come. But I won't give in to the dizziness, the weakness, or the weariness. As long as I keep going it can't defeat me.

Sometime later a black lab playing in the road joins me. It has no collar, and its ribs are visible through its patchy and matted fur. I don't pet it, I won't let myself. All the same it trots beside me, tongue rolling out of its mouth, as I continue on my route to nowhere.

Once it playfully licks my fingers. I jerk my hand away, but it thinks I'm playing. It jumps onto my chest and is rewarded with a kick in the stomach. After that, it keeps its distance, but stays with me. Its presence buoys my spirit.

As night brightens into day, I grow weary and collapse by an oak tree, thinking I have defeated it. The black lab lies beside me, its head on my lap.

I am wrong. I awaken, suddenly alert, with a strangled dog in my arms. Weakly I turn my head from the sight and the stench, and return to sleep.

"Look, kid, we just need to ask you a few questions."  
A tall man, blond, maybe 30. Strong, stronger than me.

"I didn't do anything!" Struggling. Feeling trapped.

"I'm not saying you did. Calm down! We just have to find out what happened!" Being pinned on the floor. Trying to get up and failing.



"It wasn't my fault!" Tasting blood in my mouth. "Let me go!"

"If you'll just cooperate and answer our questions, you can go. If you don't we're gonna have to take you down to the station." Nausea suddenly gripping my stomach.

"No! Let me go!" Black spots dancing before my eyes. Unable to fight.

"You'll have to come with us, kid." Quieting suddenly, the lull before the storm.

"It's coming....Let me go...."

"What's coming? What're you talking about?"

Leaving the dog behind, I continue down the road facing the bright noon sun.

#### Four

Many cars have passed since yesterday afternoon, but none have stopped. This does not bother me. No chance for It to bother anyone. I haven't felt the hunger in over 24 hours, probably because It knows that there aren't any places to eat along this lonely stretch of highway.

Though the sun shines brilliantly overhead, the forest lining the highway towers over me, trapping me in its reaching shadows. Somehow the shadows put me on edge and I imagine the symptoms, breaking into a nervous run at the slightest hint of dizziness or nausea.

A patrol car slows to a crawl beside me. "Hey, kid, where're you headed?" an Italian officer asks casually through the

rolled-down window.

"Nowhere," I reply guardedly, still walking.

"Need a ride?"

A wave of paranoia passes over me and I glance at him, wondering if he's only nice or if he knows....

"Nah," I say, averting my eyes. If he weren't wearing sunglasses, I would know.

"Come on," he insists. "It's 18 miles to the next town. Hop in."

I look at him again, and he reaches down--It slams into me and I am blind and deaf, but feel rapid movement.

It leaves abruptly as I crash to the forest floor with the officer on top of me. His knee digs into my spine. He pulls my hands behind my back and cuffs me. "Why'd you run, kid?" he demands.

My mouth tastes of gritty dirt. "Thought you were pulling a gun on me."

"Why'd you think that? What'd you do, kid?"

His weight on my spine is paralyzing me. "Nothing."

Grabbing the collar of my shirt and hauling me to my feet, he remarks, "I think I'd better take you down to the station, kid."

"My name is Dan."

"Whatever, kid." It's a long hike back to the car, and a hard one considering that I can't use my arms. I must've run a long way.

I've changed my mind since I said I wanted the police to put me someplce safe. What if they just stick me in jail,

or a mental asylum? What if they just leave me alone with  
It in solitary, and I go crazy?

Once we reach the car, he shoves me in the backseat and  
gets in, glaring at me in the rearview mirror as he starts  
up the engine. I suppose I just ruined his day.

### Five

The trees rush by in a blur. I don't even see them. I am remembering a time long, long ago....

Playing at the top of the stairs, bouncing a tennis ball  
against the wall. The house silent except for the thump of  
the ball hitting the wall.

My daddy sleeping down the hall. His door closed, but  
I can hear his big drunken snores.

Thump, bounce, catch....thump, bounce, catch....the rhythm  
hypnotizing....thump, bounce, catch....

Another sound breaking the rhythm. Holding the ball as  
my daddy comes out of his room. Smiling a big, gap-toothed,  
6-year-old grin. Waiting for him to smile back.

A heavy workboot slamming into my stomach, falling backward,  
gasping for air. Falling, not hitting the floor.

Suddenly hitting the stairs rapidly, bumpity-thumpity,  
pain erupting all over my body.

Stillness, blackness, numbness.

Awakening with a light-headed feeling in my bed, casts  
encasing both arms and my leg.

My mommy feeding me everyday, sometimes reading me a  
story, but Daddy never coming into my room.



Feeling bored even though the TV's on all day, until I see the channels changing by themselves. Concentrating on what channel I want, seeing the knob turn to that station. Later moving other things: a pencil, drawing a shaky picture; the closet, opening and shutting the door; my toys, playing games. Feeling the muscle in my head grow stronger.

It was there, too, when I first discovered the power, but in the form of my imaginary friend, Billy, from when I was four. I called him Billy until I was thirteen. He told me to keep my power secret from the kids at school, even from my family. He told me things we could do with my power, our power, he called it, like making an eraser from one kid's desk fly and hit another kid in the head, or tripping a kid carrying a lunch tray. These kids I played tricks on, they were all mean to me. Billy was my only friend. This became more important as I realized how different I was from everyone else. In the year before I turned thirteen, Billy began to tell me that everyone hated me <sup>and</sup> ~~and~~ thought I was stupid, and that he was my only friend. For a while I believed him, even when he told me that the girl who started talking to me in history class was just trying to get me to like her so she could humiliate me. I was mean to her, and the day before my birthday I was so mean I made her cry. That was when I knew she had liked me and Billy had lied. Billy and I got into a fight after school, when no one was around. I felt him receding, he stopped talking to me, and overnight he became It, and began using my power without my permission....



Abruptly I notice that we have arrived in a small town. Though reality tells me the police can't help me, a small flame of hope flickers inside.

### Six

The setting sun elongates the shadows of the steel bars that cage me. Graffiti covers the gray walls of the cell, some angry swears, some hopeful Bible passages. They blur into a colorful wallpaper before my disillusioned eyes. It feels like I've been here for hours. Maybe I should check for that guard again....No, I just checked a minute ago. He's not coming.

I hate police officers, always so suspicious. I told them I didn't do anything, but no, they still have to get my fingerprints and mug shots, and lock me up until they can check their computers for my criminal record.

I hate being trapped. I need to get out, can't they understand? Sitting on this hard bench, I concentrate on the bars of my cell. Bend, bend--but my power has weakened with years of disuse, or maybe I could never bend steel in the first place. Billy--I mean, It--probably can. Where is he when I need him? He doesn't care about my needs anymore.

A nervous-looking man with slicked-back hair, dressed in a suit and tie and carrying a briefcase, appears outside my cell. I glance at him, and when he doesn't say anything, I direct my attention to the steel bars again. Bend, bend--

"Daniel Foster? My name is Jack Farley. I've been appointed as your defense attorney."

My attention strays from the bars. "You're my lawyer?" I ask. That can't be right. I didn't do anything.

"Yes. The state of New York is charging you with the murder of nine people--your entire family, I believe--as well as several other murders committed in the area."

"I didn't kill my family," I protest. "I don't need a lawyer."

"I'm afraid you do, Mr. Foster. As you well know, you were the only survivor of a suspicious fire that was most likely arson, and the police have you on record as resisting arrest."

"That's because I didn't do anything. And I don't even remember--"

"I know it's been three years, but we need to get whatever you know. You will be pleading innocent, correct?"

"Yes, but--"

"Good. Now, how was this fire started? You have to tell me the truth, even if you plan to lie in court. Did you start the fire?"

"No. It did."

"It? Mr. Foster, you must be a little more specific, or more adept at lying. Who or what is this 'It'?"

"I don't know exactly. It lives in my head, and It killed my family. I tried to stop It but I couldn't."

Jack Farley pauses a moment to digest this. Then he says, "Perhaps we should change your plea to insanity."

"But I'm not insane," I tell him. Why'd I have to get such a terrible lawyer?

Dan, I thought I warned you....Billy's voice makes me sit up straight. I told you not to tell about me or the power.

So? He has to believe me, I tell Billy. It's the truth.

Billy's laugh echoes inside my head. You're so naive, Dannyboy. No one believes in me but you.

But you're real! They have to believe what's real!

They can't believe what can't be seen or proven. I thought you knew that all these years.

I can prove it! When they see my power, they'll believe!

Are you sure you really have the power anymore, Dan?  
Or was it really mine to begin with?

It's so hopeless I begin to cry. Please help me, Billy.  
I don't know what to do anymore.

You could do what I've been doing for you all your life: get revenge. Kill 'em all. Then start over somewhere far, far away.

I'll still be running. I'm tired of running, Billy, from them and from you.

Billy's next words are harsh. You have to learn how to take care of yourself if you want to survive, Dan. With that, Billy melts back into It, leaving me alone and weeping.

"Excuse me, Mr. Foster, are you all right?"

I turn my head to glare at that nosy lawyer. Sniffing, I reply angrily, "I'm fine," and wipe the tears from my cheeks.



## Seven

Tossing and turning, I flop onto my back and exhale in frustration. This bed is too hard to sleep on, and those guards are too loud....I'll bet they've been drinking, with all their raucous laughing and belching.

I stand and walk over to the bars. There are only two guards. Seems like more the way everything echoes in here. One of the guards, a thin, balding man of maybe thirty years, takes a swig of beer and belches loudly. The other, a fat man with a sweaty face, laughs coarsely.

"Hey, could you keep it down?" I yell crankily.

The guards look up at me blankly, until sneering expressions take over both faces. They get up and saunter over to my cell, talking to each other like I'm not here. "Hey, look, Bob," says the skinny one. "The psycho wants us to keep it down. I heard Jack say he killed his whole family. Maybe we should do what he says. He could hurt us." He fakes an expression of fear.

"Maybe you're right, Tom, but don't we have clubs and stuff for keeping psychoes like him in line?"

"I agree. We should be able to keep him in line. That is our job, after all."

"That's right, we'd only be doing our job."

I watch these two with growing anger and fear as they unlock the door to my cell. Finally Bob speaks to me directly.

"I'm sorry, kid, were we too loud? Maybe after we beat you into a senseless pulp you won't be so eager to complain."



He draws out his club and raises it over his head. I'm suddenly dizzy and weak-kneed before him, and just as it is about to strike my head, Billy come to save me. In blessed darkness I wait for him to finish.

### Eight

Coming to in a shed of some sort, I feel strangely whole. "Billy?" I call out in the semi-darkness. I find the door and let myself out into the dawning of a new day.

"Billy, thanks for saving me. I almost thought you were gonna let those men beat me up, like Daddy used to. But you always protect me. You saved me back then, didn't you, when Daddy kicked me down the stairs? I'm so glad you're my friend again, Billy. We'll be best friends, just like we used to be. I'm so dumb, I'll bet you weren't lying about that girl. You're my best-and-only friend, Billy, and we're gonna be friends for always, aren't we?"

No reply.

"Billy? Are you listening? Look, I'm sorry I thought you were lying, but we're friends still, right? I didn't mean it when I said I was running away from you! You have to believe me! You're my best-and-only friend, remember? C'mon, Billy, answer me!"

Still no reply, except a voice that isn't Billy's, it's some old lady, saying, "Young man, are you all right?"

"I'm fine!" I answer the voice impatiently, then try talking to Billy again. "You're not going to start ignoring

me again, are you? Billy, you know I hate that! I'll never ignore you again, because we're best friends and best friends don't ignore each other, Billy....Billy! You stupid bastard, stop hiding and answer me!"

More voices, none are Billy's...."I think he's having a nervous breakdown...."

"No, I'm not! Dammit, Billy! Why are you doing this to me? I thought we were friends! You answer me, Billy, or I'll kill you! I will! You won't be able to stop me! Would you answer me?"

People forcing me into an ambulance, just vague, fumbling people.

"C'mon, Billy, you're supposed to be my friend! We've always been friends, you can't just stop now! You know, I said thank you, you could at least say you're welcome!"

Smelling an unfamiliar smell, a good, sweet smell, though

"Billy, why are you always being such a baby about everything? I told you, I'm sorry I ran away, and I'm sorry I said you lied, okay? Please, Billy, you have to still be my friend. I still need you....please, Billy, pretty please....?"

#### Nine

Billy's gone. He won't answer. My power is gone, too.

They--the doctors--say Billy never existed, except in my imagination. They say I imagined the power, too. I know they're lying, they're just jealous. Billy and my power have existed for as long as I can remember. How can I imagine something like that? They're both real. I just don't know where

they went. I think maybe those doctors took them.

They are very interested in me. A very interesting case, they say. Damn stupid doctors who don't know anything!

Billy will come back. He's just hiding in me, like before. I talk to him all the time, and I know he's hearing me, he's just ignoring me. He has to come back. I need him, and he needs me. I just have to wait patiently for him, even if it's for another three years....