

THE APPLE TREE

by
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FADE IN:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Half-filled room. A JUDGE, seated at a raised oak bench, peers out from behind his glasses. A STENOGRAPHER types, stops, starts again.

A burly, suited LAWYER speaks with a skirted WOMAN. Hushed voices, papers bandied about.

The lawyer returns to a table. Chubby hands with a gold pinky ring slides papers inside a briefcase.

LAWYER

They liked the letter from your last employer, Billy.

Seated at the table is BILLY (33), skinny with a tired face cheated by time. He's one good eye, one bad -- like a crushed blue marble. Motionless.

His raspy voice quick and insistent.

BILLY

They hated me at my last job.

LAWYER

Your father wrote it for you.

BILLY

I don't work for him. Can't even remember the last time we spoke. I never asked him to do that.

LAWYER

I did.

(shuts his case)

This is last chance for you, Bill. You mess up again, I can't help you.

Billy squirms, rubs his hands together.

BILLY

So, what do we do now?

LAWYER

We do nothing. You do community service. Forty hours. You start tomorrow.

BILLY

What? Where?

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

A DOCTOR passes, marks notes on a clipboard. A NURSE answers a phone. Numbered rooms down a fluorescent-lit hall.

CAL (57), gray bearded, brown uniform. He limps as he pushes a cart with cleaning supplies. Billy keeps pace next to him.

CAL

You just sweep the floors, clean the rooms, take out the trash... It's not rocket science.

Billy nods.

Cal stops, looks him in the eye.

CAL

You do talk, don't ya?

BILLY

Yeah. I can talk.

CAL

Good. Don't talk to the patients. The people in these rooms are very sick. Now, some are gonna get well, some not. Just focus on your business, okay? No matter what you see or hear.

Billy stares back, takes it in. Understood.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - LATER

Billy scoops dirt into a dust pan, tosses it in a bag that hangs from his cart.

He puts on rubber gloves, grabs disinfectant wipes and goes into

ROOM 121

It's empty, one bed to his left. He passes it, heads for the window and opens the blinds. The bright sunlight fills the room. He winces, shields his eyes.

JULIA

Oh. Hello.

Billy whirls. Startled.

JULIA (19), pleasant-faced and noticeably pregnant, adjusts herself on another bed Billy hadn't noticed when he came in.

BILLY

I'm sorry. I didn't realize you were here. I'll come back later.

She places a hand on her belly bump.

JULIA

No, it's fine. I mean, if you don't mind looking at me. My coif's a mess. I haven't been to the hairdresser in weeks. Usually I like to go with a pony-tail and fringe, you know? Like Audrey Hepburn.

BILLY

Umm... Okay.

Billy takes to cleaning a table, turns and steals a peek at Julia. She smiles shyly, watching him.

JULIA

You got a name?

BILLY

Billy.

JULIA

Nice to meet you. I'm Julia. If you don't mind my asking, what happened to your eye?

He freezes in place, caught off guard.

BILLY

Put my head through a plate glass window.

JULIA

Oh, my. Why on earth would you do a such a thing?

He smiles sheepishly, starts wiping again.

BILLY

When it happened I don't think I cared much about what I was doing. I was angry, I guess.

JULIA

At what?

A long pause.

BILLY

Everything.

Julia raises an eyebrow.

JULIA

But, you're okay now. That's the main thing.

He turns in her direction, this young pregnant girl wrapped in a hospital gown.

BILLY

You asking me or telling me?

INT. CAR - LATER

Billy slides behind the wheel, slams the door. He takes out his cell phone, regards it for a BEAT, and places it gently on the seat beside him.

Keys the ignition.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY

Moving through the hall, coming up on ROOM 121 where

INSIDE THE ROOM

Billy talks spiritedly to Julia.

BILLY

... And he was *this* close to me.

JULIA

So, what'd you do?

BILLY

I took the shovel, whacked him in the family jewels and I high-tailed it outta there!

They laugh hard. Julia covers her mouth, Billy dabs at his good eye.

JULIA

Bad ass Billy... Billy the kid!

BILLY

They used to call me when I was younger... Billy the kid.

JULIA

Who used to call you that?

He settles down, decidedly more somber.

BILLY

My Mom... Dad... Kids around the neighborhood.

From the HALL --

CAL (O.S.)

Billy?

Billy makes a funny face. Julia stifles a laugh.

BILLY

Gotta go
(blows a kiss)

Julia returns it.

As Billy exits, she puts her hand to her stomach and winces.

CORRIDOR

Cal, like a suspicious father --

CAL

Who you talkin' to in there?

Billy smiles, rolls his eyes.

BILLY

Nobody.

Cal watches as Billy pushes a broom down the hall, whistling as he goes.

EXT. PARKING LOT - LATER

A spring in his step, Billy hits a button on his key fob and gets

INSIDE THE CAR

He slams the door, takes out his cell phone. Looks at it for a moment, hesitates before placing it down on the seat.

Keys the ignition.

INT. ROOM 121 - DAY

The PITTER-PAT of rain outside the window.

Billy sits on a chair next to Julia. Something's not right.

BILLY

You get migraines often?

JULIA

About a month now. Nausea, too.
Sometimes real bad. That's why I'm
here and not in maternity yet.

BILLY

But you're okay, right? I mean...

JULIA

The doctors say the baby's doing fine,
but me...

BILLY

What do you mean?

She puts her hands at her sides, forces a smile.

JULIA

There's a chance I might not survive
the pregnancy.

BILLY

Oh, my God. Have you thought about...

JULIA

God no! The horror stories I've heard.
Mama raised me better than that,
Billy.

Billy cranes his neck to check the hallway.

BILLY

Where's your family?

Billy's more puzzled the further he listens.

JULIA

The father took off to the oil fields
of Texas somewhere.

BILLY

And your parents?

JULIA

They disowned me when they found out.

BILLY

What? That's not supposed to happen. Parents are supposed to be loving and kind. Understanding... I don't get it.

JULIA

Billy... I'm gonna have this baby even if it spells the end for me. I don't care what anyone thinks. You don't climb the tree just to pick the apple and throw it away.

Billy rises, carefully moves in close to her.

BILLY

It'll be okay, Julia. You'll see.

She watches as he draws near. He kisses her gently on the cheek, pulls back. Gazes into her eyes when she --

SCREAMS in anguish. She inhales, puffs out in quick intervals.

BILLY

Julia!

Like a punch-drunk fighter, Billy dances in place. Not sure what to do.

He grabs her foot. His fingers slip right through it, but he doesn't seem to notice.

BILLY

I'll go get someone. Just stay right here!

He darts from the room into the

CORRIDOR

where he collides with Cal, nearly knocking them both to the floor. He grabs Cal, his eyes pleading.

BILLY

Cal! Get a doctor! I think she's in trouble.

Cal grabs him by the shoulders.

CAL

Shh. Shh. Quiet.

BILLY

No, you don't understand. She's--

Cal shakes his head. Billy tries to break free, but Cal's got a vice grip on him.

A NURSE down the hall looks up at them, then quietly back to a computer screen.

CAL

No. You don't understand.

BILLY

Cal, she's...

CAL

Go back in the room, Bill. Tell me what you see.

Confused, Billy's one good eye appeals for an answer.

Sleepy, careful steps lead him back into the room.

Cal watches on, rests his hand on Billy's cart. He scans the perfectly clean floors.

INT. ROOM 121

It's empty. Billy stands next to the bed. BEAT. Nothing on it except sheets and a pillow. He slowly exits the room into the

CORRIDOR

CAL
You see now?

BILLY
I don't understand. She was there...

He puts a reassuring hand on Billy's shoulder.

CAL
Let's get some lunch.

INT. CAFETERIA - LATER

Billy sits across from Cal at a long, empty table.

BILLY
So, what is this place built on top of
some ancient Indian burial ground?

CAL
Always been a hospital, far as I know.
We heal the sick.

BILLY
So, what is she? A ghost?

Cal sips from his cup, shrugs.

CAL
She's only shown herself to a few
people. Me included. That's why I try
not to go in there no more.

BILLY
What do you expect me to say..?

CAL
You don't say anything. It's just the
way it is. Besides, I told you not to
talk to the patients.

Cal goes to get up, considers, sits back down.

CAL

There's a position opening up here real soon. Same thing you're doing now. Is that something you might be interested in?

BILLY

Yeah. Sure.

CAL

Good.

Cal takes his tray and gets up.

CAL

You want this? I ain't gonna eat it.

Cal takes an apple and tosses it to Billy. He leaves.

Billy holds the apple in both hands. He regards it for a moment, then stares out across the room.

INT. CAR - LATER

Billy slides behind the wheel, slams the door, lays the apple on the passenger seat. He takes out his cell phone and places it alongside the apple.

Finally, he picks up the phone and dials.

Close on Billy's face -- nervous.

Click.

FATHER (O.S.)

Hello?

CUT TO BLACK:

BILLY

Yeah... Dad?