

GIRL D—EAD

Written by

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Parenting is Hell.
This is worse.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREETS - DAY

A post-card perfect suburb that's totally dead.

Houses boarded. Windows sealed. Not a car in sight.

A cul-de-sac blocked off with fencing and tarps like a backyard renovation gone feral. A painted sign reads:

"WELCOME HOME!" (smaller) **"BITTEN DISPOSED ON SITE."**

At the end there's a guarded development: a "commune" of an HOA meeting that survived the apocalypse.

A stiff, militant GUARD halts MARK STANTON (40's).

Mark sighs, tucking a "BLUEY" toddler leash between his legs. He juggles a WAIVER and a 9MM.

He can't decide which goes in which hand.

GUARD
CLEARANCE.

MARK
C'mon man. I live here!

The Guard doesn't move.

GUARD
So do rules.

Mark scoffs. He digs through his pockets. Ammo. Knife. Rope. Piano wire. A single wet-wipe. A half melted fruit snack.

The Guard puts his hand on his rifle.

MARK
Will you just -- just give me a minute! Jesus.

Finally, something crumples in one of his cargo pockets.

Mark pulls out an OLD STAMPED WRISTBAND and hands it over.

The Guard lowers his gun and looks it over: *CLEARED*.

GUARD
And your... dependent?

CHLOE (14) his daughter: a drooling teenage ZOMBIE. Slack-jawed and zonked out. Mark tugs on her stained leash.

The Guard stands firm.

Behind them, a PATROL HUMVEE crawls past, armed militia scanning the line like nose-y neighbors with assault rifles.

GUARD (CONT'D)
No papers. No exit.

MARK
She's dead. -- So... No. She doesn't "papers." -- Sorry.

Chloe GROANS under a steel-cast muzzle.

Around them, *the line slows.*

People stare.

This isn't about a wristband anymore.

A MOTHER pulls her son closer.

Mark doesn't even look. Just reaches down, instinctively taps twice against Chloe's wrist.

TAP-TAP. -- Their tiny ritual.

Chloe settles. Her groan hums.

Mark finally looks at her. A flicker of softness. Then... GONE. Back to logistics and drooling.

EXT. SCAVENGER RELEASE LINE - LATER

Laminated posters are pinned to the posts reading:

**"ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT THE NEXT OUTBREAK."
"IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SHOOT SOMETHING."**

A stale and gaudy ATTENDANT snaps to get Mark's focus.

ATTENDANT
And you're bringing her!?

The Attendant's eyes drop to -- Chloe, who's darting her eyes around, hungry for her next "meal."

Her stomach growls.

MARK
(comforting Chloe)
It's not lunch time. Not yet.

Chloe taps her hands together. Sign language for -- *MORE.*

CHLOE
Mooooorrr.

MARK
Fine. ONE SNACK.

Mark pulls out a nugget of RAW, RED MEAT.

He shoves it through her muzzle.

Chloe slurps it down. Mark turns back to the Attendant.

MARK (CONT'D)
Kids. You get it.

The Attendant looks in disgust.

ATTENDANT
No. -- I don't.

Mark shrugs.

He's going through the motions, antsy to hit the road.

The Attendant stamps Mark's form: MUZZLE INSPECTION: **CURRENT**.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
Sign here and initial here.

Mark complies. He slides the release form back.

He mouths the Attendant's parting words in sync.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
(Mark mimicking)
May you find what we couldn't
provide. Best of luck out there.
And remember, when you get bit-

Mark interrupts with a smile.

MARK
-Yeah. I'll be sure to kill myself.

He chuckles but the Attendant isn't laughing.

ATTENDANT
Only you can prevent the next
outbreak. May your tomorrow come.

Mark forces a smile. The Attendant files his release.

ATTENDANT (CONT'D)
NEXT!

EXT. COMMUNE LIMITS - LATER

An empty parking lot, sun-bleached and ransacked. The squeak of a lone shopping cart wheels past like a tumbleweed.

Mark and Chloe approach a STRIP MALL that's been gutted.

MARK

Okay Chloe, your time to shine.

He checks her muzzle like a seatbelt. Chloe groans.

MARK (CONT'D)

Safety first Chlo. (beat) Remember, no running. No biting. No making me look like a bad parent. And...?

Chloe groans again.

MARK (CONT'D)

Very good! See, you're learning!

He tosses a scrap of red meat through a shattered storefront.

Chloe BARRELS THROUGH THE GLASS without breaking stride.

Mark winces.

MARK (CONT'D)

Every time.

INT. STRIP MALL - CONTINUOUS

Chloe finds the meat, coated in glass.

She crunches through the shards like popcorn.

Black-crimson bile seeps out.

She keeps chewing, then freezes. She jolts up.

SNIFFS.

Through the busted window Mark peers in.

MARK

What is it? -- Person? Corpse?

Chloe GRUNTS and takes a short breath then GRUNTS again.

MARK (CONT'D)

I don't know what that means!

Mark waves his arms around in HUGE, sporadic movements.

MARK (CONT'D)
Use. -- Your. -- Gestures.

Chloe stares into the dark and grunts longer.

MARK (CONT'D)
That's all you ever do is grunt.

Mark sighs and readies his 9MM and steps into-

INT. STRIP MALL - CONTINUOUS

"WE'RE HIRING" signs. Kid mannequins in dusty summer clothes.

Mark's boot lands on a TODDLER TOY.

A BEEP-BO.

TOY
HI! I'M BEEP-BO!! HAAAAHA!!

Beep-Bo lights up, shrieking cheerful nonsense.

Mark's soul leaves his body.

MARK
Ugh. I hate kid's toys.

Chloe turns for Beep-Bo. Not as a zombie. As a kid.

Mark gives her leash a tug.

MARK (CONT'D)
Chloe. No. No nostalgia today-

A wet, guttural COUGH gurgles from the dark.

Mark freezes. Listening.

The wet cough turns to a *hungry growl*.

From behind a shelf -- a SHAMBLING ZOMBIE lurches. A name tag hangs crooked on its chest: *HELLO MY NAME IS PHIL*.

MARK (CONT'D)
Hi... uh... (reading name tag)
Phil? We're just browsing.

Phil LUNGES.

Mark pulls Chloe behind a kiosk.

MARK (CONT'D)
Shhh. Inside voices.

Phil sniffs, searching. Then-

A FLASHLIGHT BEAM slices through the mall.

A SCAV (late 20's) scrambles in. Wired, underfed, gun out.

He clocks Mark.

Then Chloe. Her leash -- and her muzzle.

His whole body goes rigid.

SCAV
The fuck is that?

Mark steps in front of Chloe without hesitation.

MARK
That's -- my daughter.

The Scav laughs once. Pure disbelief.

SCAV
No! That's a global catastrophe
waiting to happen!

Mark makes a sweeping gesture across the whole room.

MARK
The catastrophe's already happened!

SCAV
You should've put that *thing* down.

The Scav flinches, keeping his gun on Chloe.

MARK
She's muzzled. She's leashed. She's
fed. We're fine. Everyone's fine.

SCAV
We're definitely not fine.

The Scav takes one step towards Chloe.

Mark's hand goes to his 9MM - not cocky, just dad-panic.

MARK
You touch her, we have a problem.

SCAV
Then let's have it.

Phil EMERGES from the shadows with a guttural "UUUUGHHHHH!!"

MARK
PHIL!

Phil CHOMPS into the Scav's neck -- RIPPING off a meaty chunk of flesh. A tendon stretches like chewing gum.

An ARTERY POPS. **BLOOD SPRAYS.**

The Scav SCREAMS and FIRES wildly.

BAM! One round blows a mannequin apart.

BAM! Another shatters glass.

BAM! CHLOE JERKS.

Outside: birds explode from the trees.

In the distance, other LINGERING ZOMBIES turn and start shuffling towards the strip mall.

Back inside: Chloe's HIT.

Mark spins.

Chloe stumbles into a rack. Blood blooming through her side.

MARK (CONT'D)
Chlo-bee?!

The Scav, half-mauled, crashes to the floor, trying to aim.

Phil turns and goes for Mark.

Mark takes one step towards Chloe-

He sees the Scav raising his gun again.

He sees Phil lurching towards him.

Then he sees Chloe, injured.

Three worlds colliding in one second.

He can't get to all of them.

Chloe's eyes widen. Blood scent hits her like a drug. Her whole body TIGHTENS -- she goes into shark mode.

She TWITCHES. STRAINS at the leash.

Mark digs for her red-meat treats, FAST. He shoves one towards her muzzle.

She SLAPS it away. She wants *FRESH*.

SCAV
Please. (coughs) My family.

Mark flinches. That hit too close to home.

Mark looks at Chloe's wound. Then back at the Scav.

He tries one last thing. Being her dad.

MARK
Snack. Pet. Hum. Anything. Please.

Mark pats Chloe's back – their little code.

Nothing.

He starts a soft HUM – some old lullaby.

Chloe SHRIEKS. Arms flailing and body jolting.

It's a full blown *TANTRUM*.

Mark yanks a SPRAY BOTTLE from his bag and spritzes her face.

PSSHT. PSSHT.

For one beautiful second -- Chloe calms. The water worked.

Mark exhales.

The Scav goes to fire--

CLICK. CLICK. His gun's jammed.

MARK (CONT'D)
Really?! Out of all of us here! You
still choose to be a piece of shit.

Then the Scav screams again -- loud, high, panicked.

SCAV
NOOO!! I COULD'VE LIVED!!

The Scav's screaming RAMPS Chloe right back up.

She thrashes. Inconsolable.

Mark looks at Phil.

Looks at the Scav.

Looks at Chloe -- she's shaking like a combustible engine.

The Scav un-jams his gun and keeps his sights on Chloe. Then-

Mark makes the ugliest parenting decision of his life.

MARK

I'm sorry.

He unlatches her steel muzzle.

CLICK.

Chloe inhales a breath of fresh, dead air.

She's free.

She *SPRINTS* to the Scav and *POUNCES* on him.

Wet *SLOSHING*. Bone *CRUNCHING*. Teeth on cartilage.

Mark can't look. It's too much.

MARK (CONT'D)

(to himself)

It's okay. It's- it's just protein.

He looks anyway.

As Chloe feeds, the wound on her side begins to *SEAL*.

Not fully. But enough.

Mark clocks it. At first curious. Then-
Horrorified. Relieved. And slightly sickened.

Phil shambles in, drawn to the feast.

Mark raises his 9MM -- not at the Scav.

At Phil.

MARK (CONT'D)

Take tomorrow off, Phil.

BOOM! Phil drops like a wet coat.

Mark checks his watch.

MARK (CONT'D)

Any minute now. (to Chloe) No. NO!
Don't play with your food.

Chloe lifts a string of *INTESTINES* and gnaws.

He gets a better look at her side. It's healed -- mostly.

But a *RAGGED SCAR* will remain...

Mark stares at the scar. He swallows.

CRACKING BONES shift as the Scav's body JERKS to life.

White eyes lock onto Mark.

MARK (CONT'D)
Only you can prevent the next
outbreak.

BOOM! Mark drops the newly turned Scav-zombie.

He stands, breathing hard, covered in blood-mist and shame.

Chloe turns towards Mark, still wild.

Mark switches into dad-mode.

He moves slow. Gentle.

MARK (CONT'D)
Hey. Hey. Big feelings. I get it.
We're gonna put this back on, okay?

He re-muzzles Chloe with care.

Chloe groans -- furious and thrashing.

Mark tightens the BLUEY leash, exhausted.

MARK (CONT'D)
Yeah. Love you too.

He grabs a few items off the Scav. Weapons, rations, ammo.

He scoops a bag of LOOT nearby -- not looking -- and hauls Chloe out of the strip mall as distant SHUFFLES grow closer.

EXT. STRIP MALL - CONTINUOUS

Mark steps into the daylight, dragging Chloe and the loot.

He glances at the dark entrance and pulls out his SKETCHBOOK.

He starts mapping the area in a quick sketch.

MARK
This place really isn't meant for
families.

Chloe groans. Mark gives Chloe a look.

MARK (CONT'D)
You said it.

INT. COMMUNITY HALL – DAY

Folding chairs. Fluorescent lights. A hand-written sign:

“WELCOME HOMEOWNERS” (smaller) *“Don’t be the reason we die.”*

An ATTENDANT stamps wrists like a nightclub: CLEARED (TODAY).

At the front: the MATRIARCH (60s), calm, immaculate, and sharp holds a clipboard like a weapon. She commands the room.

MATRIARCH
Item three. We’ve updated our
guardrails for outbreak prevention.

A man raises a hand.

MAN
Can we circle back to the generator
noise?

The room murmurs in agreement.

MATRIARCH
Once we address the rise in undead.

The doors SWING OPEN.

Mark hustles in, dragging the leash. Satchel slung over his shoulder. Loot inside. He’s late, sweaty, and barely alive.

At the end of the leash is Chloe. Hoodie. Sunglasses.

In her hands: BEEP-BO.

The room goes still.

MARK
Sorry. Traffic.

MATRIARCH
There’s no traffic.

MARK
Yeah. (beat) Bad habit.

No one laughs. People stare like he brought a live grenade to a PTA meeting. His friend, JASON (40s), sympathetic but firm-

JASON

Mark. C'mon. -- IS THAT BLOOD?!

Mark side-eyes Jason.

MARK

Relax. Most of it's not mine.

Jason doesn't laugh. Mark plants himself in front of Chloe like a dad at a school board meeting.

Jason continues to stare at them, really at Chloe.

MARK (CONT'D)

What? She's muzzled. She's leashed.
She's fed. -- We're compliant!

MATRIARCH

Compliance is not safety.

A WOMAN in the front row tears open an MRE packet. The foil SLICES her finger.

A single bead of blood.

Chloe's head SNAPS. Her whole body tightens.

A collective inhale. Mark calmly pulls a scrap of red-meat snacks from his pocket -- he's a parent producing an iPad.

MARK

Hey. Eyes here. -- Snack!

Chloe GROANS, straining towards the blood. Mark whispers-

MARK (CONT'D)

I know. I know. We're doing our
best. But we don't bite. Please.

He taps her wrist. TAP-TAP.

Chloe wavers. Then settles... Barely.

The room is horrified.

MARK (CONT'D)

(to the room)

Any other public safety concerns?
Or can we get back to pretending my
generator's the problem?

Matriarch steps down from the front.

Not angry. -- Certain.

MATRIARCH
You insist she belongs here.

Mark nods. Forced smile.

MATRIARCH (CONT'D)
Then you will prove it.

Marks face drops.

MATRIARCH (CONT'D)
By next council review I want
measurable improvements. No
incidents. No escalations.

Mark stares.

MARK
You want me to housebreak a zombie?

MATRIARCH
I want you to demonstrate that she
can remain under your care without
endangering mine. -- Or theirs.

Mark felt that.

MATRIARCH (CONT'D)
If you can't, she will be
reassigned to containment.

Mark thinks.

MARK
You can't just take my kid because
some idiot got a paper cut!

The WOMAN with the paper cut SNEERS at Mark.

MATRIARCH
No. I get to protect this community
because you keep asking them to bet
on hope. Your hope, mister Stanton.

Jason can't look at Mark.

Others in the room don't hide it either. They agree.

Mark looks at Chloe.
At the room.
At the leash in his hand.

MARK
Fine. -- She stays with me.

EXT. BUTCHER'S BLOCK TRADE SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

Mark's bag of loot PLOPS on the counter with a wet *THUD*.

A BUTCHER in a blood-soaked apron eyes Mark.

BUTCHER
Whadd'ya got today, Mark?

The Butcher digs in the bag.

MARK
Whatever survived the mall.

The Butcher lifts an eyebrow. He pulls out:
A LABUBU PLUSH DOLL.

MARK (CONT'D)
That's gotta be worth something.

BUTCHER
Not anymore.

TOSS.

He digs one last time and lands on-
The SCAV'S GUN.

BUTCHER (CONT'D)
Now this is something! Got ammo?

MARK
It was jammed when I found it-

The Butcher gives the gun a hardy SMACK.

BANG! A shot rings out.

Everyone in the trade line FREEZES.

MARK (CONT'D)
It's okay! Kiosk pop!

A beat. The crowd exhales in relief.

The Butcher thinks, weighing the gun.

BUTCHER
Two pounds of scrap. Couple cuts.
Nothing prime.

MARK
Ugh. Fiiiiiiiineeeee-

EXT. LAND'S END COMMUNITY - MOMENTS LATER

Mark, Chloe, and Jason head towards the RATION LINE.

It has everything they need. A TRIAGE medic. A daycare center for Scav's -- *SCAVVY SITTERS*. And a long DMV line for food.

JASON
We have rules man.

MARK
You know how many permits I had to file to keep her around?

Chloe grunts.

MARK (CONT'D)
(off Chloe)
That's right! We are up to code!

JASON
They make it hard because you shouldn't be keeping her around.

MARK
Jason. As your friend. And I hope you don't take this the wrong way. But you've never had a kid. So please, shut the fuck up.

As they near the line two PARENTS approach from behind.

TAMMY (40's) and ERIKA (40s) both talking loudly, not at them, but at the area, it's Instagram Stories in real life.

TAMMY
We did Kill Training early. It's hard, but it worked best for us.

ERIKA
We could never. Co-Killing is the only, humane, way.

Mark rolls his eyes.

The line moves and Mark's at the front.

A NURSE, NINA REYES (30's) has a smile that can stop the rain. She sees Chloe and Mark's exhaustion.

NINA
Hi Chloe! You having a good day?

Chloe grunts. Mark melts.

NINA (CONT'D)
Here. You're a mess girl!

She wipes blood from her face and hands Mark the towel.

NINA (CONT'D)
And how are you Mark?

Mark smiles through his fatigue. Nina notices.

MARK
Great. How's the daycare?

Mark turns towards a chain link fence with some kids barricaded in.

The sign reads: **SCAVVY SITTERS** -- DROP-OFF/PICK-UP (below, smaller) PICK-UP HIGHLY ENCOURAGED.

NINA
Oh, the usual. Poor Hendrickson's kid's been there for days.

A BOY, red-eyed, clutches onto his backpack in the corner.

NINA (CONT'D)
(to Mark, whispering)
I don't think they're coming back.

She breathes, back to normal.

NINA (CONT'D)
So. What can I get for you? Rice?
Power banks? Bread?

MARK
No, none of that today. Just some filtered water if you can spare it.

NINA
Oh... Sorry. We've had an issue with the pump recently.

Mark smacks his lips.

NINA (CONT'D)
You can try the stream and boil it?

MARK
Nah. Last time it gave me a tummy ache and the sweats.

JASON
Sure you weren't turning?

Jason looks at Chloe. Nina shoots a look at Jason.

NINA
Anyway. You get a chance to get
those routes finalized?

MARK
Oh yeah. Got a fresh route here.

Mark whips out his SKETCHBOOK and removes a HAND DRAWN MAP.

He hands it over to Nina.

MARK (CONT'D)
I'd stay away from the mall for a
few days though. -- Hopefully this
has what you're looking for.

Nina scans the map. She smiles.

NINA
May your tomorrow come.

Mark smiles. Nina clocks it and gives a grin back.

Jason rolls his eyes. He's had enough.

NINA (CONT'D)
Is... she... okay?

Mark looks down to see Chloe trying to gnaw on the table leg.

MARK
We're working on table manners.

TITLE CARD:

GIRL DEAD

INT. MARK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A small home retrofitted for survival. Boarded windows. Locks. And a "calm corner" that looks like a toddler playpen designed by a prison architect. Only muddy and bloody.

Chloe sits on the floor, muzzled with a chain on her ankle.

There's a meat bowl and a baby monitor nailed into the wall.

Mark sits at the kitchen table -- he's clocking out of war.

He opens his SKETCHBOOK. It's part map. Part journal. And part art portfolio from another life.