

NOBODY (!!) . . . Gets Out Early . . . (nobody!!)

By Geoff Hargreaves

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... This compelling short dramatic work takes place in a youth prison. At the start, playwright Geoff Hargreaves asks why so few of the young offenders get out early. The play then examines this question through the gritty interactions of three of the inmates: the sensible Joe who is counting the minutes to his release, vulnerable Billy, and Doggo, a bully and the eldest of the three. There is no supervision (referred to as “the screws”) to be seen, and a cruel lawlessness prevails in this story that artfully presents incarceration as a zero-sum game but has us rooting for Joe to beat the odds at the same time. The dialogue is fantastic – it will keep you on the edge of your seat. Read on and watch your head.*

BILLY: That’s your problem, ain’t it?

JOE : What is?

BILLY: You’re getting out early. I don’t see the others doing it.

JOE: So what?

BILLY: They’re all talking about you. They’re dead jealous.

Spacing is playwright’s own.

NOBODY GETS OUT EARLY

Theme: In a youth prison young offenders may be sentenced for up to two years. An early release of three months is granted to those with a trouble-free record. Why do so few get out early?

Characters

JOE: aged 19, well built, sensible, cautious.

BILLY: aged 17, weak, vulnerable.

DOGGO: aged 20, a bully.

All the characters dress in their own clothes.

Setting

The TV room in a prison for young offenders.

At Rise JOE is seated, watching TV, when BILLY enters.

BILLY: You're Joe, ain't you?

JOE: Sometimes.

BILLY: What you watching?

JOE: Not sure. Something about sailors.

BILLY: I don't like sailors.

JOE: You're Billy the Kid, right?

BILLY: That's me.

JOE: I heard about that thing with you and the windows. How was solitary?

BILLY: Better than being kicked around by Doggo.

JOE: Was that why?

BILLY: Yeah. I couldn't take any more.

JOE: You smashed them windows to get stuck in solitary? Cause Doggo was getting at you?

BILLY: Couldn't think of any other way. I was gonna skip outa here. But where can you go? With those marshes everywhere. And no cash. No food.

JOE: You don't look like you could break a cookie in half. Let alone smash them tall panes.

BILLY: I can do lots of stuff when I go crazy.

BILLY sits.

BILLY: Doggo hates me.

JOE makes no response.

BILLY: Doggo hates me.

JOE: What's he got against you?

BILLY: Dunno. But I'm hiding out here. Just in case.

JOE: He's a psycho.

BILLY: He says he's in here 'cause he hit his stepfather with an axe and paralyzed him.

JOE: So he says. Everybody lies about why they're in here. It's always gotta be big man stuff.

BILLY: You too? They say you set fire to a nightclub with a Molotov cocktail 'cause the owner had raped your girlfriend.

JOE: I wonder who made that up.

BILLY: Yeah, everybody lies and nobody gets out early. That's what they say.

JOE: Doggo picks on you a lot?

BILLY: All the time. Since I got here.

JOE: Yeah?

BILLY: The first day. He told me I gotta take a bath.

JOE: Nobody uses those old things. They should toss 'em out.

BILLY: You gotta take a bath, kid, he said.

JOE: But you didn't.

BILLY: How did I know? Yeah, I did.

JOE: Asking for it.

BILLY: I got in the tub. Then all the other guys came over from the showers to piss into it, but Doggo wouldn't let me out. He pushed me under. Over and over. And everybody was laughing like crazy.

JOE: Yeah. I bet. You poor sucker.

BILLY: I went to tell one of the screws.

JOE: Did he laugh?

BILLY: He just told me to use my eyes and never do anything I don't see the others doing.

JOE: It works.

BILLY: That's your problem, ain't it?

JOE : What is?

BILLY: You're getting out of here early. I don't see the others doing it.

JOE: So what?

BILLY: They're all talking about you. They're dead jealous.

JOE: Three months early. So what? It's no skin off their noses. What do they care?

BILLY: Dunno but they do. They'll try to get you into trouble so you'll lose your clean record.

JOE: I've been dodging 'em all week. I gotta stay clean till seven o'clock. One more hour to go.

BILLY: "Early release for good behavior". Wow!

JOE: If I can make it.

BILLY: I sure won't. I already screwed up with them windows.

JOE: I guess.

BILLY: TV! Can't they do better than this? I miss my WhatsApp and Twitter and all my video games. Don't you? Astro Bot and Blasters of the Universe and the Hand of Fate. I guess you're real good at 'em.

JOE makes no answer.

BILLY: I'm a real ace at party games as well. The Chocolate Game.... Egg Toss ... Balloon Stomp—that's a winner. Stomping on the other guys' balloons and trying to protect your own. You ever played it?

JOE still makes no answer.

BILLY: And, and ... Limbo. ... Roll a Sundae. Oh, and the Hanging Donuts Game. I'd forgotten all about that till I went to a Halloween party at a friend's house. ... Speed eating's my specialty. I'm so good at it I get accused of cheating.

JOE still makes no answer.

BILLY: This is a kinda obvious place to lie low. But I couldn't think of anywhere else. You? I guess not.

JOE: I planned to hang out with the Catholic priest. But he had to go back into town.

BILLY: What's he like?

JOE: Why do you care?

BILLY: They say he's a great guy.

JOE: Oh yeah? He's kinda dumb. Thinks I wanna go straight.

BILLY: Straight? Where did he get that idea?

JOE: Where do you think?

BILLY: I dunno. Never met him.

JOE: He says I'm learning a useful trade here. When I get out, I can get a job as a welder and go straight. Me a welder? Me?

BILLY: I get that all the time.

JOE: He thinks deep down I feel guilty about my past and I need Jesus to save me from my sins. I'm struggling to find him, he says. He thinks I'm wrestling with a bad conscience.

BILLY laughs. JOE relaxes.

JOE: I can make more by robbing a pet store than I could in a month of welding.

BILLY: You a Catholic then?

JOE: I remembered I was.

BILLY: I don't get it.

JOE: They told me you could start work half an hour late, if you attended Mass. Then I remembered I went to a Catholic primary school.

BILLY: Nuns and all that.

JOE: Boring. Kneeling there, with the priest mumbling on and on. But no way as boring as welding. Hours and hours of it.

BILLY (*pointing at himself*): Or carpentry. Hours and hours of it.

JOE checks the clock on the wall.

JOE: That the right time?

BILLY: I guess.

JOE: Forty-six minutes to go.

BILLY: I bet Doggo's looking for me. I can feel it. He knows they let me out this afternoon.

JOE: Probably playing soccer. There's a game on.

BILLY: Kicking ankles and shins instead of the ball.

JOE: That's Doggo.

BILLY: Where you going, when you get out? Back home?

JOE: No.

BILLY: No?

JOE: No.

BILLY: *No?*

JOE: Only to get my clothes.

BILLY: You don't get on with your folks?

JOE: Do you?

BILLY: They say they can't trust me now.

JOE: The other way around with me. I never trusted them.

BILLY: You got a nice place to go? I bet you do.

JOE: You're right, kid. I took the rap for my boss. Two years in this place. Less three months. First offence. They went easy on me. Would have been five years in a real jail for the boss. With his record. He owes me big.

BILLY: You got a boss? Lucky you, man!

JOE: He wants me outa here tonight. He's got plans. That's why I can't take chances, getting into fights.

BILLY: You got a girl?

JOE: I can get one easy.

Enter DOGGO in soccer gear.

DOGGO: Well, well. Holy Joey and Billy the Kid! Ain't that sweet? Watching telly together.

JOE: Doggo the Beast. You ain't playing soccer? Get sent off for fouling?

DOGGO: It's raining hard. You ain't noticed?

DOGGO changes the channel on the TV.

JOE: Why'd you do that?

DOGGO: Because I can. You saying I can't?

JOE gets up and changes the channel.

JOE: You saying I can't?

*DOGGO thinks about changing it yet again but just pretends he didn't notice.
JOE resumes his seat.*

DOGGO: And how's little Billy? Enjoy solitary? Miss anybody special?

BILLY makes no answer.

DOGGO: I said: enjoy solitary?

JOE: Better than being bullied.

DOGGO: You looking for trouble? I can provide it.

BILLY: He's outa here in half an hour.

DOGGO: That's what everybody's saying. Early release. Never heard of such a thing.

BILLY: Me neither, Doggo.

DOGGO: Got a taxi waiting, Joey? Or Mommy and Daddy in their limousine, waving pretty flags? Come and kiss your Mommy, Holy Joey!

BILLY: He says he don't get on with his folks.

DOGGO: Shut up you!

JOE (*to Billy*): Quit sucking up to him. It'll get you nowhere.

BILLY: He says his boss—

DOGGO: You want my fist up your nose?

BILLY: Sorry, Doggo. You know what he told me? He didn't burn down that nightclub.

DOGGO: Who believed he did?

BILLY: And he says you're a psycho.

DOGGO: Oh? Looking for a fight. Are you, Joey?

JOE: Forget it.

DOGGO: No, no. I ain't gonna forget it. And I ain't gonna let you forget it, either.

BILLY: Sock him one, Doggo!

JOE: You little rat!

DOGGO: Hey! But wait! Just a minute. If we have a fight, Billy, Holy Joey won't get outa here early. He'll dirty his record. And it's so, so clean.

BILLY: Nobody gets outa here early.

DOGGO: If I ain't getting out early, he ain't, neither.

JOE: Back off, Doggo.

DOGGO: Hear that, Billy. He's giving me orders.

DOGGO lunges at JOE. JOE avoids the punch and pushes DOGGO off balance.

*DOGGO falls to the floor. JOE kicks him hard on the hip several times.
DOGGO tries to get up but his painful hip prevents him.*

DOGGO: I can't. I can't get up. My hip. Billy, go get the screws!

BILLY starts to leave the room.

JOE: Stay where you are, kid.

DOGGO: Go on, Billy! Call the screws!

JOE: Don't move, kid! I'm telling you. If I gotta spend three more months in here, they'll be the worst months of your life. Doggo's bullying will be like nothing compared to what I'll do to you.

DOGGO: Get moving, Billy!

BILLY: I don't know—

JOE: When I've finished with you, kid, you'll drown yourself in the marshes just to get away from me.

DOGGO: Don't listen to him, Billy!

BILLY: But what'll the screws say when they see Doggo here?

JOE: Tell 'em it's an injury from the soccer field. Somebody finally paid him back.

DOGGO: My hip! Help me up!

JOE: Leave him there.

DOGGO rolls on the floor. He fails to get up.

DOGGO: Kid! Kid!

BILLY: What? What? . . .

JOE: I'm getting outa here right now. But I'm warning you, kid. If I'm still here tomorrow morning, you better dig a hole and bury yourself in it. 'Cause—

BILLY: Oh, no, no!

DOGGO again tries to get up and fails.

DOGGO: Call the screws, dammit!

JOE: Shut up! If they're gonna keep me in here for kicking your hip, I'm gonna make it worth my while and kick every damn bone you got.

DOGGO falls back, groaning.

JOE: Call the screws in ten minutes, if Doggo's still down there. But if anybody stops me leaving at the last minute, I know it'll be 'cause of you. So cut your throat, kid, 'cause you'll be better off dead.

Exit JOE.

DOGGO: Go on! Call the screws, kid! You gotta stop him leaving.

BILLY: I can't. I can't.

DOGGO: Call the screws, I said!

BILLY: I don't know. I don't know!

DOGGO: Call the damn screws! Right now!

BILLY: I'm going crazy again! Crazy, crazy, crazy!

*BILLY howls and starts to exit. He halts.
He goes to DOGGO and kicks twice him on the hip.
DOGGO screams.*

BILLY (*calling out*): Joe! Joe! I'm sorry I ratted on you. I'm sorry!

Exit BILLY, running

BLACKOUT

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS... *At the age of twenty, while a university student, I was invited to participate as a mentor in a program for delinquents, aged 16 to 21. Why me? "Well, we understand you attended a Catholic school and lots of these kids are Catholics." So?*

Eventually I agreed. One month inside the jail, 24 hours a day. A total shock.

Fortunately, my mentee taught me more about human nature than I ever taught him. One thing I learned quickly was that religion is beside the point. These adolescents aren't troubled by bad consciences. They see nothing wrong with crime as such. It is inconvenient to be jailed now and then. But every career has its disadvantages.

AUTHOR BIO: After studying psychology in Dallas, I moved to Mexico, where I currently teach and translate.

I have had two full-length plays staged, along with four ten-minute plays. I wrote a libretto for a short opera for a Canadian composer. It was performed 12 times in Canada. And one play published by Fleas on the Dog: *Eddy, Jo, and Larry*.

I have translated five Mexican novels for Grove Press and Bloomsbury Press of New York, plus poetry for Copper Canyon Press.

Most recently, Jersey City Theatre Center and the Globe Theatre London zoomed two of my plays, to considerable acclaim. I have also published a novel *The Collector and the Blind Girl* in both US and Sweden with excellent reviews.