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Kill All Enemies

Written by

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MELVIN BURGESS

KILL ALL ENEMIES



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UNCORRECTED BOUND PROOF

NOT FOR RESALE

PART I
School

Billie

I'd been good for nearly a week. Only one fight; it must have been a record for me. I should have known it couldn't last.

I was walking across the car park by the pub on the corner with Riley and his gang, when one of them spotted Rob walking towards us. I knew something was going to happen. Rob's that sort of kid. He wasn't doing anything – he didn't have to. He was just wrong. Everything about him was wrong. Wrong shape, wrong clothes. Wrong ears. Yeah, you heard, wrong ears.

'Look at the state of that,' said Riley. 'What a moron. Look at his ears.'

'What do you care about his ears?' I asked. I was genuinely interested. I mean – ears?

'I'll show you,' said Riley.

'Oi! Robbie,' he said, grabbing hold of him. He whipped an arm over Rob's neck and got him in a head lock.

I'd just been chucked out of the Brant the week before and I was doing everything I could to stay out of trouble. Hey, I'd even got myself some new mates. Hannah at the Brant said I needed some mates. OK, it was only Riley and his crooked little gang of thugs. But I was doing it, wasn't I? Socializing. Being one of a crowd.

And then I have to stand there watching them bully this fat kid because they don't like the shape of his ears.

Normally I'd have blown a fuse, but this time I just stood there and watched. I thought, *It's none of your business, Billie. Just leave it. They're not going to kill him. It's only pain.*

That's one of Hannah's. When I asked her what to do if someone started on me, she said, 'They're not going to kill you. Take it and walk away. It's only pain.' And this wasn't even my pain. It was just one more fat kid getting pushed around.

I stood and watched. I didn't turn a hair.

Riley had Rob's head under his arm, and he was rubbing his ears, hard. And Rob was going, 'Ow ow ow!' like an idiot, and his ears were getting redder and redder and someone else was behind kicking him up the arse. It was none of my business. I was just watching. I'm a good girl, me. Then Riley walked over with Rob's head under his arm and he said, 'Go on, Billie. You have a go. Give 'em a rub.'

I just said, 'You want me to have a go?'

'Yeah,' said Riley.

'How about this?' I said. So I punched him right on the nose. *Bang*. Down went Riley. Then – in with the boot. *Bang bang bang*. And then his girlfriend, Jess or whatever her name is, came and tried it on, so I did her – *bang!* – just once, in the teeth. Down she goes, blood everywhere.

'I don't do bullies,' I said. And I walked off – just in time to see the bus going past. All along the windows a row of faces turned to watch me.

Can you believe me? In public. Right in front of anyone who cared to see. I am so stupid!

I turned my face away and headed off, out of the car park. Then behind me – 'Billie . . . wait . . . Billie . . .'

Jesus.

Rob's all right. He was a new kid too, not as new as me – I'd only been there a week – but he hadn't been there long. Just long enough to arrive right at the bottom of the pecking order. We'd had a bit of a chat, talked about music and stuff like that. But I wasn't in the mood for him just then.

He caught up with me. 'Thanks . . . thanks . . . That was . . . that was . . .' He was all out of breath, bending over, trying to get the words out.

'Don't,' I said.

'What?'

'Just don't. You and your bloody ears.'

'What about my ears?'

'They stick out. If it wasn't for your bloody ears, I wouldn't have had to do that.'

'I'll change 'em for you.'

'What?'

'I've got a spare pair at home.'

'What?'

'Joke.' He smiled at me. 'You know.'

I turned and walked off, but he wasn't giving up. He came running after me.

'I just wanted to say thanks.'

'You said it.'

'We could be mates,' he said.

I turned to look at him. 'What are you on?' I said.

'Why not?' he said.

'People like me don't make friends with people like you.'

'Why?'

'Because all people like you want is for people like me to sort your fights out for you.'

'I can fight me own fights, thanks.'

'Yeah, it looks like it.'

'No, but you're new. I'm new. We could hang out together.'

'Look. I can't afford to have fights,' I told him. 'I'm on my last chance. I told you. I've been through five schools in the past two years. I even got chucked out of the Brant, and they like me there. Statside is the last school that'll have me. If I blow this, it's the WASP. I can't do the WASP. Do you know the WASP?'

'No.'

'It's this terrible place. I'm not doing the WASP for anyone.'

No way. I already got sent there once. I lasted one day and I was banging at the door of the Brant, begging them to let me back in. It's evil. They have guards with batons patrolling the corridors. They lock the doors behind you everywhere you go. You have to have an escort even just to go to the toilet. It's full of nutters. Just because I like fighting, that doesn't make me a nutter.

'You don't have to go to the WASP,' he said. 'Don't fight. I'll show you how. It's easy. You just get beat up.' He smiled at me again.

I laughed. 'Yeah, I'm not very good at that,' I told him. I had another look at him. He was one of those kids. Overweight and bouncing about like a puppy dog. He didn't give up easy, though.

'Look at the state of you,' I said. 'You're the sort of kid who gets picked on all the time. It'd be fights all day and all night if I was friends with you.'

'We can be friends out of school, then.'

I shook my head. I was thinking about something else Hannah always said. 'Trouble with you, Billie, is,' she said, 'you always make the wrong sort of friends. None of 'em last, none of them are ever there for you. Why don't you get with someone nice for a change?'

Yeah, great – but how do you know? I can never tell whether they're just after something or if they really want to be mates. I had a good look at Rob and tried to work it out. I hadn't got a clue.

'I'll think about it,' I said.

'Yesssss!' he hissed. And that made me smile.

He walked me to the bus stop. I wasn't going to the usual one because I had a visit to make. Once I decided to let him, I quite liked him being there. Maybe he was a nice kid – why not?

'I won't let you down, Billie,' he said. 'I'll be a good friend.'

Yeah, right, I thought. *We'll see*.

Chris

It wasn't me who started it this time, it was Alex.

Monday morning. We were humming.

I know, I know. It's not the teacher's fault that no one in the past two hundred years has been even remotely interested in what they're on about. It's school. It's boring. But they could make an effort. Look at Mrs Connelly who does English. I mean, books by dead people are only marginally more interesting than the cross section of dead frog skin Mr Wikes was drawing on the board, but at least she tries. But this was science. This was Mr Wikes, the most boring man in the known universe, whose idea of education was to stand with his back to you and draw on the board.

That's not education. It's fraud. If it wasn't kids he was torturing, he'd be put on trial.

It can do you damage, boredom at those levels. On the Chris Trent bored-ometer, anyone going over 100 needs to be taken out of class and put to work counting nuts. After 200, the learning process goes into reverse. At 300, your reflection in the mirror starts to age and you lose the ability to digest pizza. At 500, your brain begins to eat itself.

Wikes scores several thousand regularly. So, really, I was humming for the sake of my health.

The point about humming is they can't tell who it is. Wikes spends a few minutes pretending it's not happening before he turns round and sneaks a look, but of course all he sees is kids, heads down, writing away. If he had any sense he'd keep his trap shut – it's about the only time anyone actually does any work in his class. He can't help himself, though. It's not enough to be bored, see – you have to be bored in silence.

'All right, you lot, you can stop it now, thank you,' he said tiredly, before turning back to the board and carrying on as if nothing had happened. It's just a front, though. Inside he's a seething mass of resentment and rage. He was on a good day this time – he must have managed at least five minutes before he finally erupted. The marker pen went flying and he leaped away from the board, slavering like a bison in rut.

'Right! That's enough! Who is it? Stop that noise! Who's making that noise?' he yelled. It's quite a sight, the Wikes in full territorial display. He froths. It's a form of scent marking. You can get sprayed if you sit too close.

'Not me, sir . . . I'm not, sir . . . It's not *me* . . .' everyone goes. Of course, when one person speaks the others are still humming so the noise levels remain exactly the same.

When it finally dawns on him that tantrums won't work, Wikes tries *cunning*. Mistake. He strolls casually up and down the rows leaning slightly to one side. If he gets too close, all you have to do is stop and the humming carries on a metre or so ahead of him. It's like watching a dog chasing its own tail.

Then he strikes.

WIKES [*Speaking very quickly and suddenly*] Chris, how are you today?

CHRIS (that's me) [*Equally quickly*] Very well, thank you, sir, and how are you?

WIKES Fine, thank you . . .

The humming goes all wobbly at this point as people try not to laugh out loud, so then Wikes loses it totally. 'Stop it! Stop! You – you! I know it's you!'

That's me. As usual. He pounces and hoiks me out of my seat, yelling and spitting.

'Out! Out! Get out of my class!'

'OK! Get off me.'

It's funny, but – he has no business shoving me like that. He's got to pick on someone, I suppose, but why is it always me? Out I go, slam the door on him. He opens it and creeps after me, growling like an enraged lemming.

'You will go straight to the headmaster and tell him what you've done.'

Then he slams the door on me. And that's that.

I didn't go and see the head, of course. Wikes *might* ask him about it, but he probably won't. It's humiliating for the teacher to have to send someone to see senior management. It's like they're saying, 'Help me! I can't cope!' Which of course, in Wikes's case, they can't.

It was the last lesson of the day. I could have headed off home, but I didn't want to be seen leaving school, so I headed off to the hall instead. No one goes backstage unless there's a play on. There's this little room where they keep all the gels and the old costumes and stuff. No one ever disturbs you there.

I sat down on a wicker trunk of old costumes and chewed some gum. I'd just about had it with school. They should have let me leave and get on with it, but oh no. You have to stay until your brain melts. Maybe you like sitting in a class

with a brain-dead imbecile wondering why Shakespeare used primroses instead of violets to symbolize the end of Hamlet's nose, or finding out how many prime numbers you can stick up a frog's bum before it explodes. Or maybe you're like Alex, and you want to get good grades and go to uni so you can learn how to teach kids to count how many prime numbers, etc. etc. Maybe you just don't have anything better to do. I don't know.

But me? I'm not even going to university. I have better things to do. I'm an entrepreneur, or at least I will be when they start leaving me alone to get on with things. That's how you make money, that's how you get rich, that's how you contribute to society. Not by being a teacher, or a doctor, or by going to uni. By building a business.

I don't want to work for the man. I want to *be* the man.

They can't cope with the fact that actually, instead of being at school, I ought to be out there right now, making my first fortune. They don't do GCSEs in entrepreneuring. Business studies is as near as it gets and that's not very near. I already have a nice little earner on eBay. I know everyone does eBay, but I have a *shop*. I make a profit. £100 last trading month. Not bad! And they think I'd be better off learning how to count up to a million in binary, do they?

I don't think so.

The first bus was full, so me and Alex walked a couple of stops, which is always a pain because you have to go past Statside School, and they eat you if you get too close. That sort of thing.

It had been raining. Everything was wet. By the time we got to Statside, most of the kids had already gone, but there

were a few still left. The stop was by a church with ivy hanging down an old stone wall on to the street, and the rain must have woken up all the snails that lived there. There were loads of loads of them, crawling all over the place – 'Fat on the flesh of the dear departed,' as Alex pointed out. They were the big brown sort, roving around the pavement with their little faces up in the air and their little horns waving about. It must have been snail heaven at that bus stop because there were dozens of them. You could have opened up a restaurant if you were French.

And these two kids were stamping on them.

I mean, OK, I know they're just snails – you don't have to be friends with them. But still. These snails, all they were doing was getting a bit of rain after spending the winter in the wall. It's not much to ask, is it? And then along come two stupid kids who think it's fun stamping on the hapless molluscs so the snail goo goes splat all over the place.

'Leave it out,' I told them.

'What's it to you?' one of the kids said, like I was some kind of perv for watching out for snails. He lifted his foot and got three of them in one go, *splat*, all in a heap. I saw red. I shoved him backwards . . . and then, of course, this vast, fat monster emerged from behind the bus stop where it had been listening to rapists on its iPod and chewing a sackload of pizza crusts or whatever.

'That's my brother,' grunted the monster. I could hear Alex moaning, 'Noooooooo.' One of the kids, smirking away, stamped on another snail.

Alex to the rescue. 'Hey, let's go,' he said brightly, scuttling backwards like a rodent.

'Pathetic way to amuse yourself,' I said.

The fat one looked at me.

'It's snails,' he said.

'They're on a day out. Leave 'em alone.'

The little brother lifted up his foot, and 'Cur-runch,' he says, and he did another one in. I stepped forward; he stepped back behind his giant brother and pulled a face at me.

'Enjoy hurting things, do you?' I said.

The fat one shrugged. 'It's snails,' he said again.

Behind him, his little brother reached out a toe and crunched another one. I reached forward to grab him, but the big kid blocked me. The little kid smirked. I went for him again, but Roly Poly pushed me back.

'Leave him alone,' he told me.

'You dribbling furball,' I said.

'Let's go, let's go, let's go,' said Alex from somewhere behind me.

The fat one looked all hurt, as if no one had noticed his furballness before. Not only that but his little brother started sniggering. Result! He didn't have any answer, being a man of little brain, so he crushed a snail instead.

'You quivering gob of dog spit,' I said. The fat one turned red. Everyone laughed. He trod on two snails, one after the other – *crunch*, *crunch*.

It was a trial of nerves. Everyone turned to look at me.

'You farting walrus,' I said.

He crushed another one. The time had come to stop being clever.

'Wanker,' I said.

He cracked.

'Right! That's it,' he shouted. 'You asked for it.' Then he went berserk. He started stamping on all the snails he could

find. 'Bang bang bang squelch bang bang!' he screamed, stamping and pulling faces like some kind of overweight Maori on the warpath. He was slithering around on the crushed snails – you could see it was all going to end in disaster. I didn't have to do anything. He looked so ludicrous even his brother hid his face in his hands.

'No, Rob, don't, don't,' he groaned.

And then – the snails got him. All that slimy snail goo. It was bound to happen. His feet shot out one way, his arms another, his fat belly another, his bag yet another. He hung in mid-air for a minute like a elevating hippo . . . then *SPLAT!* Right down on the pavement. Right in the dog shit and the snail corpses, where he belonged.

'Uroerugh,' groaned the fat one.

'The revenge of the snail people is complete,' I said.

And then the bus came along. Perfect! Sometimes, the universe just hands it to you on a plate.

The fat one hauled himself upright just in time to see the bus roll off, with us on it.

'Tosser,' yelled Alex to him, now that it was safe. The fat one didn't say anything. He didn't need to. He just drew his finger across his throat.

We pushed our way upstairs. 'Why'd you do that?' moaned Alex.

'I was saving the snails,' I pointed out.

'I didn't notice many snails getting saved,' said Alex. 'That kid is a psychopath. Did you see the size of him? If him and his family want to squash snails for a hobby, that's fine by me.

'You're such a chicken,' I said.

Alex scowled. 'It's not being chicken, it's looking after

myself,' he said irritably. 'You could have got punched and you could have got me punched too. It's stupid.'

I shook my head. I mean, we go way back, me and Alex, but . . . Don't get me wrong, I like him. He's OK. But it's like . . . all he ever thinks about is Alex.

'Why are you staring at me?' he asked.

'I was just wondering why we're friends,' I told him.

'We share a similar sense of humour,' he said.

'Oh, yeah, I forgot.'

Alex shook his head. 'Fat lip at twelve o'clock,' he added, changing the subject. This couple got on the bus, a boy and a girl, and the girl had blood on her mouth. He was slouching in front of her, like he was embarrassed to be seen with someone who was bleeding, and she was creeping along behind him, trying not to cry.

Even girls get beaten up at Statside.

They sat down a few seats away, and she was trying to mop up with bits of old tissue, the sort of stuff you find rolled up into little twists in your pockets, while he sat there scowling away. I dug out a little packet of tissues I had in my pocket, ever since I had a cold a while ago, and I got up to give it to them.

'Here, do you want to use these?' I said. The lad glared at me.

'What's it to you?' he said.

I shook the tissues. 'Do you want them or not?'

He stared at me as if I'd just told him to get stuffed, but the girl reached across and took them.

'Thanks,' she said, and she tossed her head at the bloke like he was being a dick. Which he was.

'No worries,' I said, and I went back to my seat. The lad

twisted round to stare at me. What for? Helping his girlfriend? You tell me.

Alex was furious. 'What did you do that for?' he hissed as soon as the lad looked away. 'It's none of your business. What is it with you and violence?'

'Shut up, Alex,' I said.

I looked across at the girl. She'd looked ugly with her bleeding lips, but behind the tissues there was a pretty face, I reckon.

'I wonder what happened to her,' I said.

'Got in a fight with Billie Trevors,' someone said behind us.

I thought, *She's not going to be a looker for long if she gets into trouble with people like that*.