

Dog Door

A full-length play

By Grant Gottschall

Contact:
Grant Gottschall
5836 Lake Lindero Drive
Agoura Hills, CA 91301
(818) 437-4708
grantwriterguy@gmail.com

Dog Door is a 3w 3m ensemble comedy/drama with one song, “Let Me In” (music by Beverly Nero; lyrics by Grant Gottschall).

Synopsis: Five random dogs find themselves in a room with only one way out and can only leave once they have formed a Pack with the help of their leader, a sixth dog.

CHARACTERS

STELLA, 35-55: A female German Shepherd, a born leader, confident and focused. Former Military Working Dog. Currently atoning for past sins.

BUBBA JOE, 25-35: A male Rottweiler Mix, proud of what he believes is a recent redemption. A rural yard dog with a stubborn, headstrong urban street sense.

LILY, 18-30: A female Golden Retriever, simple yet wise, deeply sensitive and in tune with nature. Has an unexpected wild streak.

KING REX, 35-60: A male Doberman Pinscher, grandly convinced of his own royalty. Despite his inflated self image and malapropisms, he is actually quite noble.

BOGIE, 35-60: A male Mix, brooding and haunted by a feral past. Cannot understand unconditional love.

HAPPY, 13-25: A female Mix, a smaller, untrained and unsocialized orphan stray. A chaotic mess. Must sing.

SETTING

A nondescript room with a nice loveseat up center. Scattered about are four flattish dog beds. Somewhere offstage, perhaps behind the audience, the Door looms.

TIME

Now.

ACT 1

Lights up on a stage with a nice loveseat up center and four dog beds scattered about. BOGIE, a Mix, enters warily. He sniffs around, paying special attention to the loveseat. Discouraged, he finds a dog bed on the floor, circles twice upon it and settles in with a deep sigh.

BUBBA JOE, a Rottweiler Mix, struts on, quickly surveying the scene. He rushes over to Bogie, who reluctantly rises to meet. Ritual mutual sniffs.

BUBBA JOE

‘Sup.

BOGIE

Hey.

BUBBA JOE

What happened to your balls?

BOGIE

They...never mind.

Bogie drops to his pillow. Bubba Joe crosses to the loveseat and gives it a quick sniff.

BUBBA JOE

This is nice.

BOGIE

It belongs to someone.

BUBBA JOE

Who?

BOGIE

Dunno. Female. Powerful.

I don't see her.

BUBBA JOE

He relaxes on the loveseat.

BOGIE

Maybe you shouldn't--

KING REX, a Doberman Pinscher, glides on and takes in his surroundings.

KING REX

Greetings to you both.

Bogie and Bubba rise to check out King Rex.

BUBBA JOE

'Sup.

BOGIE

Hey.

KING REX

Allow me to interduct myself. I am King Rex.

BUBBA JOE

King, huh? King of what?

KING REX

Of my domain. I rule at the pleasure of my two-legged manservant, womanservant and their servant offspring.

BUBBA JOE

Right.

KING REX
(seeing the loveseat)

Oh, how thoughtful!

(smelling it; disappointed)

Alas.

He finds a pillow. LILY, a Golden Retriever, bounces on.

LILY

Hi, everyone! I'm Lily!

The others cluster around her, sniffing.

BUBBA JOE

Okay...your butt smells really good.

LILY

Thank you!

She smiles and suddenly puts her hands on her knees.

LILY Continued

Play bow!

BUBBA JOE

(play bowing too)

Okay.

LILY

Chase game!

And she's off, running madly around the stage followed closely by Bubba. She calls out to Bogie and King Rex.

LILY Continued

Come on!

Bogie and King Rex make a half-hearted attempt to keep up but quickly tire.

LILY Continued

Now switch!

She chases Bubba around the stage. Bogie and King Rex return to their pillows. Finally, Lily and Bubba both collapse, laughing and panting.

LILY Continued

I have a feeling this is gonna be the best day care session ever!

Me too!

BUBBA JOE

Bubba attempts to mount her.

Me too, me too, me too...

BUBBA JOE

No thank you, not right now.

LILY

What? Oh. Okay.

BUBBA JOE

Lily crosses to the loveseat.

Ooh, nice loveseat!

LILY

(sniffing it)

Mm, not for me.

Might I offer you a pillow?

KING REX

Sure, thanks!

LILY

STELLA, a German Shepherd, enters quietly and watches, unseen by the others. Bubba crosses to Bogie.

Get up.

BUBBA JOE

(to Bogie)

What? Why.

BOGIE

(rising)

I need your pillow.

BUBBA JOE

It's mine.

BOGIE

So? BUBBA JOE

You already have a pillow. BOGIE

I want yours too. For- BUBBA JOE

No...! BOGIE

Tug of war. Outmatched, Bogie is dragged around briefly. Stella appears as if out of nowhere and steps in.

Excuse me. STELLA

(everyone freezes, staring)

There is one pillow for each of you. That's how it's going to be.

Bubba considers this and releases it, sending Bogie backwards. Stella crosses to her loveseat.

STELLA Continued
(sitting)

Now then. I'm Stella.

Hi Stella! LILY

'Sup. BUBBA JOE

Hi. BOGIE

You have the smell of leaderishness about you. I like that. KING REX

So...do you like, what, live here? BUBBA JOE

STELLA
Pretty much. Although not for much longer, I hope.

BOGIE
Are there any treats?

LILY
Treats!?

STELLA
No treats today.

LILY
Toys?

STELLA
No.

KING REX
Brie? Camembert? Velvet Ah?

STELLA
I'm sorry?

KING REX
Cheese!

LILY
Cheese?

BUBBA JOE
I want cheese.

STELLA
No cheese.

KING REX
Perhaps a little butter of the peanut?

STELLA
Nope.

BOGIE
Bully Sticks?

Nope. STELLA

Beat.

Actual sticks? BOGIE

Just pillows. STELLA

Well mine is very nice. LILY

Yes. It's like the foam...has a memory. KING REX

What's that door over there? BUBBA JOE
(pointing off)

It's closed. STELLA

I can see that. Where does it go? BUBBA JOE

Someplace else. Don't worry about it. STELLA

I'm not worried. BUBBA JOE

Good. STELLA
(to the group)
All right. Let's find out who we are today. Just go around and tell us your name.
(to Lily)
You first.

Okay. I'm Lily, of Golden Retriever. Hi, everybody. LILY

Bogie of...Mix. BOGIE

STELLA
(points to Bubba)

You?

BUBBA JOE
I'm Bubba Joe from Kokomo of mostly Rottweiler.

STELLA
And finally?

KING REX
I am King Rex the Highly Awesome of Doberman Pinscher. AKA "The GOAT."

BUBBA JOE
A goat *and* a king, huh? Wow.

STELLA
And something interesting about yourself. Lily?

LILY
I like nature and long walks on the beach.

BUBBA JOE
Me too!

STELLA
Bogie?

BOGIE
I don't know.

STELLA
Gotta be something.

BUBBA JOE
He doesn't have balls.

BOGIE
Shut. Up.

STELLA
(to Bubba)
Let him speak.

BOGIE
I was gonna say...I was...adopted.

LILY

I was too!

BUBBA JOE

Same. Coupla times.

KING REX

I believe most of us have been through adoptimization at some point. No shame in that.

STELLA

Better than not having a home, right?

BOGIE

Yeah.

STELLA

King Rex?

KING REX

Something interesting about me. How do I narrow it down?

BUBBA JOE

Try.

KING REX

Before I eat, my two-legged manservant family will go through a lengthy ritual of tasting my food to ensure that it is good enough for me and then they will serve it to me in my royal bowl.

BUBBA JOE

Yeah, that's called leftovers.

KING REX

Call it what you will.

BUBBA JOE

That's not interesting. That's just delusional.

KING REX

I am not delusional in the slightest, Mr. Joe. I know my place.

STELLA

Moving along. Bubba Joe?

BUBBA JOE

Okay. So...I just killed a great beast and saved my people.

Really? BOGIE

Whoa! That sounds really brave! LILY

Right? BUBBA JOE

A great beast you say? KING REX

You heard me. BUBBA JOE

So where is it now? KING REX

Probably disappeared. BUBBA JOE

How convenient. KING REX

You calling me a liar? BUBBA JOE

LILY
I think there are more mysteries and miracles in the world than we'll ever know. One time I went into a building with my lady and she pushed a button on a wall and two doors opened and we went into a box. Then the doors closed and when they opened again we were in a completely different place. I couldn't explain how that happened, but I accepted it.

KING REX
Now that's interesting. Reality, I have found, can sometimes be a vexatious carborundum.

BUBBA JOE
The hell does that mean?

KING REX
If you know, you know. Stella! Kindly tell us of yourself.

STELLA

Well, my full name is Stella Four Star von Lackland AFB of German Shepherd. I was in the military for seven years, multi-purpose training, emphasis on explosives detection. Two tours of duty.

LILY

You're a badass!

KING REX

Thank you for your cervix.

STELLA

I enjoyed it, for the most part. But what I do now is just as important.

BUBBA JOE

What's that?

STELLA

This. I'm a helper.

LILY

What do you help?

STELLA

You. Things. And the way things...want to be.

BUBBA JOE

And how do things wanna be?

STELLA

That's what we'll find out.

(beat; helpfully)

Some groups decide they want to become something greater than themselves.

BUBBA JOE

What does that mean?

STELLA

It means they'll bond together in a special way with complete trust and respect.

KING REX

Like a...

LILY

Like a Pack! Guys, we could totally become a Pack! Who wants to be a Pack? Bubba?

BUBBA JOE

Uh, sure.

KING REX

Why not!

BOGIE

Will it be a good Pack?

LILY

Of course! *We're* all good, right?

BUBBA JOE

What do we do?

STELLA

Talk, learn some stuff. Play a few games...

LILY

We already played the chase game! Oh--we could also play the fight game! You know, where you pretend you're fighting but you're really not, like this: arararar-ngahng-ngahng-ngahng...

She lies down next to Bubba and they play fight.
Bubba moves to mount her and she deftly
evades him once more.

LILY

No thank you!

(to the others)

This will be the best Pack ever! And you'll be in it too, right, Stella?

STELLA

Sure, if you'll have me. But you need to know that a Pack - at least in this room - is sacred. It is a commitment that is not to be taken lightly.

LILY

Of course!

KING REX

What happens after we become a Pack?

STELLA

We move on. Celebrate and leave. Knowing, of course, that we will always have the support and friendship of our Pack mates.

KING REX

So we're all here to bond together - with your help - and then we all...jubilate and depart.

STELLA

Very good, King Rex. Yes.

KING REX

Thank you, Stella.

(beat; he goes to her)

May I have a word, please?

STELLA

Okay...

KING REX

(half under his breath)

How's it going?

STELLA

It's going okay.

KING REX

I really think you're doing a great job here. Whatever it is you're doing.

STELLA

Thank you.

KING REX

Would you like a partner?

STELLA

You mean...with all this?

KING REX

Perhaps. Maybe more.

He slides behind her and almost mounts her.

Stella pulls away.

STELLA

Yeah, I'm kind of a loner in that way, King. Thanks, though.

KING REX

(sashaying back to his pillow)

If you change your mind, you know where to find me.

Seeing this, Bubba crosses to Lily and attempts to mount her, thrusting. She breaks away.

LILY

Bubba, I'm not your bitch! Yet. Maybe. Just...be cool, okay?

BUBBA JOE

I'm cool!

Bubba returns to his pillow.

BOGIE

I have a question.

STELLA

Okay.

BOGIE

Yeah, what happens if we *don't*--

From offstage, HAPPY screeches.

HAPPY Offstage

HEEEY! HEY!

BOGIE

...become a...Pack? I mean--

HAPPY Offstage

HEY!

Confused, all turn to look offstage.

STELLA

What the...?

HAPPY, a Mix, careens onstage.

HAPPY

HEEEYYY!

She is smallish, with fur that has never seen a brush. She smells bad. The others - especially Stella - are in shock.

STELLA
(confused)

Hello?

HAPPY

Hey!

STELLA
Excuse me...what-what are you doing here?

HAPPY

Hey!

STELLA
What's your name, sweetheart?

HAPPY

HAPPY...

STELLA

Happy. Okay-

HAPPY

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Stella sniffs the air around her.

STELLA

Oof! Is that you?

HAPPY

Hey!

She runs up to each of the others and addresses them individually. The others instinctively recoil from the smell.

HAPPY
(to King Rex)

Happy Birthday!

(to Lily)

Happy Birthday!

Happy Birthday! (to Bogie)

Happy-- (to Bubba)

Yeah, yeah. Same to you. BUBBA JOE

Is she supposed to be here? (to Stella)

No. I mean... This is... This has never happened before. STELLA

It's happening now! BUBBA JOE

Happy grabs ahold of Bubba's pillow in her mouth. She shakes it furiously then prances around with it.

Hey, that's my-- BUBBA JOE

Happy, no! That's not yours. STELLA

Give it back! BUBBA JOE

Bubba rushes to Happy but she executes a perfect head fake and evades him. He chases her until Stella steps in.

Happy. Drop. STELLA
(firmly)

Happy instinctively obeys, dropping the pillow and rolling onto her back, smiling.

Cute. In her way. KING REX

Bubba picks up his pillow, smells it and winces.

HAPPY
(to Bubba)

Happy birthday!

BUBBA JOE

Thanks a lot.

Happy suddenly throws her arms around Stella's leg.

HAPPY

Hey!

LILY

Aww...

STELLA
(gently extricating herself)

Happy, darling, I think...I think there's been a mistake. You're not supposed to be here.

On her back again, Happy twists from side to side.

BUBBA JOE

Can you send her back?

STELLA

No way to. The only way out is through the Door.

BOGIE

Then open the Door and put her out.

BUBBA JOE

I'll do it.

STELLA

Not possible. The Door is closed.

KING REX

Can't you open it?

STELLA

It doesn't open from this side.

LILY

How *does* it open?

STELLA

From the other side. When the time is right. When we've become a Pack.

BUBBA JOE

Wait. You didn't say anything about...

HAPPY

Hey!

Happy starts chasing her tail in circles.

BUBBA JOE

...about not leaving till we become a Pack.

STELLA

That's how it works. You wanted to become a Pack, so--

BUBBA JOE

Yeah, but that's not gonna happen now! Look at her. She's crazy. And she smells bad.

BOGIE

And not in a good way.

KING REX

Or even an interesting way.

LILY

And we don't have an extra pillow.

Happy runs upstage and jumps onto Stella's loveseat triumphantly.

HAPPY

Hey!

STELLA

Happy, no. That's my place!

Happy jumps up and down on the loveseat.

STELLA

No jumping, please. Sit down and relax, okay?

Seated, Happy smiles and begins bouncing on the loveseat.

STELLA

Okay. You can bounce. Just don't destroy the loveseat.

Happy buries her face in the upstage corner of the loveseat and continues to bounce away. The others look uncertainly to each other.

STELLA

(still unsettled)

Okay. Where were we?

BUBBA JOE

Trying to figure out how to get her outta here.

LILY

Where'd she even come from?

KING REX

A land where ragamuffins run free and neither baths nor brushes exist as concepts, appearingly.

LILY

I wonder who let her get that way.

BOGIE

(quietly)

Maybe no one.

BUBBA JOE

And why does she only know two words?

KING REX

Three. 'Hey' is a word. It is interjectional.

BUBBA JOE

Interject this.

STELLA

(desperate to change the subject)

Let's uh, let's talk about something different. Let's talk about...challenges.

BUBBA JOE

I thought we were.

STELLA

I mean challenges beyond this room. Like how, how do you deal with them? Lily? Let's-let's play the challenges game!

LILY

Oh, okay! So, uhhhhh... Oh, I know!

STELLA

(to Lily)

Just a moment. Happy?

Happy freezes then turns around to face the group. She has a mouthful of loveseat stuffing that almost obscures her face.

HAPPY

Hey!

She expels the stuffing everywhere.

STELLA

Happy, no, no, no!

BUBBA JOE

Great. We just gonna let her destroy everything?

STELLA

Happy. Darling. You can't keep doing this. Just bounce, okay? You can bounce.

Happy dutifully bounces.

STELLA

(to Lily)

Okay. Lily. If you can...

LILY

Sure. So my lady and I live in a house with a yard. She's a very good gardener, so it's a wonderful yard with all kinds of great smelling flowers and special shrubs and stuff. It's like this perfect little world, you know?

Happy has stopped bouncing and begun listening to Lily, head atilt.

LILY

But here's the challenge. This perfect little world is sometimes too perfect. It's all closed in - there's a fence, a strong fence, that goes around everything - and sometimes I'll be out there just dying to go exploring but I can't.

STELLA

Doesn't she take you for walks?

LILY

Sure, and they're great. We go all up in the hills and everything by our house. But sometimes you just want to be off leash, right?

KING REX

Wanderlust! I know it well.

BOGIE

Whadja do?

Happy moves to Lily and sits, rapt.

LILY

I started digging. There's a corner of the fence that's hidden by a big toyon bush. So I started digging there a little every day. It was kind of fun. I felt so sneaky, like I had a big secret. Then one night I was able to get my whole body under the fence. And I was off. It felt amazing to be running so free with the wind in my face and my ears flopping everywhere... I ran to the trail not far from my house and this time I could really explore all the smells I'd been smelling on my walks, all the grasses, sage, sugar bushes and oaks...everything was just so interesting. Like where other creatures had been and other things that I just didn't know about but hoped one day to.

BOGIE

Did your lady ever find out?

LILY

I was on my way back and heard her calling for me. So I ran fast as I could back to the hole and got in just in time. She never knew!

Happy leaps onto Lily and gives her a hug.

HAPPY

Happy birthday!

LILY

Oh... Uh, thank you, Happy. You know, it kind of felt that way! Like being reborn or something.

Happy runs back to the loveseat and continues bouncing.

KING REX

Brava!

BUBBA JOE

Yeah, you go! Freedom!

BOGIE

Just be careful out there if you're not used to it.

STELLA

Bogie, where were you before your adoption?

BOGIE

The woods.

Happy slows her bouncing, intrigued.

STELLA

Okay...

BOGIE

Yeah. I started running with a bunch of wild ones ever since I could remember, at least three summers. We counted on each other for food and safety, whatever. We were a Pack too, I guess, but I did things with them that I'm not proud of.

(beat)

And that's all I'll say about that.

(beat)

Packs can also be... I dunno...

STELLA

You don't have keep going if you don't want to.

Happy goes to him and sits.

HAPPY

Hey.

BOGIE

Hey. So things fell apart and I tried making it on my own. That didn't go too great. These guys in uniforms found me in a shack, starving and covered in fleas. Put me in the back of a big truck, took me to this place where there were all these cages in two long rows facing each other.

STELLA

A shelter.

BOGIE

Next day they took me inside a big building where it was warm and they made me fall asleep. When I woke up, I was back in the cage again...on the floor. And I didn't...have my...

BUBBA JOE

Balls. That's probably when they took them.

BOGIE

Shut your kibble hole!

HAPPY

Hey!

STELLA

Bubba. No.

BUBBA JOE

It happens. That's all I'm saying.

KING REX

Mr. Bogie, if it's any constellation, they took mine too. But they gave me new ones. Better ones. They're called Neuticles!

(looks at Stella seductively)

They're bionic.

(he displays himself to the group)

You are free to check them out! One at a time, please.

Nobody moves.

BOGIE

Anyway, I stayed there for a while, and this older guy came to look at me. Then he took me to a house that smelled like old books, cigarette smoke and bacon grease.

HAPPY

Happy birthday!

BOGIE

Lemme finish. I had to learn a lot. First week there, he left a roast chicken on the counter and I couldn't help myself. So I...helped myself. Kept thinking he was gonna kick me out or send me back but he never did. Didn't even hit me, not once. So I settled in. Had regular meals and someone who looked after me and let me sleep on his warm bed with him. Was it worth losing my balls over? You coulda taken one of my legs and it'd still be worth it.

HAPPY

Happy birthday.

Happy hugs Bogie for as long as she can.

BOGIE

Uh, thanks.

(finally freeing himself)

Okay, now I got the Happy funk on.

HAPPY

(returning to the loveseat)

Happy birthday, happy birthday, happy birthday!

Happy begins bouncing again.

KING REX

(to Stella; about Happy)

Notice anything interesting?

STELLA

Yes, I do.

LILY

She got so quiet when Bogie and I were telling our stories.

BOGIE

Almost like she'd never heard one before.

They all look at the bouncing Happy.

KING REX

(loudly; making sure Happy hears)

So once upon a time...

Happy freezes, then tilts her head, listening.

KING REX

Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah...

Instantly bored, Happy resumes bouncing.

KING REX

And then the most *interesting* thing happened...

Again, Happy freezes and listens.

KING REX

This is the way.

STELLA

You found the switch.

BUBBA JOE

So she like stories, so what. Just wait till she hears *mine*.

They all look at Bubba Joe. Happy stops bouncing.

STELLA

Happy, do you want to hear another story?

HAPPY

Hey!

She jumps down eagerly and sits in front of Bubba.

STELLA

We're all ears. Tell us about the beast.

BUBBA JOE

Right now?

STELLA

Unless you'd like her to keep being...Happy. You know what I mean.

BUBBA JOE

Yeah.

(thinking)

Uh...

KING REX

Any reason why not?

BUBBA JOE

No, no. I, uh... Okay. Here it is.

(takes a deep breath)

So...I was...I mean...I should probably start with...there was this thing...and it was big, too, this, this...

Happy gets restless.

BUBBA JOE Continued

...thing. Like, you know, a beast. And I knew I had to... But it was big and so... I-I got it. I mean I killed it. And so that's what happened.

The rest all share a nervous glance. A disappointed Happy begins bouncing in place.

HAPPY

Hey.

BUBBA JOE

Well, what do you want me to say! That's what happened!

STELLA

It's okay. Just-

BUBBA JOE

No, obviously it's not okay! You can't put me on the spot like that!

LILY

Bubba, don't worry about it. You did something amazing and very brave. Just speak from the heart the way you remember it. And add a few details you think are interesting.

BUBBA JOE

Okay...that-that's good.

He thinks for a moment. Happy continues to bounce.

BUBBA JOE Continued

CAN YOU STOP?

HAPPY
(matching his energy)

HEY! HEY! HEY!

BUBBA JOE

STOP IT!

HAPPY

HEY! HEY!

STELLA

Bubba, why don't we come back to you. Take a few minutes. We really do want to hear all about it. It sounds incredible.

BUBBA JOE

It was. Okay. Give me a few.

STELLA

In the meantime we're still playing the story game.

LILY

Yay!

STELLA

Challenges. King Rex? Anything to add?

KING REX

Yes, I do, Stella. Miss Happy, I need you to come over here and be very sitful and listen like a proper little lady.

Happy runs to him and sits attentively.

KING REX Continued

This is a story about how you can be living your best life and then one day everything you thought you knew...suddenly changes!

HAPPY

Hey!

KING REX

Now, from day one my two-legged manservants have worshipped me as their king. They feed me, bathe me, proclaim my royalty every day, et cetera, whatevera. All was copaseptic, until the day the Great Challenge was upon us.

BOGIE

What happened?

KING REX

What happened was... a cat.

The others gasp.

KING REX Continued

That's right.

(to Happy)

Do you know what a cat is, Happy?

HAPPY

(moving and meowing like one)

He-eyyy...

KING REX

That's right. At first I thought what manner of creature is this...with its hidden retractable daggers and its constant pushing of things off bookshelves willy-nilly. Not to mention its daily habit of defescating in a box inside the house! It was anarchy! But my manservants were clearly enameled with it, especially the younger ones, who were always trying to get us to play "kissy face" and "be friends." One night when I was resting on my side upon my pillow throne, they insisted on putting Cat on *its* side, right in front of my chest. It then began massaging me like this:

(demonstrates; Happy does same)

They said it was a sign that Cat liked me. Understandable...then it began to lick me. Finally, some respect. So I gave it a little lick in return. The two-leggers were ecstatic. Then Cat got next to my ear and whispered two words: "Cat. Nip." It was clear from this good faith effort at communication that Cat wanted to enter a new diplomatic framework. A détente, un entente, a rapprochement. Si'l vous plait fromage. Don't ask me how I know French. So I made my peace with the little ball of flufferousness. And now, several times a day I allow it to ride around on my back, clutching my neck with its forepaws as it yells out "Cat! Nip!" It then steers me toward the pantry whereupon the clever little thing uses my back to leap up to a shelf and find a green leafy substance it seems to enjoy.

(beat; chuckling)

Yes, we're quite the team. I should mention that Cat has even given me a cute little nickname: "Oo-ber," which I think is adorable and with which it hails me. But the best part is, after it has had its green leafy substance it will lick and groom me for hours on end. As a result, I have never looked better. So as you see, it is a symbolotic relationship and we have become literally ride or die.

(beat)

Now, Happy, before you wish me your inevitable “Happy birthday,” kindly do so from a respectful distance, all right?

HAPPY
(barely containing herself)

Happy birthday!

KING REX

Thank you, Happy.

Happy suddenly springs forward to hug King Rex violently.

HAPPY

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

KING REX

Yes, yes, okay...

Happy tries licking his face, then rubs up against him like a cat. Cringing, King pulls away.

KING REX

Okay, bye for now.

STELLA

Happy, please.

LILY

I love that story!

KING REX

Thank you, Lily.

STELLA

Bubba, you ready now?

BUBBA JOE

Yeah, yeah, I think so. And, uh, thank you all for kinda showing me how.

LILY

You're welcome, Bubba.

KING REX

Mm-hm.

BUBBA JOE

Okay.

(still a little unsure)

So this is a story about how you can just be living...and then suddenly everything changes.

Happy is doubtful.

KING REX

(under his breath)

The sincerest form of flattery.

BUBBA JOE

Whuzzat?

KING REX

Continue, please!

BUBBA JOE

So...for a long time a great beast roamed the land.

Happy snaps to attention.

LILY

Ooh, that's good!

BUBBA JOE

But you never knew what shape the beast would take. I used to live in the city and I saw what it could do, and it was the worst thing ever, so I knew that wherever I went I would always have to be on the lookout.

LILY

Well yeah!

BUBBA JOE

Then I moved out to the country and got re-homed with a different family, and they gave me my new name Bubba Joe. Anyway, now I'm in the yard most of the time. But I'm always watching. And waiting. That's the biggest thing. Beasts like that don't always come around, but when they do, you have to remember that your only job is to protect your family, your people, cuz they're like your everything so you gotta do it. A lot of times I'd catch a glimpse of the beast off in the distance and I'd run out to get it, but it would disappear.

(beat)

Today was different. I first saw its big eyes at the edge of the woods and it looked like it was heading straight for the house!

So I jumped over the yard fence and started running as fast as I could for it, past the tomato plants, past the hay barn, past everything... until I finally I get to the beast itself. I know I have to stop it before it can make those loud attack noises and kill everyone, so I gather all my strength and with everything I have I latch onto its soft underbelly and I pull it down and stop the threat and save my loved ones!

LILY

Yay, Bubba Joe!

BUBBA JOE

I AM BUBBA JOE FROM KOKOMO OF MOSTLY ROTTWEILER AND I KILLED THE BEAST AND SAVED THEM ALL!

Happy runs and leaps onto Bubba's back.

HAPPY

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

BUBBA JOE

AAGH! GET OFF ME! STOP THAT!

HAPPY

HEY HEY HEY!

Happy holds on and starts snapping her teeth.

BUBBA JOE

Hey, no biting! Get off me!

HAPPY

(still snapping)

HEY HEY!

BUBBA JOE

STOP IT!

STELLA

Happy!

He shakes Happy off him.

BUBBA JOE

What is her problem?!

STELLA

Okay, let's settle down.

BUBBA JOE

I am not the one who needs to settle down! She's outta control!

STELLA

She's just--

BUBBA JOE

She's CRAZY! Probably has the spirit of the beast I just killed in her!

STELLA

Please.

BUBBA JOE

How do we know she doesn't!

HAPPY

HEY!

BUBBA JOE

She doesn't belong here! She's getting in everyone's way! She's gotta go!

(beat)

Oh yeah. Except where's she gonna go? Where's any of us gonna go?

STELLA

What do you mean?

BUBBA JOE

I mean if we can't leave till we become a Pack, and she's keeping us from becoming one, then we're trapped.

BOGIE

Trapped?!

LILY

I don't want to be trapped! This isn't like one of those weird cults, is it?

KING REX

Or a re-education camp or something?

BUBBA JOE

Or a kill shelter?

HAPPY
Hey!

BOGIE
A kill shelter?!

BUBBA JOE
That's right! What else are they gonna take from you, Bogie?

HAPPY
Hey!

STELLA
Everybody, please, please just-

LILY
Stella, what's going on!

BOGIE
Yeah, you're the leader! You're supposed to know how to handle all this!

STELLA
Yes, I'm a leader! But I don't know everything, okay? Some things are on a need to know basis around here. Beat What I do know is that no one leaves here - including me - unless and until we have mutual trust and respect. And that's something we have to figure out together. I can't make it happen any faster and I can't make it happen by myself.

BUBBA JOE
Then maybe we need a new leader. Someone who *can* make it happen.

STELLA
Like you?

BUBBA JOE
Maybe *that's* the way things want to be.

STELLA
Or is that just the way *you* want them to be?

BUBBA JOE
And why shouldn't I?

STELLA

(beat)

Because you don't have a clue, Bubba. About anything.

BUBBA JOE

Oh yeah?

STELLA

You didn't even know that Happy was just playing with you. And that maybe she didn't know how to do it any other way because she was probably never socialized anywhere long enough to learn how.

HAPPY

Hey.

STELLA

Or that she was play-biting you because she loved your story so much she was pretending to be you slaying the beast.

BUBBA JOE

She was trying to hurt me!

STELLA

She was matching your energy. Everyone's energy. This whole time. When things are crazy, she gets crazy.

BUBBA JOE

No...

STELLA

(demonstrating)

I'VE DONE THIS BEFORE!

HAPPY

HEY! HEY! HEY! HEY-HEY!

STELLA

(to Happy)

Ssshhh...

HAPPY

(quietly)

Hey.

Pause.

KING REX

I believe Stella speaks from experience.

LILY

I do too.

BOGIE

Pretty much.

HAPPY

Hey.

STELLA

So how's this: why don't we all take a moment to slow down. Maybe take a nap.

LILY

I think that's a very good idea.

KING REX

I could use a little shnoozle.

BOGIE

Okay with me.

STELLA

Bubba? Can you settle down too?

BUBBA JOE

Fine.

Happy goes to the loveseat and curls up.

HAPPY

(yawning)

Heeeeeyyy.

Bubba gets in Happy's face.

BUBBA JOE

You will never be part of this Pack.

STELLA

BUBBA! PILLOW! NOW!

HAPPY

HEY HEY HEY!

STELLA
(to Happy)

Quiet.

(deep breath to center herself)
Yeah, I think we could all use a little break. Wake up different.

Stella yawns. The others yawn and curl up on their pillows.

LILY
Sounds good to me.

BOGIE
Me too.

BUBBA JOE
(more to himself)
I do have a clue.

LILY
Shhhh...

Stella looks around as one by one the others quickly fall asleep. Not wanting to disturb Happy, she sits on the floor leaning against the loveseat and lowers her head. Lights slowly dim.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The dogs are still asleep. Happy is dreaming; her legs twitch. She whimpers. Music. She snaps awake and looks around. She sings “Let Me In.”

HAPPY

I WAS DREAMING I WAS RUNNING
TO A PLACE I’D NEVER BEEN
COMFORT AND SECURITY
BUT THEY WOULDN’T LET ME IN.

THE WAKING WORLD’S NO DIFFERENT
SINCE BACK FROM AN EARLY AGE
SOMEONE TOOK ME FROM MY MAMA
AND PUT ME IN A CAGE.

THEY THREW ME IN THE RIVER
ICY COLD, I NEARLY SANK
TILL SOMEONE HAD A CHANGE OF HEART
AND PULLED ME TO THE BANK.

I SPUTTERED, COUGHED AND WHEEZED
A WORD RISING IN MY HEAD
I LET LOOSE A GLORIOUS CRY
AND THIS IS WHAT I SAID:

HEY! HEY! HEY! HEY!
THAT’S ALL I COULD SAY - HEY!
HEY! HEY! HEY! HEY!
I’M ALIVE TODAY!
HEY, HEY! HEY! HEY!
I’M BREATHING, I’M OKAY
HEY, HEY! HEY! HEY!
AND NOW IT’S TIME TO PLAY!

BUT ONE WORD BARELY SEEMED ENOUGH
TO EXPRESS THAT SWEET RELIEF
SO I ADDED JUST A COUPLE MORE
TO EXPLAIN A NEW BELIEF

‘CUZ ANYTIME YOU START AFRESH
WITH NEW APPRECIATION
IS A TRIUMPH ALL ITS OWN

AND DEMANDS A CELEBRATION

SO, HEY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
 YOU'VE CHEATED DEATH AGAIN
 HEY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
 YOUR LOSS IS NOW A WIN

HEY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
 YOU CHEATED DEATH AGAIN!
 HEY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
 SO NOW YOU CAN BEGIN TO...

RUN IN THE SUN
 TO DRINK FROM A SINK
 TO CHEW ON A SHOE
 WHATEVER YOUR WISH IS!

TO LEAP WITH A SHEEP
 TO LAUGH WITH CALF
 TO SMILE IN A PILE
 OF VERY DEAD FISHES!

TO SHOW A NEW GLOW
 SO BRIGHT THAT IT'S BLINDING
 YOU JUST NEED A NUDGE
 YOU JUST NEED REMINDING

WE ALL HAVE THAT SPARK
 WE ALL HAVE THAT SPIRIT
 AND THAT'S WHAT I'M SAYING
 IF THEY COULD JUST
 HEAR IT...

SO, HEY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
 YOU'VE CHEATED DEATH AGAIN
 HEY! HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
 YOUR LOSS IS NOW A WIN
 HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HEYYYYY!
 HAPPY BIRTHDAY, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TODAY!

BUT...
 MAYBE I'LL TAKE IT DOWN A NOTCH
 NOT TRY SO HARD TO FIT IN
 IF I LISTEN MORE AND LEARN TO WATCH
 WILL THEY FINALLY LET ME IN?

Stella awakens, ready to go.

STELLA

Okay, nap time is over! Up we go!

Lights up all the way. The others wake up, stretch, scratch behind their ears, etc.

STELLA

That's right, good stretches... Good nap... Good day.

KING REX

Yes, it is, Stella. A very good day...to packify!

STELLA

We have a bit more work to do.

KING REX

And that's a good thing. But not unconceivable, because as Lily pointed out, each of *us* is good.

BOGIE

How ya figure?

KING REX

We are good because we are royals...and we are royals because we are good.

LILY

It's only logical.

BOGIE

Then why's my guy always asking if I'm good?

LILY

Like how?

BOGIE

He'll have a treat - my favorite liver treat - and before he gives it to me he's like, "Who's a good boy?"

BUBBA JOE

They all say that.

LILY

Unless you're not a boy.

KING REX

It's a versatile question. Theo-rhetorical.

BOGIE

Okay. But it's weird. 'Cuz I'm sitting there thinking, I guess I'm supposed to say 'I am,' but I don't know how to make him understand that.

STELLA

Just by being good?

BOGIE

Can you be good...just by being?

LILY

I think you can be.

BOGIE

Even when you do bad things?

STELLA

We always have a choice.

BOGIE

Do we?

LILY

You were just trying to survive though, right? Out in the woods?

BOGIE

I guess...

STELLA

And are you sorry for doing those things?

BOGIE

I am.

STELLA

Then don't ever do them again and move on.

BOGIE

Just like that?

STELLA
There is always forgiveness--

BOGIE
Forgiveness? Where? How?

STELLA
There just is. And you have to learn to forgive yourself. We all do bad things. Beat Let's move on. Okay--

BUBBA JOE
Wait. What did you ever do that was bad?

STELLA
That's also on a need-to-know basis.

BUBBA JOE
We need to know. I mean, you wanna be part of the Pack too, right?

STELLA
I do.

BUBBA JOE
(to the group)
So who wants to hear about the bad stuff Stella did?

OTHERS
Sure...let's hear it...hey...how bad can it be, etc.

BUBBA JOE
The Pack has spoken.

STELLA
Pack-in-progress.

BUBBA JOE
Whatever.

STELLA
(thinking)
Okay.

Happy runs and eagerly sits before Stella.

STELLA

(a deep breath)

So when you're part of a military working unit, you only want one thing. And that is to be deployed. It's what you've trained for, it's your whole purpose in life. Now, because I'm a female and a little smaller than the others, I had to work twice as hard to prove myself, which I did - to the surprise of a lot of the other soldiers in the 341st Training Squadron. But one day when we were going through our drills, we had a whole new cohort, a new group of soldiers, join us. These guys were like nothing I'd ever seen. They looked a little like me, you know, of German Shepherd, but they weren't. We found out later they were of Belgian Malinois. And these guys were machines. They jumped higher, patrolled faster, sniffed out mines quicker... They seemed to do everything better. And I'd worked so hard, wanted it so bad, I wasn't about to let outsiders like them take my place. So first I became friendly with them, you know, gained their trust. And then little by little I started telling them stuff that wasn't...exactly true, like wrong information about the latest scent profiles, where the trainers had buried the latest practice mines. Anything to hurt their performance. Beat And...it worked. I was deployed first and I served two tours. Well, one was cut short, but that's another story.

HAPPY

(disappointed)

Hey.

BOGIE

You lied to all those other soldiers?

LILY

How could you do that? There could have been real consequences from them believing you.

STELLA

There were. And I still see his face every night before I fall asleep.

KING REX

One of them perished?

STELLA

Injured. Enough to lose his deployment.

BUBBA JOE

I knew it! I knew there was something. And all this time acting like you were better than us. You're bad! Bad!

STELLA

I did a bad thing. That doesn't mean that *I'm* bad. Any one of us can be free from the past if that's what we truly want. Now I serve.

Who. Who do you serve?
BUBBA JOE

You. All of you.
STELLA

No, who gave you this job - to serve us? Who's your higher up?
BUBBA JOE

I'm not really sure, to tell you the truth.
STELLA

The truth? Like we're supposed to believe anything you say now, after what you just told us?
BUBBA JOE

Yes.
STELLA

Why?
BUBBA JOE

Ever since I started doing this, I've become physically incapable of lying.
STELLA

Really.
BUBBA JOE

What's behind that door?
Beat

A place.
STELLA

What kind of place?
BUBBA JOE

A different place.
STELLA

A good place or a bad place?
BUBBA JOE

STELLA

When you're a Pack member you'll see.

BUBBA JOE

Arrggh! You're making my head explode!

LILY

(going to Bubba)

I think maybe what Stella is saying is that at some point you just have to let go and have faith.

STELLA

That's right, Lily.

LILY

Yeah, faith!

(leaning into him)

You can have faith, can't you, Bubba?

BUBBA JOE

I can try...

Again, Bubba tries mounting her.

LILY

Not that kind.

Bubba disengages with disappointed sigh.

KING REX

In my experience, Mr. Joe, the female of the species sometimes appreciates a softer approach. Observate.

He sidles up to Stella.

KING REX

Greetings, fair Stella.

STELLA

(playing along)

Greetings to you.

KING REX

I'm a king, you know.

So you say.

STELLA

And I'm looking for a queen.

KING REX

Well, I suppose I'm flattered. But you need to know I'm not that into kings.

STELLA

What do you mean?

KING REX

I like when there are two queens.

STELLA

Oh. --Ohhh. Like, really?

KING REX

Stella smiles.

LILY

Remember, she can't lie!

The others laugh.

KING REX

Then so be it! There is a truism I have found to be all truistic and which I have tried to incorporate into my royal philosophy. And that is: if something neither breaks my spirit nor injures my manservants, why should I not allow it?

LILY

I like that attitude.

STELLA

Those Belgians, though...

KING REX

They threatened your pride, just as Cat did mine. But you needed to see that they might have been valued members of a much larger Pack.

BUBBA JOE

Oh, please.

STELLA

What.

BUBBA JOE

You're so full of it. All of you. Where were your sweet words when...
 (points to Happy)
 ...*that* one came along? You couldn't wait to get rid of her.

KING REX

With you leading the charge as I recall.

BUBBA JOE

That's just it--at least I wasn't pretending to be something I'm not.

LILY

We're being nice to her now...

BUBBA JOE

Yeah, when it doesn't matter--when it's *convenient*.

Silence.

STELLA

(quietly)

You have a point, Bubba.

BUBBA JOE

Thank you! See? I do have a clue!

Stella goes to Happy.

STELLA

Happy, I'm sorry. I thought you were a mistake. But you're not. You are exactly where you need to be. With us.

HAPPY

(softly)

Happy birthday.

STELLA

So...

(to the group)

I will not be joining your Pack today.

BUBBA JOE

What?

LILY

No!

STELLA

I was put here to learn. Now I wonder if I know anything.

BOGIE

Then the rest of us are...also guilty.

Pause.

KING REX

Were we really so eager to create an outcast?

Pause. Bogie approaches Happy.

BOGIE Continued

Hey, sweetie. I know you don't like to talk too much. So just nod for yes and shake your head for no, okay?

Happy nods.

BOGIE Continued

You, uh...you've had a pretty hard life, huh?

Happy nods.

BOGIE Continued

Before you came here, did you have anybody looking after you? You know, feeding you or anything like that?

Happy shakes her head.

BOGIE Continued

So you were a stray?

Happy nods.

BOGIE Continued

Your whole life?

Happy nods.

BOGIE Continued

Yeah, that's...that's rough, I know. So look. I don't really know what's going on here too much, but I'll make you a deal.

If you'll be my friend, I promise I'll always look out for you. You know, have your back, that kinda thing. I'll, well, I'll adopt you. Sound like a plan?

Happy nods and falls into him.

BOGIE Continued

You and me, kid.

LILY

Don't forget us.

All except Bubba go to Happy and encircle her with love. From around the Door, a light glows softly. Happy sees this and points.

HAPPY

Hey!

KING REX

There's light around the door. Does that mean...?

STELLA

Close. You may be one short.

Lily beckons Bubba over.

LILY

Bubba? "Faith"...?

BUBBA JOE

I'm good.

LILY

Are you?

The group disbands. Happy stays close to Bogie.

BUBBA JOE

I'm not really the touchy-feely type.

LILY

Mm-hm. You can't even do the right thing and apologize to her?

BUBBA JOE

What's to be sorry about? I was looking out for the Pack.

LILY

By not joining us?

BUBBA JOE

You had it covered.

LILY

The Pack is *all* of us. But you can't be bothered?

BUBBA JOE

Don't preach to me! I killed a great beast to save my Pack at home!

LILY

I'm talking about right now.

BUBBA JOE

Okay. Yeah, I'll tell you. I got a problem with this whole thing about you gotta welcome every stranger. If I had accepted that beast from the very beginning like all of you seem to think is so great, my Pack at home would all be dead right now!

LILY

That was different. This is us, we're all the same kind. Happy is clearly--

BUBBA JOE

I'm a protector. And with Stella not joining us now, it's going to be up to me to--

LILY

Is that what this is about? Your own power!?

BUBBA JOE

I apologize for nothing.

LILY

Then you're an asshole.

The group watches as the light around the Door fades.

BOGIE

Now we're never getting out of here.

BUBBA JOE

Sure, blame it all on me. I'm the bad guy! All I did was kill something that would have come for all of you next.

KING REX

And yet nothing remains of it.

BUBBA JOE

Yeah. What of it?

KING REX

This beast - can you describe it?

BUBBA JOE

Like I said, it had big huge eyes. That glowed. With light that came out.

KING REX

What did the rest of it look like?

BUBBA JOE

Well, it was...shiny. A lot of metal and glass.

KING REX

How was it moving? Did it have legs?

BUBBA JOE

Not really. It had these wheel things.

BOGIE

(beat)

That sounds like a car.

BUBBA JOE

Well, that's what it looked like, yeah. But it was really a--

KING REX

(laughing)

A car?! You killed a CAR?!

BUBBA JOE

Shut up! It was a beast! And I killed it!

BOGIE

You can't kill a car.

BUBBA JOE

It wasn't a car!

LILY

Bubba, maybe it *was*, and you just-- Oh!

Lily suddenly gets it - everything. She clutches her neck, not finding what used to be there.

LILY Continued

Oh no.

BOGIE

(to Lily)

You okay?

LILY

Yeah...I seem to have lost something. I'm sure it just...

Lily beelines to Stella. They talk in hushed, intense tones.

KING REX

So which was it, Mr. Joe? A beast or a car?

BUBBA JOE

What are you getting at?

KING REX

I don't believe you killed anything.

BUBBA JOE

Well I did. And I don't believe *you*. You're not a king. You just want everyone to bow down to you.

KING REX

All we want is the truth.

BUBBA JOE

The truth is you're a pussy-whipped slave and you can go back to your stupid little cat.

KING REX

You may insult me, but you will not insult my feline friend.

BUBBA JOE

Or what?

Bubba shoves King.

Hey!

Bubba!

You really don't want to do that.

What if I do?

HAPPY

STELLA

KING REX

BUBBA JOE

Another shove.

Hey!

Bubba, please-!

It's okay, Lily. I'll protect you.

DON'T YOU GO NEAR HER!

Stay away, Lily!

Show your teeth!

Bubba, don't--

Stop it!

Bubba, please--!

Hey!

HAPPY

LILY

KING REX

BUBBA JOE

BOGIE

STELLA

LILY

HAPPY

BUBBA JOE

(another push)

Curl your lip and show your teeth. You no-balls. Beta. Bitch.

STELLA

Whoa, whoa, whoa--!

Bubba Joe tries pushing King Rex again, but King quickly takes Bubba Joe down. They fight. The others gather around trying to separate them. Happy runs and leaps into the fray with a mighty roar.

HAPPY

HEEEYYYYYYYY!

Almost immediately, she gets pushed back out. Eventually, King pins Bubba on his back, his eyes and nostrils flaring.

KING REX

(showing his teeth)

Don't ever mess with the King, boy!

STELLA

I SAID ENOUGH!

(silence; quietly, but firmly in control)

We don't allow that in here. Or anywhere.

Bubba slinks back to his pillow. Lily is curled up in shock.

KING REX

I apologize for my role in that sorry spectacle.

STELLA

Bubba--

BUBBA JOE

(desperately turning to Stella)

Okay! You win! Is that what you want?

STELLA

Nobody's winning right now.

BUBBA JOE

Then just...let me leave, okay?

STELLA

I can't do that.

(beat)

How do you want to be, Bubba? How do you truly want to be?

BUBBA JOE

I want...to be like I was before.

STELLA

You can't go back. There is only right now. And what's ahead.

Stella walks away and beckons Lily over for a chat. Lily goes to her and again they speak in hushed, intense tones. The others stew in the aftermath, all with their backs to Bubba. Lily nods to Stella and crosses to Bubba's pillow. She sits.

BUBBA JOE

(softly; to Lily)

I wanna die.

LILY

Shh... Bubba, there's just one thing you need to know right now.

Bubba looks at her.

LILY Continued

Everything is going to be okay.

BUBBA JOE

How would you know?

LILY

Where you're from out in the country - did you have butterflies? The big orange and yellow monarchs with the black stripes?

BUBBA JOE

Yeah...?

LILY

Do you know where they come from?

BUBBA JOE

The air?

LILY

Caterpillars. Fat green caterpillars. They feed all day long on the milkweed plants. Then they get a shell. And all the time inside that shell they're becoming a beautiful butterfly. My lady had a garden so I watched them. At every stage they smelled the same. They *were* the same, but they were all so different. How do you think that could that be?

BUBBA JOE

I don't know.

LILY

I don't either! Sometimes we'd see them in summer on our walks up the hill, you know, where I'd sometimes sneak off to. Then they were gone. When it got cooler, the smells on the trail would change from all the dried leaves under the big oak trees and the decaying flowers and there was a feeling that everything was just going to take a nice rest for a while. Then after some rain it got warm again and everything started growing back and it was beautiful.

BUBBA JOE

Seasons, yeah.

LILY

Yeah.

(beat)

So last night I was in bed and I heard something. I don't know how to describe it. A strange kind of...music, maybe? And it was coming from right up that hill. And it was clear and beautiful, high-pitched yips and howls that went on and on...like someone was having a big party or something. I had to know who it was - or what it was. So I crawled under the fence and started running up the trail, like that sound was just pulling me closer and closer. The moon was pretty full so I could see about seven or eight of them including a couple of their little ones all singing their special music. They looked a little like us, only smaller and skinnier with ears that stood straight up. I wasn't sure what to do next, so I just walked out into the open. They were really surprised! They looked at each other and then they slowly approached me and made a circle around me.

(pause; sadly)

That's when I saw how hungry they were.

BUBBA JOE

(pause)

Then what? You ran home?

LILY

No, I just remember going numb.

BUBBA JOE

Wait. You didn't run and you didn't try to fight?

LILY

No point, really.

BUBBA JOE

So you stayed there... And they...did what?

LILY

What hungry creatures usually do.

BUBBA JOE

You mean they...

LILY

Yes.

BUBBA JOE

So...how are you here?

Silence.

LILY

How are any of us here?

Silence.

BUBBA JOE

(uncomprehending)

What? No.

BOGIE

What...what does that mean? What are you saying, Lily?

KING REX

I believe she's saying that we're actually...

HAPPY

Hey...

LILY

Our collars. Where did they go? I never went anywhere without mine.

BOGIE

(feeling for his; growing panicked)

Me too! Who's got our collars? What's going on?

LILY

(gently)

Listen. It's okay. It really, truly is. The world is a big, wild, beautiful, scary place. And I don't think that anything in it is ever just one thing all the time. Because everything we see and hear and touch and smell...is always changing. Even us.

BUBBA JOE

Well, I'm not changing. I'm the same as I've always been. Is this some kind of joke?

LILY

I'm sure it feels that way to you, Bubba. But think for a second. I remember what I was doing the exact moment before I got here. Do you?

BUBBA JOE

Yeah!

(trying to remember)

I was, uh...

BOGIE

I was at the doctors. And the old man, he was hugging me so tight...and crying and saying good boy over and over.

(to Happy)

You?

Happy shrugs sadly. Bogie reaches out to console her.

KING REX

Oh...I was enveloped in the warm embrace of my older manservants. They too were weeping. Then...I was here.

STELLA

We were detecting mines and all I remember is one of the Belgians running after me. Yelling at me to stop.

LILY

I'm so sorry.

BOGIE

So it is true.

BUBBA JOE

Wait. I remember. I was...tumbling...in the dirt. Then I must have passed out from exhaustion. But at least I got the beast.

They all look at Bubba. A beat.

LILY

(gently)

Bubba...It was just a car. And I think it... got you.

Bubba, pained, goes to Stella.

BUBBA JOE

Is that true?

Stella nods sadly.

BUBBA JOE

That means it's...still out there - the beast. I need to go back. Can I? You can let me - you're powerful! I'll be good. I promise. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Happy. Please. I can't let it happen again!

LILY

What, Bubba? What happened?

BUBBA JOE

The car! But it wasn't just a car! Cars can't do that! I know that!

LILY

What do you mean? Can't do what?

BUBBA JOE

In the city. My other family, my first family. Mama and Big Papa. They got me for protection. That was my job, my one thing I had to do. We were just going for a walk around the block, all of us. And we were almost home and this car - I thought it was just a car - in the street, it slowed way down right near us. Suddenly there're all these loud bangs and bright flashes coming from its windows and they, my people...fell. I couldn't...do anything.

BOGIE

It must have been the people inside the car--

BUBBA JOE

No! That's not-- It had to be a beast! It had to! People - people would never do something like that! They're too good. Right? They're pure. Isn't that why...we love them?

He cries. Happy approaches and gives him a long hug. Lily and the others join to form a protective circle around him.

LILY

Listen. Everything changes. But now we know - we all know - that there's a part of us that *never* changes and never dies. I don't know what to call that part exactly, but I think it's the very, very best part of us. And that's how we can all be together, here, in this place, right now.

Beat. He looks at Stella again. Again, Stella nods. Bubba takes a moment to absorb everything.

BUBBA JOE

(quietly)

"Dog."

LILY

What?

BUBBA JOE

The part of us that never changes. The best part. We should call it "Dog."

STELLA

I like that.

Around the Door, the light shines brightly.

HAPPY

(noticing the light)

Hey!

LILY

Look!

STELLA

Okay, listen carefully. The Door is going to open soon. You have shared moments and stories, listened to each other, and most important, learned from each other. I am proud to pronounce that you have become something greater than your individual selves: You have become a Pack. Because where you are about to go, *no one* can go alone. And so you will continue to rely on each other for company and counsel. Now, when that door opens, there will be more light and you will see a bridge. You will cross that bridge and when you get to the other side you may see loved ones and family that have already passed before you. They have been waiting for you and you will be reunited with them.

OTHERS

Oh! ...My family! ...Oh! ...Thank you! etc.

STELLA

For those who are still waiting for loved ones, you will have each other.

Bogie and Happy share a smile.

KING REX

(to Stella)

Please come.

STELLA

When it's right. In the meantime, dear King, stay noble. Lily, get ready for the greatest adventure yet.

LILY

Thank you.

STELLA

Bogie?

BOGIE

Yeah?

STELLA

You. Are a good boy. And you deserve this. Bubba?

BUBBA JOE

Yeah?

STELLA

You do have a clue. Now learn all you can and love everyone you meet.

BUBBA JOE

Okay.

STELLA

Happy?

HAPPY

Hey.

STELLA

I honor your spirit. You will lead the Pack across.

Hey!

HAPPY

The Door opens slowly, bathing the Pack in light. They are awestruck.

Is that the bridge?

LILY

It is.

STELLA

Are those...colors?

BOGIE

Yes. All of them. It's a rainbow.

STELLA

So beautiful.

LILY

(beat)

Bubba, will you walk with me?

BUBBA JOE

Yes.

KING REX

A word, Mr. Joe. You were willing to sacrifice everything for your Pack. Respect.

Bubba Joe claps King Rex in a tight hug.

So what are you waiting for?

STELLA

With Happy in the lead, they all start off toward the light. They get halfway to the door.

Hey!

HAPPY

Happy runs back to Stella and throws her arms around her legs.

STELLA

It's okay. This is how things want to be. For now.

Happy runs back to the Pack and they continue.

HAPPY

HEEEEEYYYYY...!

STELLA

(softly)

Happy birthday.

As they disappear, the Door closes and the light dims. Stella is alone. She takes a moment to arrange the pillows, then sits on her loveseat.

STELLA

NEXT!

Blackout. End of play.