

AU REVOIR, NOIR

By Mark Bellusci

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CHARACTERS

DIRK Somber and dark, in a Fedora and weathered raincoat.
BILLY Nerdy, with a pocket protector and plenty of pencils.

SCENE

A small, sparse studio. Two chairs flank a small table with an old, beat-up coffee pot and a badly chipped mug. Also on the table are a tape recorder and a notebook PC.

AT RISE: BILLY, tied up and gagged, squirms and squeals. DIRK sits at the PC, types, pauses, then pounds the table. HE pours coffee from the pot and downs it, wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

****If performed in competition, all of this may be mimed.***

DIRK: *(indicating the coffee)* That, *mi amico*, is *real* coffee. Java. Mud. Not that venti-bentee-frappe-zappa-mocha-chocha-lata-ya-ya someone like you would drink.

(BILLY continues squirming and squealing. Finally, DIRK roughly removes the gag from BILLY's mouth.)

DIRK: Something to say?

BILLY: I . . . What are . . . I don't--

DIRK: Guess not. *(begins to put the gag back on)*

BILLY: Please! I'm claustrophobic! Asthmatic! Synthetic fiber sensitive!

DIRK: *(chuckles)* "Synthetic fiber sensitive." Kind of mug uses that one?

BILLY: Rayons and dacrons make my skin hyper-sensitive to—

DIRK: Close that claptrap, or you'll be downing a high-fiber feast.
(gestures to the cloth gag)

BILLY: Look, if it's money, I -- my mom, she could borrow something, I'm sure. But, I mean, I live over a garage; how much money could I possibly have --

DIRK: Spare me the monologue, Buster Brown.

(BILLY stops talking. DIRK hunts and pecks at the keyboard. While doing so, his right hand swipes at an imaginary carriage return, found on older typewriters. After a few moments, HE stops. HE then hits the space bar once, then often, with more emphasis each time)

DIRK: *(to himself)* Froze. First roll in weeks, shot.

BILLY: Maybe a warm boot?

DIRK: *(resigned chuckle)* You know what "a warm boot" used to mean? A send-off by a dame.

BILLY: Oh, I . . .

DIRK: I know. Can't use the word, "dame" any more.

BILLY: I don't care if you--

DIRK: Women want to be called women, fine. What they've taken from mugs like us over the years, I don't blame them.

BILLY: Uh, sure.

DIRK: But still, the words we lost: "Sugar. Sweet stuff. Gals . . ." *(looking off into the distance)* "She had a pair of gams that started in the cellar and climbed through the penthouse."

BILLY: Gams. That some kind of ladder?

DIRK: *(sighing and shaking his head)* Why do I even try? *(gets up to put the gag back on BILLY)*

BILLY: No! Not that. I'll say whatever you want. *Do whatever you want.*

DIRK: What else can you do? You've already turned me into a dead man walking.

BILLY: No, you're -- a little -- you've got me confused with someone else.

DIRK: Nah, you're the mug. You and your type, get me?

BILLY: Yeah, but -- see, I couldn't have hurt you -- or anyone else. I'm a pacifist vegan and --

DIRK: A "vegan?"

BILLY: It's like, a vegetarian squared.

DIRK: How am I supposed to work with that?

BILLY: Work with what?

DIRK: *(types)* "It was a cold, dead-as-nails burger joint. The scar-laden, butt-smoking, short-order cook yelled over a cacophony of grease splatter, "What'll you have, Mac? I ordered a . . .tofu patty and julienne veggies?"

BILLY: I'm sorry, I don't understand--

DIRK: Why do I even try? Listen up. (*turns on the tape recorder or recites from previous notes*) "He walked into the phone booth, slipped a nickel into the slot and jawed with the operator." (*types*) "He hit autodial on his cell."

(*BILLY shakes his head, still confused. DIRK plays the tape or recites from notes.*)

"He got a telegram." (*types*) "He got an IM."

BILLY: I got it! You're a technical writer, chronicling the great advances of technology and --

DIRK: Great? That techno-babble is killing every phrase in the book. Destroying the very place I come from.

BILLY: Where is that?

DIRK: A world of character, get me? Of mystery and intrigue. Of subtle shades of gray. A world . . .of noir.

BILLY: A world . . .of noir?

DIRK: A world you're burying.

BILLY: No! I love noir. Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Philip Marlowe, The Thin Man.

DIRK: They don't belong here anymore. It's all you now.

BILLY: But I'm a nobody. Tech support guy by day, gamer by night, geek 24 hours a day.

DIRK: And today's last hope for noir.

BILLY: Come on. Look at me. The only muscle I have is in my mouse finger.

DIRK: In today's world, you're the tough guy.

BILLY: Wait a minute: you couldn't have mistaken me for . . .Everyone knows I'm not . . .See, my name is *Billy Gate*, not Bill--

DIRK: In this business, down-on-their-luck loners are the *modis operandi*.

BILLY: *Modis operandi* for what?

DIRK: For the last stand. The final fight. One more shot to write modern noir, or die trying.

BILLY: I don't want to die!

DIRK: You ain't the one dying. All you have to do is be the technical consultant.

BILLY: How do I do that?

DIRK: Well first, you escape.

BILLY: But you're holding the . . . (*points to the gun*)

DIRK: (*putting the gun, or mimed gun, down*) Not anymore. Now I'm writing. (*typing as HE narrates*) "He was a pale, sickly, slip of a sad sack. With a whiny voice and a wimpish demeanor."

BILLY: What, you think I like being this way? Working a million hours for no pay, no social life, eating mom's macaroni and cheese every night, waiting for that big break?

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* "But that all was about to change. Because *this* was his big break."

BILLY: Being kidnapped is your idea of--

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* "At first, he continued his woe-is-me wimpishness. But sometimes, you either change . . . or die."

BILLY: Wait! You said you wouldn't kill me.

DIRK: Never said I'd free you, either.

BILLY: Then what do I--

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* Then, a voice from inside said, "Shut up and escape!"

BILLY: Well, I . . . *(struggles unsuccessfully, and is quickly left panting)* This is impossible. I'm going to die in this chair!

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* "The voice inside told him to assess the situation, turn his negatives into positives."

BILLY: Positives?? I'm tied up, with no—

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* "Positives that included his total lack of muscle."

BILLY: All right, I'm a pencil necked geek! You don't have to rub it—

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* "By using his silly putty stature, he could simply squirm out of his bonds."

(BILLY shrugs and tries it. After a few moments, HE pulls his arms free.)

BILLY: Wow, I'm -- I did it!

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* "Freedom, however, is a double edged sword: earning it is one thing; knowing what to do with it, another."

BILLY: But the . . . *(points to the gun)*

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* "To make sure the hand cannon didn't enter the picture, he'd have to snatch it."

BILLY: But my pacifist ways.

DIRK: *(typing and narrating)* "Then he thought: no sense being a *dead* pacifist."

(Beat, then BILLY snatches the gun.)

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