

Billy and the Wizard

TERRY BISSON

Just what do you do when you find the Devil rummaging through your garage... ?

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ILLY had a secret. He liked to play with dolls. One of Billy's dolls could talk. His name was Clyde. Clyde only talked when Billy pulled his string.

One day Billy pulled his string.

"Would you like to meet the Wizard?" Clyde asked.

Billy was surprised. Clyde had never asked a question before. Billy pulled his string again.

"How about it?" Clyde asked. "How many little boys get to meet the

Wizard?"

"What's he the Wizard of?" Billy asked. He pulled Clyde's string again.

"He's the Wizard of Everything," Clyde said. "And he's hiding in the garage."

"What's he hiding from?" asked Billy. He pulled Clyde's string again.

"He's the Wizard of Everything," said Clyde. Sometimes Clyde said the same thing over and over. "And he's hiding in the garage."

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BILLY looked in the garage. There was nothing in the garage but old mag-azines.

"I looked in the garage," said Billy. "But I didn't see any Wizard."

He pulled Clyde's string.

"Of course not," said Clyde. "He's hiding. You have to look harder."

Billy looked harder. "I still don't see any Wizard," he said. He pulled Clyde's string.

"Of course not," said Clyde. "He's hiding. You have to look harder."

Billy looked harder. He looked through all the magazines.

Finally, he found one called *Today's Wizard*. He opened it up, and there was the Wizard. He was little and flat, and he wore a pointy hat.

"I am not the Wizard," he said. "Go away."

"You are so," said Billy. "I can tell by your hat."

The Wizard didn't say anything. He was just a picture. After a while. Billy turned the page.

There was the Wizard again. "How did you find me?" he asked.

"Clyde told me you were hiding in the garage," said Billy. He turned the page again.

The Wizard was the same on every page. He had a pointy beard to go with his pointy hat. "That Clyde," said the Wizard.

"Are you really the Wizard of Everything?" Billy asked.

"Turn the page," said the Wizard. Billy did. "And who told you that, my boy?"

"Clyde," said Billy.

"That Clyde," said the Wizard. "You should know better than to pull his string. Turn the page."

Billy turned the page again.

"I'm not the Wizard of Everything," said the Wizard. "I'm the Wizard of Everything Else."

Billy thought about that. "Who are you hiding from?" he asked.

"Who do you think?" asked the Wizard.

Billy turned the page. "I give up," he said.

"The Devil," said the Wizard. "Now put me back in the pile."

"Are you playing with dolls again?" asked Billy's mother. She was standing in the door of the garage.

"No, ma'am," said Billy.

"Come to supper then."

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"BILLY was playing with dolls again," said Billy's mother. She was carving the turkey.

"Of course," said Billy's father. "That's because he's a sissy."

"I am not," said Billy.

"You are so," said Billy's father. "Look, I brought you another doll."

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BILLY took the doll to his room after supper. It was a baby doll. Billy hated it.

It had a string. Billy pulled it.

"You're a sissy," said the doll.

"I am not," said Billy. He shook the doll and pulled the string again.

"You are so," said the doll.

Billy tied the doll to a pencil. Then he got a book of matches and burned the doll up. He pulled its string so he could hear it scream.

"What are you doing in there?" asked Billy's mother.

"Nothing," said Billy.

"Playing with dolls," said Billy's father.

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"DOLLS are stupid," said Billy. It was the next day. He was playing with Clyde behind the garage, where no one could see. "I hate dolls," he said.

"Pull my string," said Clyde.

Billy did.

"Even dolls hate dolls," said Clyde. "I would rather be a little boy like you."

"Really?" said Billy. He hugged Clyde and pulled his string again. "Not really," said Clyde. "You're a sissy. Would you like to meet the Wizard?"

"I already did," said Billy. "And I am not a sissy."

"How many little sissies get to meet the Wizard?" asked Clyde.

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BILLY threw Clyde into the garbage and went to the garage to find the Wizard.

He opened *Today's Wizard*, and there he was in his pointy hat.

"Where's Clyde?" asked the Wizard.

"He called me a sissy," said Billy. He turned the page.

"That Clyde," said the Wizard. "I told you not to pull his string."

"I had no one else to play with," said Billy. He looked around the garage. It was dark and scary. "Can I take you outside?" he asked.

"No way," said the Wizard. "I'm in hiding."

"Why is the Devil after you?" he asked.

"Why do you think?" asked the Wizard.

Billy turned the page. "I give up," he said.

"He wants to steal my hat," said the Wizard. "So he can rule the world."

Billy thought about that. "What does he look like?" he asked. He turned the page.

"He looks ugly and evil," said the Wizard. "Now put me back in the pile. Here comes your mother."

"What are you doing in there?" asked Billy's mother.

"Nothing," said Billy

"Put your dolls away and come to supper."

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"GET a load of this," said Billy's father. He was reading the paper. "Wiz-ard Goes Into Hiding."

“He’s hiding from the Devil,” Billy said.

“He’s apparently not the Wizard of Everything anyway,” said Billy’s father. “So what’s the big deal?”

“He’s the Wizard of Everything Else,” said Billy.

“What do you know about it?” said Billy’s mother. “Eat your turkey.” They had turkey every night.

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BILLY woke up in the middle of the night. Clyde was standing on his chest.

Billy was afraid. “I’m sorry I threw you in the garbage,” he said.

“Pull my string,” said Clyde.

Billy pulled his string.

“I’m sorry I called you a sissy,” said Clyde. “Now hurry. Come with me! It’s an emergency.”

“What’s the problem?” Billy asked. He pulled Clyde’s string.

“The Devil is in the garage, looking for the Wizard. It’s an emergency!”

* * * *

IT was midnight. Billy’s parents were asleep.

Billy sneaked out the side door, into the garage.

The Devil was sitting on the floor, going through the magazines. He looked ugly and evil. He had a snout like a dog. He wasn’t wearing any pants.

“What are you doing here?” asked Billy. Even though he knew.

“Don’t bother me, kid,” said the Devil. “Go play with your dolls.”

“The Wizard’s not here,” said Billy.

"You're a liar," said the Devil. "I like that. Now go back to bed and leave me alone. I have work to do."

He started going through the magazines again.

"This is my garage," said Billy.

"It is not," said the Devil. "It's your father's. And you're a sissy."

"I am not," said Billy. "If I had a gun, I would shoot you."

"Be my guest," said the Devil. Then he said something in Latin, and a magic gun appeared in Billy's hand. It was silver. Billy pointed it at the Devil and pulled the trigger but it just went *click*.

"Guess I forgot to load it," said the Devil. He grinned. "It takes magic bullets. And look what I found."

He held up a magazine. It was *Today's Wizard*. "Thanks for the tip, Clyde," he said.

Billy was shocked. "You told on him!" he said. He pulled Clyde's string.

"I'm sorry!" said Clyde. "Pull my string again. But only halfway out this time."

"Don't do it!" said the Devil. But Billy did.

"*Si vis pacem para helium,*" said Clyde. "*Bibere venerium in auro.*"

The Devil stood up, looking scared. And no wonder: three gold bullets had appeared in Billy's gun.

"I was just about to leave," said the Devil. He held the magazine over his face and tried to hide.

But it did him no good. Billy shot him three times: once in the snout and twice in the heart.

The Devil disappeared. So did the magic gun. Only the magazine was left. Billy picked it up.

It had a bullet hole all the way through it. "Oh no," said Billy. He opened it with trembling hands.

The Wizard's pointy hat had a hole in it, but the Wizard was okay.

"Good going, Billy," he said. "You're no sissy. But how did the Devil find me?"

Billy told him and turned the page.

"That Clyde," the Wizard said. "He can't keep his big mouth shut. Pull his string and let's see what he has to say for himself."

Billy pulled Clyde's string.

"I'm sorry," said Clyde. "The Devil said he would make me a Devil too. Anything is better than being a doll. Almost."

"We all make mistakes," said the Wizard. "So I forgive you. Besides, you saved the day."

"It's true," said Billy. "Maybe the Wizard will make you into a little boy, as a reward."

"Thanks anyway," said Clyde. "I'd rather be a doll."

Billy thought about that.

"Suit yourself," said the Wizard. "I'm out of here."

"What about your hat?" Billy asked the Wizard. "It has a hole in it."

"I have an extra," said the Wizard. He was starting to fade away. "And now I don't have to hide anymore."

Billy turned the page. The pointy hat was still there, and so was the hole, but the Wizard was gone.

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"WHAT'S that infernal racket?" said Billy's father. He was standing in the door. "Give me that magazine and go back to bed."

"Yes, sir," said Billy. He handed his father the magazine.

"*Today's Wizard*," said Billy's father. He threw it onto the pile. "Pointy hats and dolls! You are such a sissy. Go back to bed and take your doll with you."

"Yes, sir," said Billy. He pulled Clyde's string as he went into the house.

"You're the big sissy," said Clyde.

"What did you say?" asked Billy's father.

"Nothing," said Billy. "It wasn't me."

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