

Bobby Bare

"The Devil And Billy Markham"

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The Devil walked into Linebaugh's on a rainy Nashville night
While the lost souls sat and sipped their soup in the
sickly neon light.

And the Devil, he looked around the room, then got
down on his knees.

He says, "Is there one among you scum who'll roll the
dice with me?"

Well, Red, he just strums his guitar, pretending not to
hear.

And Eddie, he just looks away and sips on his beer.

Vince, he says, "Not me, I'll pass, I've had my share of
Hell"

And kept scribbling on a napkin, some song she's
thought would sell.

Ronnie just kept whisperin' low to the snuff queen
clutching his sleeve,

And somebody coughed, and the Devil scoffed, and
turned on his heels to leave.

"Hold on," says a voice from the back of the room.

"'fore you walk out that door.

If you're lookin' for some action, friend, well, I've rolled
them dice before."

And there stood Billy Markham, he's been on the scene
for years,

Singin' all them raunchy songs that the town didn't
want to hear.

He'd been cut and bled a thousand times, and his eyes
were wise and sad,

All his songs were the songs of the street, and all his
luck was bad.

"I know you," says Billy Markham, "from many a dark
and funky place,

But you always spoke in a different voice and wore a
different face.

Me, I've gambled here on Music Row with hustlers and
with whores,

And, Hell, I ain't afraid to roll them devilish dice of
yours."

"Well, then, get down," says the Devil" just as if you
was gonna pray,
And take these dice in your luckless hand and I'll tell
you how this game is played.
You get one roll and you bet your soul and if you roll
thirteen you win,
And all the joys of flesh and gold are yours to touch
and spend.
But if that thirteen don't come up, then you can kiss
your ass goodbye
And will your useless bones to God, 'cause your
goddamn soul is mine!"

"Thirteen?" says Billy Markham. "Hell, I've played in
tougher games.
I've loved ambitious women and I've rode on wheelless
trains.
So gimme a room, you stinkin' fiend, and let it all
unwind.
Nobody's ever rolled a thirteen yet, but this just might
be the time."

Then Billy Markham, he takes the dice, and the dice
feels heavy as stones.
"They should, they should," the Devil says, "'cause
they're carved from Jesus' bones."
And Billy Markham he turns the dice and the dice, they
have no spots.
"I'm sorry," says the Devil, "but they're the only dice I
got."

"Well, shit," says Billy Markham. "Now, I really don't
mean to bitch,
But I never thought I'd stake my roll in a sucker's game
like this."

"Well, then, walk off," says the Devil. "Nobody's tied
you down."

"Walk off where?" says Billy Markham. "It's the only
game in town.
But I just wanna say 'fore I make my play, that if I
should chance to lose,
I will this guitar to some would-be star who'll play some
honest blues,
Who ain't afraid to sing the words like damn or shit or
fuck
And who ain't afraid to put his ass on the stage where
he makes his bucks.
But if he plays this guitar safe, and sings some sugary

lies,
I'll haunt him till we meet in Hell, now, gimme them
fuckin' dice."

And Billy Markham shakes the dice and yells, "Come
on, thirteen!"
And the dice, they roll -- and they come up blank. "You
lose!" the Devil screams.

"I must say 'fore we go our way that I really do like your
style.
Of all the fools I've played and beat, you're the first one
who lost with a smile."

"Well, I'll tell you somethin'," Billy Markham says.
"Those odds weren't too damn bad.
In fourteen years on Music Row, that's the best damn
chance I've had."

Then, arm in arm, Billy Markham and the Devil walk out
through Linebaugh's door,
Leavin' Billy's old beat-up guitar there on the floor.
And if you go into Linebaugh's now, you can see it
there today
Hangin' from a nail on the wall of peelin' gray
It's Billy Markham's old guitar
That nobody dares to play.

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