

(LIGHTS UP-- another street lamp in front of a tenement apartment-- later that night as Billy stops walking when he gets under the light and starts tap dancing. Before he's finished, Irish Cop, Bumpy and the boys step out of the shadows. Billy falls out of his dancing.)

IRISH COP

You know we got laws against dancin in the streets.

(A light is switched on behind a tenement window. OC opens the window and, with sax at the ready, watches them from above.)

BILLY

(ignores Cop)

Bumpy, what you doin with this pounder⁹⁸? You on a date or somethin?

BUMPY

Rhythm, you--

IRISH COP

"Rhythm"?

BUMPY

Yeah, I know, the guy's a comedienne. Officer O'Connor is third generation 40 Thieves and I would appreciate it if you showed a little respect.

BILLY

(sizing up the odds)

Wish I could, but it just isn't in me.

(Billy digs into his pocket, pulls out his switchblade, clicks it open and assumes a fighting stance. Irish Cop looks at Bumpy, laughs, and then spins around, bringing his nightstick down across Billy's hand and knocking the knife free.)

+♫(6) MUSIC: *The Artists in America* starting at 1:00 as OC plays his sax and a DRUMMER joins him, banging his drums from another open window as his apartment light goes on.

Billy, yells, grabs his hand and gets caught with the baton again on Cop's back-swing which sends him to the ground.)

BUMPY

Look, gate, Madame is losing patience. Are you gonna play ball with us or what?

BILLY

(struggling to his feet)

Bumpy, you are one icky salty⁹⁹ yard dog whose been off the tracks since your mama made you when she squatted over the toilet.

(A gang member opts to kick Billy but Bumpy stops him.)

But just for the record, you don't scare me-- and neither do your connections. Rubbin me out will just set me free from evil mugs like you, Flattie, and Whitey.

(Gang member motions to Bumpy if it's okay *now* to strike Billy. Bumpy waves him off.)

No, I'm goin independent. I'm shakin loose of all of ya bloodsuckers.

(MUSIC TEMPO INCREASES around 1:30.)

IRISH COP

That's brave talk for a man on his knees. Would you be willin to sacrifice that skirt we saw you walk-
ing with too for such a noble cause?

BILLY

Don't you dare touch her.

IRISH COP

Whoe, I seem to have found something for you to live for.

BILLY

You touch her and I'll kill you.

(Bumpy nods it's okay to kick Billy. The kick sends him back to the ground. Others join in. At 1:55 Bumpy does too. Billy's body is lifted into the air and becomes a bloody rag doll dance partner between the men, who take turns jitterbugging him in true jiu jitsu fashion. At 2:40 the beating ends as Bumpy steps in to stop it.)

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BUMPY

Rhythm, you ain't killin nobody. You got till tomorrow to see the light or we's be killin you. C'mon, boys.

(As they walk away, Bumpy stops and walks back to Billy's crumpled, struggling body.)

This is for mama.

(He kicks Billy hard in the ribs, lifting his body off the ground and turning him toward the audience. Billy's arm flops forward, pointing at the audience. The men exit stage laughing. Drummer drops his window and turns the apartment light off. OC, leaning out his window, looks at Billy, sadly shakes his head and then turns to look up at the night sky before pulling his window down and turning out the apartment light.

LIGHTS DOWN to a SINGLE SPOT on Billy. A moment

+♪ (8) passes before we hear the three opening cymbal notes of *Kickin' The Gong Around*. The first one jars Billy. The second one makes him lift his head to look at the audience. The third one gets him up on his elbows.

SPOT RISING ON Cab as he moves as only he can in white tails behind Billy. LIGHTS DIMLY UP marching one row at a time toward the back of the stage on each “call” by the ORCHESTRA until it is revealed behind Cab, seated in a triangle of chairs trailing to the back of the stage with Cab at its apex at the front just behind Billy. The street scene is gone, replaced now with the Cotton Club interior in deep shadow.)

CAB

(singing)

It was down in Chinatown, all the cokies laid around, some were high and some were mighty low...

(When Cab mimics snorting coke and starts to scat at 1:43, Billy, barely standing, dances like a loose-limbed addict to the scat. By the break at 2:20, Billy is dancing in synch with Cab, shadowing his every move but oblivious to his presence at the same time. When Cab stops dancing and begins scatting at 3:00, Billy stumbles out of the dance-- and the light-- to grab his side, leaving the focus on Cab.)

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When the number ends, LIGHTS RISE on the Cotton Club set as Harold Arlen enters with sheet music in hand from one side of the stage and Tharbis from the other. He walks up to Cab. She grabs Billy to keep him from falling as other members of the revue also enter.)

ARLEN

Cab, you're hittin' on all sixes.¹⁰⁰

THARBIS

Billy, what happened this time?

CAB

Thanks, Mr. Arlen.

BILLY

Tripped over a lamp post on the way home. Guess I had too much to drink.

(LIGHTS DIM ON Arlen/Cab/Revue cast as they turn their backs on the audience to confer with the band.)

THARBIS

Billy!

BILLY

I didn't say anything stupid last night, did I?

THARBIS

Only that you loved me.

BILLY

Did I now?

THARBIS

(pushes Billy away)

What, didn't you mean it?

End excerpt.

98 **Pounder:** a cop.

99 **Salty:** angry, ill-tempered.

100 **Hittin' on all sixes.** 100% performance (out of a six-cylinder car engine).