PLEASE BE AWARE THAT
THIS PLAY IS FULLY PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT

All plays, books, music and other materials published by Heartland Plays, Inc. are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries which the United States has reciprocal relations including, but not limited to all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, The Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention. All rights to the plays and materials on our website are strictly reserved including, and without limitation, professional and amateur performance rights; motion pictures; public reading; radio and television broadcasting; audio and video recording and reproduction of any type known or yet to be invented; information storage and retrieval systems of any type known or yet to be invented; and the rights of translation into any and all languages. No individual or organization whether amateur or stock may perform this or any play published by Heartland Plays, Inc. without first obtaining advance permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. and paying the appropriate fees including Royalties and Single-Use Copyright fees. Heartland Plays, Inc. collects royalties on behalf of the Playwrights whose plays it publishes. Unauthorized copying, transcribing or reproduction of this or any play or excerpt, or storage or transmittal in any form and by any means whether known or yet to be invented, is strictly forbidden except as provided by Agreement with Heartland Plays, Inc. Any unauthorized use is a violation of copyright laws and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

FIVE SIMPLE RULES TO REMEMBER

1. **DO** take advantage of the free online perusal of our plays to help you make the best choice for your particular needs or production.

2. **DO** enjoy the convenience of our online purchase application for performance rights and single-use copyright.

3. **DO** understand that this play and all plays and materials on our website are controlled by Heartland Plays, Inc. and fully protected by copyright.

4. **DO NOT** attempt in any way to copy, transcribe or reproduce this play by any means or perform this play or use any play or material from our website without first receiving permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. Any attempt to use this or any other work without first obtaining permission is a violation of copyright and punishable by law.

5. **DO NOT** rob this Author or any of the Authors we represent of their right to be paid for the use of their property. It is a crime and it is wrong!
STRANDED TRAVELER

A Short Play by

Eric Thomas

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
REPRODUCTION WITHOUT SPECIFIC WRITTEN PERMISSION PROHIBITED

Performance Rights Available Exclusively through
Heartland Plays, Inc. at heartlandplays.com
playsnow@heartlandplays.com
customer service: 406-431-7680

Copyright © 2019 by Eric Thomas
Stranded Traveler
by Eric Thomas

CAST OF CHARACTERS

EARL: Middle-class man; any age over 30

JACKIE: Possibly homeless; any gender, age

BUS RIDER: Person at a bus stop; any gender, age

TIME

The present

SYNOPSIS

A man is approached at a bus stop by someone asking for money because their wallet has been stolen. Rather than giving money or saying he can’t help, the man engages in a challenging conversation, revealing each person’s dishonesty.
Stranded Traveler
by Eric Thomas

AT RISE: EARL is standing at a bus stop at night. JACKIE enters and approaches EARL.

JACKIE
Excuse me. I’m really sorry to bother you but my wallet was stolen, and I just need bus fare to get home. I’ll get your address and I swear I’ll mail you the money back.

EARL
(Laughs)
I know what this is.

Huh?

JACKIE
I know what this is. It’s the “Stranded Traveler” scam. It’s like, famous.

The stranded...

EARL
Stranded traveler. You’re in a bind because – for example – you ran out of gas on the way to your uncle’s funeral. Blew a tire and had to pay to get it fixed. Or your wallet was stolen and you need bus fare. The taking my address so you can mail me the money thing? That’s new. Nice touch.

JACKIE
Look, sir. I don’t know what you mean. I really have been—

EARL
Stranded. Right. I get it. The scam has been used for centuries. I bet there were people in covered wagons doing this. So, what is it? Why do you really need the money?

JACKIE
Sir, it’s exactly what I told you. I had my wallet stolen and—

Is it heroin?

EARL

Sir, I—

JACKIE
EARL
You can be honest with me. It’s heroin, isn’t it?

JACKIE
Look, I—

EARL
(Deliberately)
Why not just be honest? Is it heroin?

JACKIE
(Beat)
You want me to be honest?

EARL
Lying to me is not going to get you any money. Maybe honesty will.

JACKIE
Man, if I was honest, I’d never get any money.

EARL
I knew it. Heroin.

JACKIE
I didn’t say that.

EARL
You didn’t have to. Addicts lie. And I called you on your malarkey. You know I can’t give you money for drugs.

JACKIE
Uh huh. So, let me ask you. Which is worse, giving money to an addict, or not giving it?

EARL
This sounds like a trick question.

JACKIE
Look, if an addict needs a fix, they’re gonna get it. Know what I mean? If someone like you doesn’t give a little money, like this right here, what are the other options?

EARL
(Puzzled)
What are the other options?

JACKIE
Yeah. I’m not saying it’s me. But if you’re calling me on my “malarkey”, I’m calling you on yours. Know what I mean?
(Laughing)
Oh, I can’t wait to hear this.

JACKIE
You’re probably the type to say addiction is a disease, right? A disease like any other disease, right?

I guess.

JACKIE
Lou Gehrig’s. Irritable Bowel. Restless leg.

Whatever.

JACKIE

Okay! I know what diseases are.

JACKIE
A person suffering from those diseases can’t control their symptoms. Know what I mean?

Right. I guess.

JACKIE
Same with the addict. They have withdrawal symptoms. The only difference with their disease is that the drug that makes symptoms go away, is what causes the disease in the first place! So, they’re stuck. They use the… Stranded…

Stranded Traveler.

JACKIE
Right. Or if relying a kind handout doesn’t work, then breaking in, stealing stuff, or… or something worse.

Look it’s not that simple. I’m not making someone do anything. They got themselves into this mess.
JACKIE
If you don’t give a little money you could be pushing that addict to something more desperate. Pushing them to something that could hurt someone.

EARL
Pushing. Right. I’m pushing them. Now I’m the pusher?

JACKIE
Look, the drug’s gonna get used either way. That part don’t change. But you can play a part in how it goes down. How the symptom gets treated. Know what I mean?

EARL
Well, they could get help. There are clinics, county services, there are—

JACKIE
And so, by not giving them a little money, the person will see the light and go looking for help? Is that your plan?

EARL
My plan? I don’t have a plan—

JACKIE
That’s some powerful money you got there. It can help someone by staying in your pocket. That’s like magic. Are you sure you’re not the addict here?

Please?

JACKIE
Addicted to your ego, your fancy status. It feels pretty good to sit around and judge doesn’t it? Know what I mean?

EARL
I know what you mean. But I’m not judging—

I bet you call yourself a Christian.

What?

JACKIE
(Deliberately)
Why not just be honest? Is it Christianity?

EARL
Well, I like to think of myself as a good—
JACKIE

I knew it. Christian.

EARL

What?

JACKIE

You Christians should wear long black robes because you do love to judge. You only open your wallets if you can change someone. You can’t just give. You have to judge, preach. Know what I—

EARL

You don’t have to ask if I know what you mean. I know what you mean. But I’m not like those hypocrites on TV or whatever. I’m not perfect. I’m just trying to be a good person. I’m not the preachy type, I—

JACKIE

You sure are the judge-y type, though. Judged me pretty quick.

What?

JACKIE

“I knew it. Heroin.”

Am I wrong?

JACKIE

Does it matter?

EARL

Of course it matters. I need to “judge” whether I should help someone. If I give money to an addict, that just keeps them going down a bad path. I have to “judge” if… if…

JACKIE

If they deserve your help? What’s your man Jesus say?

EARL

Um, when? Where do you mean?

JACKIE

Visit prisoners. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Do this for the least of the brothers…. Know what I mean?

EARL

Yes. I know what you mean. I’m familiar with that passage.
JACKIE
The hungry, naked people. Why are they hungry and naked? It’s probably their own fault, right? Visit the prisoner. What did that prisoner do to get locked up? Nothing good. Probably beat up an easy mark like you and took his money.

EARL
What?

JACKIE

(Beat)
So, what’s this scam called?

JACKIE
What?

EARL
I know the Stranded Traveler scam. But what should we call this one? Maybe the “I Know Four Bible Verses to Make You Feel Guilty” Scam. Or the “Angel of Light” scam.

JACKIE
Come on.

EARL

JACKIE
Man, you’re unbelievable.

EARL
I’m unbelievable?

JACKIE
You’re just selfish.

EARL
You’re just lazy.

JACKIE
A hypocrite.

EARL
A druggie.
Elitist.

Freeloader.

Stingy.

Addict.

Ignorant.

Vagrant.

Heartless!

Crackhead!

Cheap Ass!

Hobo!

You think you’re so great! Living up in your ivory tower looking down on us – wait. Go back.

What?

Did you just say “hobo”?

Um, maybe. I don’t know what I said.

Oh my God. “Hobo.”
What?

(JACKIE)
You said “hobo”!

EARL
Um, I guess that wasn’t— (JACKIE continues laughing) I mean I guess that isn’t the right word for…. I was running out of things to say and – it just came out.

JACKIE
Like I’m riding the rails or something carrying one of those sacks on the end of a stick.

EARL
A bindle.

JACKIE
Right! Like I’m in a cartoon or something.

EARL
(Starts to laugh)
I guess it is a stupid word.

JACKIE
Boxcar Jackie. Riding the rails. Headed to Wichita to meet up with Shoe-Leather Wally. That’s hilarious. Know what I mean?

EARL
Oh, for crying out loud! You’re speaking English words that I can perfectly understand! I know what you mean!

JACKIE
(Stops laughing; beat)
Right. Of course you do.

EARL
Jackie? Your name is Jackie?

JACKIE
Yeah. I’m Jackie.

EARL
(Offering hand)
Nice to meet you. I’m Earl
JACKIE

(Shakes hand)
Um. Okay.

EARL
Jackie. Can you tell me what the problem is? If you need help, I want to help. But I don’t want to be scammed.

JACKIE
Does it matter?

EARL
It does. It matters to me.

JACKIE
Okay. How’s this. Imagine you had a bad week. Bad stuff happens. For you, a minor car crash, laid off, pneumonia. Whatever. A bad week. It sucks, but you could get through it and come out with a scar and a story. Right?

EARL
Sure. I guess.

JACKIE
You can manage. You can get back up. Know what I… sorry.

EARL
(Very deliberately)
Yes. I know what you mean.

JACKIE
But me? I have no backup. Nobody to turn to. No savings. No credit. Just nothing. So here I am.

EARL
So if I give you money, what are you going to do with it?

JACKIE
Tell you what. You get to pick. That’s my gift to you. I pick what I do with the money. You pick what you think I did with it. That’s fair, right?

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes