

Another Bus Stop  
A short play by George Gray

Cast of Characters:

LEON, mid-30's, homeless man  
JACKIE, 20's, well-dressed woman

Setting:

A bus stop down right.

At RISE:

The stage is empty. LEON enters  
through the audience, panhandling.

LEON

*(Panhandling the audience.)*

Hey, man, you got a quarter?

'Scuse me, sir, you got a quarter?

Hey, man, I got car trouble, I broke down, ran out of gas...

Hey, you got a cigarette?

'Scuse me, ma'am, I wonder if you could spare a little  
change...

Hey, man, you look like a good Christian person...

Hey, sir. Sir...

Sir, I don't do this kind of thing, I ain't a dope fiend, I  
got six kids...

Shithead.

JACKIE

*(Enters up right, talking to herself, moves down  
to bus stop. NOTE: Spoken thoughts are in  
brackets.)*

[... never should have been there in the first place after  
all cause every time she makes things worse for everybody,  
all she does, makes things worse for me and I don't have  
the patience for it after all I'm not her keeper...]

LEON

*(Approaches her.)*

Hey lady...

JACKIE

[Oh, shit. Don't look at him. Don't look him in the eye.  
These people...]

LEON

Ma'am, hey, you don't know me...

JACKIE

[Just act like he isn't here...]

LEON

My name's Leon. Leon Marsh.

JACKIE

[Like I give a shit.]

LEON

You waiting for the bus?

JACKIE

[Some people just can't take a hint...]

LEON

It'll be about ten minutes. They come every twenty minutes.  
Last one came about ten minutes ago.

JACKIE

*(Starts away left.)*

[Maybe I should wait down the street...]

LEON

*(Following.)*

Hey, hold on now, wait a minute. You ain't gotta...

JACKIE

*(Moves far left.)*

[Dear God he's going to rape me!]

LEON

*(Stops.)*

I don't mean to run you off.

JACKIE

*(Opening her purse.)*

[Do I still have that pepper spray?]

LEON

I just thought you might have a little spare change, that's all.

JACKIE

[He sees my purse...]

LEON

*(Backing off upstage.)*

Okay, okay. I don't mean to bother you. Wait for the bus.

*(He approaches another imaginary passer-by.)*

Excuse me, sir, I wonder if you could spare a quarter...

JACKIE

*(Warily returning to the bus stop.)*

[How can a person be that way? Walk right up to you and hold their hand out like they had it coming and so what if it's just a quarter when all he's gonna do is buy drugs, or even if he needs it he can go somewhere, they have places, welfare, and it's the principle, I work for mine and there's no reason for this guilty feeling when he's the one who invaded my personal space. Like a stalker. You feel sorry for them but you have to draw the line...]

LEON

*(Edging back down left center.)*

Excuse me, ma'am?

JACKIE

[Oh, God...]

LEON

Look, I don't mean to bother you again, I just...

JACKIE

[Then don't, you shit!]

LEON

I just wanted to apologize. I don't do this because I want to.

JACKIE

[Why don't you get a job?]

LEON

I've been out of work going on two years now. Living on the land since March. Couldn't pay the rent.

JACKIE

[Why don't I just tell him to fuck off?]

LEON

My wife was working 'til she took sick. Now it's just me and the kids.

*(Reaching for his wallet.)*

You want to see?

JACKIE

[If you come near me I'll scream!]

LEON

*(Stops.)*

I guess not.

*(Looks at pictures.)*

William, Jean, and Little Lee. The county's got 'em in foster homes for now, until I get back on my feet.

JACKIE

[Why is he doing this to me?]

LEON

It's just, you know, sometimes you just-to eat...

JACKIE

[There's no such things as a free lunch, friend...]

LEON

It's hard to explain. It's hard to understand until you've been there. That's why I hang out at the bus stop. You have to hear me out.

JACKIE

[How many minutes has it been?]

LEON

Of course, you could tell me to shut up. All you have to do is ask, and I'd leave you alone, but that would mean you'd have to speak to me, acknowledge my existence, and we both know by now you can't do that.

JACKIE

[Son of a bitch. He's teasing me!]

LEON

Or you could give me a quarter, but you won't do that either. Not yet. Although that is what it's all going to boil down to in the long run.

JACKIE

[Never in a million years, Elrod...]

LEON

Unless the bus comes early. Besides, you're curious. You want to know, you wonder, how could someone stoop so low, right? Where's my self respect? Groveling for quarters on the street. You want to hear the story.

JACKIE

[I'll have to tell Harry about this. He's always telling me to take a cab...]

LEON

Okay, here goes. Once upon a time a kid from West Virginia came to the Big City, got a job in a textile plant and worked hard for sixteen years, got married, had kids, friends and neighbors, went to church. Then one day the plant closed down, something about the economy, and then his wife got cancer, and they didn't have health care, so she died, but by that time he was so deep in debt he couldn't pay the rent, like I said, so they evicted him, took his kids, and that was it. Everything. All gone. No job, no home, no family. He might as well be dead, only he didn't have the guts to kill himself, so how was he going to stay alive. He wasn't smart enough to rob a bank. Finally, one day, when he hadn't et for a week, he swallowed his pride and walked down to the bus stop, and he's been there ever since.

JACKIE

*(Pause. She looks at him for the first time. She speaks.)*

Where in West Virginia?

LEON

Charleston.

JACKIE

That's where my father's from.

LEON

No kidding.

JACKIE

We used to go there to visit my grandparents.

LEON

Small world.

JACKIE

Maybe you should go back.

LEON

Nobody goes back to West Virginia. I don't care what the song says.

JACKIE

But if you're starving to death...

LEON

Oh, I get by.

JACKIE

Groveling for quarters?

LEON

I get enough to eat. You'd be surprised, some days I clear twenty bucks. That may not seem like much, but then you think, with no expenses. And it's not just quarters. Some people give you dollar bills, some give you all their change. 'Course, the huge majority just give you a dirty look, or turn away, like you—especially if they're walking down the street. You have to catch them at the bus stop to score big.

JACKIE

So you can tell your story.

LEON

Right. You tell a good story, and there's always something that will grab them, get their attention. Like this guy yesterday, his wife died of cancer, ten bucks. Women with kids, laid-off textile workers, no health care. You'd be surprised what people fall for.

JACKIE

How much do you think you'll get from me? Now that you've told me all your secrets of the trade?

LEON

How much have you got?

JACKIE

On me?

LEON

I don't take checks or credit cards.

JACKIE

Then you're out of luck. I've barely got enough for lunch.

LEON

You don't need lunch.

JACKIE

You may not get a dime.

LEON

You're wrong.

JACKIE

What makes you so sure?

LEON

The second you turned around.

JACKIE

Excuse me?

LEON

The second you looked in my eyes. That's the trick. That's the big secret. Once you looked in my eyes, once I had your attention, from then on...

JACKIE

Ah! Here comes the bus!

LEON

*(Looks at his watch.)*

Right on time.

JACKIE

*(Reaching into her purse.)*

You know, I knew all along that you were a panhandler.

LEON

I could tell.

JACKIE

I could have just told you to fuck off.

LEON

But you didn't.

JACKIE

Okay, so what, ten minutes of your time, your story, comes to...

*(Counting bills into his hand.)*

...five, six, seven, and...

*(Counting change.)*

...eight dollars and thirty-seven cents. Will that do?

LEON

Thank you, ma'am. I can't tell you how much that means to my wife and me.

JACKIE

I thought your wife died of cancer.

LEON

She lives within my heart. God bless you.

JACKIE

You're not really from West Virginia, are you.

LEON

Does it matter? Now that you've been blessed?

JACKIE

To tell the truth, I feel like a human being for a change. Thank you.

*(The bus pulls up. She starts.)*

Oh, wait. I don't have bus fare.

LEON

Now that's a bummer, ain't it?

*(Panhandling imaginary customers up left and  
off.)*

Hey, buddy, you got a quarter?

JACKIE

Son of a bitch!

*(Nonplussed pause. Then she panhandles as well.)*

Excuse me, sir, have you got a dollar for bus fare...?

Fin.