

Five Minutes

Bruce Marshall Romans

Characters:

Homeless Man, Any age

Passer-by, Any age

Woman, Any age (This play was originally written without the character of Woman. She may easily be removed, for the sake of production, if necessary.)

Place:

The set should be sparse and perhaps even unclear; nevertheless, it should be ultimately defined by the actors.

Time:

Probably early evening.

Sounds:

Soft winds, Distant dogs barking, Occasional traffic. Salvation Army bells.

"O call back yesterday, bid time return"

William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, III.ii.69

Homeless Man: I need a quarter. Gotta have a quarter. Gotta git a quarter. A Kwotta. A quota. A Kwa-tair. I need twenty five cents, twenta fie pennies, two dimes and a nickel. Three nickels and a dime. One quatray. One fourth of one dollar. Twenty five percent of one hundred cents. Yessir. Fifty percent of fifty cents. One quarter. I really only need thirty five cents—minus a dime. Twenta fie sint. Lookin for a triple nickel plus two more--don't need no more! Yessir,

yes sir. I need a quarter, kawotta, kawota, kwotair. . . . (*Woman enters passing by*)
Got a quarter, I mean, need a quarter.

Woman: No, I don't.

Homeless Man: Don't need one or don't got one?

Woman : I'm sorry, I'm in hurry. I have to work for my money. (*She hurries off*)

Homeless Man: Five cents twenty need I. Quarters four looking for am I.
Have quarter a gotta. Q-U-A-R-ter. Quar-T-E-R. Pennies five and twenty.
Kwotters need a plenty. (*Passer-by: enters*)
How many quarters you got in your pocket?

Passer-by: Excuse me?

Homeless Man: You're excused.

Passer-by: I'm sorry, I thought you were talking to me.

Homeless Man: I'm sorry, I thought you were talking to me.

Passer-by: I thought you were asking me something. I'm sorry.

Homeless Man: I would say, if I had to, three or seven. But, probably twenty five, no that's not right. Two hundred and twenty five.

Passer-by: What, quarters?

Homeless Man: Five.

Passer-by: Are you asking me if I have five quarters in my pocket?

Homeless Man: No sir. No sir, I am absolutely not asking you if you have five quarters in your pocket. I would not ask anyone any kind of questions like that. I'm sorry sir, for giving you that impression. I do not want to be misunderstood. I was telling you that you have five quarters in your pocket.

Passer-by: Do you need some change? I think I have...(*Passer-by looks at Homeless Man*) Hey, do I know you? You look like...Do you know me?

Homeless Man: Well my friend, I do believe that that is completely possible. Did you sail on the H.M.S. Beagle with Darwin?

Passer-by: No.

Homeless Man: No, I don't guess that was you. Your nose is too small anyway. Perhaps you were in Crete when I was helping Daedalus and Icarus with their wings?

Passer-by: No, I'm afraid that wasn't me either. Maybe, I'm mistaken.

Homeless Man: Did I mis-take you?

Passer-by: I mean maybe I don't know you. You probably just look like someone I know or something.

Homeless Man: Maybe you do know me.

Passer-by: Who knows...Well I have enjoyed talking to you, but--

Homeless Man: Oh, I know ya have and I've enjoyed talkin to you, but you know what?

Passer-by: What?

Homeless Man: I would like it, if you don't mind, if you could just hang out with me for just a little longer. You see, I got a little problem that I'm trying to remedy.

Passer-by: I understand, and I'm sorry, but I have problems too, we all have problems. I don't think I can really be of any help.

Homeless Man: *(After taking a long silent look at Passer-by)* My space craft has crash landed in the desert in New Mexico and before I was able to initiate a distress signal, all of my communication equipment became inoperative. I can see that you understand my plight. Now, I am faced with the task of raising enough money to buy the sub-standard Earthen hardware to repair my craft enough for flight. Now, I'm willing to make a deal here. If you are willing to lend a helping hand, I, in turn will rid your planet of Saddam Hussein. Is that a good deal, or am I lying? You know he's crazy.

Passer-by: (*A bit amused*) A flying saucer?

Homeless Man: More cigar-shaped really.

Passer-by: Cigar -shaped?

Homeless Man: Yeah, Cuban. (*Winks*) Hey, do you know how to hot-wire a car?

Passer-by: No.

Homeless Man: A nuclear submarine?

Passer-by: I'm afraid not.

Homeless Man: Mmmm. Well, how 'bout a moped?

Passer-by: Look, I don't know how to hot-wire a toaster, much less a car or submarine and I don't know anything about the mechanics of a flying saucer.

Homeless Man: Cigar.

Passer-by: Flying cigar.

Homeless Man: Thank you. (*Passer-by starts to leave*) Hey, where are ya goin'?

Passer-by: "Hey," I'm going home.

Homeless Man: Why?

Passer-by: I've got things to do, I've got to go.

Homeless Man: Okay, okay, all right. Hey, wait one second. I got a deal for you. I bet you five more minutes of your time, that I can tell you where you got those shoes. If I can do that, you stay and talk to me for five more minutes. If I can't, then I'll give you back five minutes of your life. Now, that, to me sounds like a deal. If it ain't then I'm lyin. I know that there are a lot of people on your planet that would love to have five minutes back.

Passer-by: (*Now a bit amused and interested*) You mean to tell me that you think you can guess where I got these shoes, and if you can't you will give me five minutes of my life back?

Homeless Man: I guess you ain't deaf.

Passer-by: (*Playing along*) I guess I ain't, I'm not.

Homeless Man: Granted, five minutes ain't that long sometimes, but other times it can seem like forever. It ain't very long to talk to someone you just met. But what about those last five minutes that you got to see your grandmother, when you didn't know it was going to be the last five minutes you'd ever see her? That's a lot of time. Or what about the first five minutes that you knew you were in love, and she was in love with you? Or even better, the last five, when you still had time to take back what you said to that special someone from Boston, but you didn't. You see it's all a matter of perspective.

Passer-by: (*Amazed*) How did you know about those things?

Woman: (*Re-enters carrying packages, notices Homeless Man again*) Can't you just leave people alone and stop wasting our time? My God. (*Woman hurries off*)

Passer-by: (*Watches woman exit and turns back to Homeless Man*) How do you know those things?

Homeless Man: What things?

Passer-by: Those things about my grandmother and Kimberly. How did you know?

Homeless Man: I guess I'm good at guessing.

Passer-by: No you're not, you know things about me. How do you know these things? I want you to tell me.

Homeless Man: Is it a deal? Are you willing to let me guess where you got those shoes? (*The Passer-by looks at him speechless for a moment unable to answer*) If you let me guess, just cause I like you, I'll even throw in Saddam Hussein. Goin once, goin twice--

Passer-by: Yes, yes, of course I'll let you guess. Go ahead.

Homeless Man: You drive a hard bargain monkey man. (*Homeless Man circles Passer-by, apparently deep in thought looking at his shoes*) I would say, if I had to, and I do because you and I have entered into this agreement with one another,

that you got those shoes, no, yes, I bet you think I can't do this. . . I think. . . that you got those shoes. . . on your feet right now as we are speaking. Am I right?

Passer-by: What?

Homeless Man: I'm sayin that you got those shoes on your feet. Am I right?

Passer-by: No, you're wrong, you're a fraud, a fake. I don't GOT these shoes on my feet, I HAVE them on my feet.

Homeless Man: Oh, well, if you're gonna boil it down to just a simple matter of semantics and be a sore loser, then I'm sorry I chose you to help. You lost and you know it, fair and square. And if you turn and leave then this will just be another one of those "five minutes" that keep adding up, that keep passing you by. Do you want that?

Passer-by: You chose me to help? Did you want to help me, or did you want me to help you? (*Homeless Man looks at Passer-by in silence and doesn't answer*) What do you want? What is it that you want with me?

Homeless Man: See, that's not it. What do you want?

Passer-by: What do I want?

Homeless Man: Did I stutter? I don't think I'm stuttering.

Passer-by: I want to know how you know those things about me? I want to know who you are and why you're bothering me? (*No answer*) What is it that you want from me, I want to know?

Homeless Man: I want to know why you ask so many questions?

Passer-by: Stop it! Answer me.

Homeless Man: I could stand here and answer all these questions and more, but is that what you really want? I don't think so. I'm a person who happened to cross paths with you one night. I'm someone whose space craft is downed in New Mexico. I'm a bad dresser. I am someone you lost five minutes to. But, what does this matter? If I bother you then leave.

Passer-by: (*Looks at Homeless Man for a moment then starts to leave. He is almost gone then turns and slowly walks back*) I can't.

Homeless Man: Why?

Passer-by: I made a deal with you. *(He looks at his watch)* You still have about two and a half minutes.

Homeless Man: You can go. Nobody's goin to make you stay and talk to me.

Passer-by: I can't. I can't do that any more.

Homeless Man: Why?

Passer-by: I don't know. I just can't. I don't want to do that anymore.

Homeless Man: I need a quarter. You got a quarter I can have? *(Passer-by reaches into his pocket and pulls out a hand full of change)* Hey, wait a minute. Five quarters, two dimes, four pennies, and a wheat penny. And some lint.

Passer-by: *(Passer-by looks at the change in his hand and then at Homeless Man and then again at the change)* How did you know that?

Homeless Man: Any of them quarters in your sweaty hand for me or are you gonna stop at a few Coke machines on the way home?

Passer-by: *(Passer-by hands Homeless Man a quarter)* How do you know these things?

Homeless Man: Don't ask me that. What is it that you really want to know?

Passer-by: I don't know.

Homeless Man: Yes you do. What do really want?

Passer-by: *(Something has come over Passer-by)* I'm not sure. I don't even know who I'm talking to.

Homeless Man: That's right, you don't, you never know who you're talking to.

Passer-by: But, how do you know. . .

Homeless Man: How could I not know? Even more important how could you not know? How could anybody not know? But, the funny thing is nobody

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seems to know. That's what gets me. I wanted a quarter and got it. I wanted five more minutes and got them. If you had won, and you didn't, what would you have wanted those five minutes for? Do you know? Now, think about it. Do you really know?

Passer-by: Yes, I do know.

Homeless Man: Then tell me. Why did you want your five minutes back?

Passer-by: I . . . I . . . would have changed things. I wanted to change things.

Homeless Man: (*Homeless Man holds out the quarter*) You ready? Call it in the air. Heads you win, tails I lose.

(Homeless Man flips the quarter and Passer-by watches and says nothing.

Homeless Man: catches the quarter and holds it in his hand without looking at the outcome) How much time do I have left?

Passer-by: (*Passer-by looks at his watch*) You don't.

Homeless Man: Ain't that a bitch. I didn't think so. But you know what?

Passer-by: What?

Homeless Man: (*Homeless Man puts quarter in his pocket without looking at it*) You do.

(Passer-by turns and starts to leave)

Dale, we both won. Do you know that?

(Passer-by, not surprised that Homeless Man knows his name nods yes and exits. After a few moments of silence, Homeless Man starts again)

I need a quarter. Lookin for twenty five cents. One fourth of one dollar. A Kwota...

(FADE TO BLACK)