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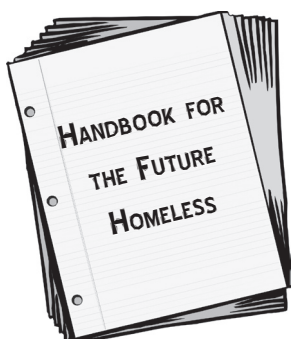
BLUES

An Ensemble Play in One Act

by

JEROME McDONOUGH





BLUES

“Sterling City’s performance here last night at the theatre festival left the entire auditorium in tears—clapping and yelling when its production of *Blues* ended. Even the judge cried ... it was one of the most inspiring, tumultuously received plays we’ve ever done, equaled maybe only by Jerome’s—*Addict*, performed three years ago.” (Patty Miller, Sterling City High School, Texas)

Blues was previewed with a performance at the Texas Educational Theatre Association convention in Houston in 1990 by the Fox Technical Little Theatre of San Antonio.

Drama. By Jerome McDonough. *Cast: 10 to 20+ actors.* *Blues* is about the homeless. Where do they come from? Did they once have homes—like you? Have you ever thought what stands between you and life under a bridge in a cardboard box? People who have nowhere to go when it’s bedtime show you and your audiences what to do when your time comes. Jerome McDonough’s disquieting style makes us acutely aware of the problems of people in distress. The play takes place in a vacant lot, where street people sometimes gather if it isn’t too cold. Will you ever be one of them? It could never happen to you ... could it? *Blues* is a sort of “Handbook for the Future Homeless.” For audiences of adults and young adults and everybody else who cannot be sure what the future holds. *Set: a somber gathering spot for poorly dressed homeless people. Time: the present. Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: BJ6.*

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(BLUES)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

Dedication

**For two literary giants, Thornton Wilder and John Steinbeck,
who taught us to always see both sides.**

BLUES

An Ensemble Approach

BLUES is an ensemble play.

Featured parts are written for 18 characters, but fewer performers may cover all roles, or entire character segments may be cut, if need be, to reduce cast size or playing time.

Characters and Order of Scenes

Ensemble Entrance

Gino

I. THE STREET

Nate

Tonya

Aggie

Ice

II. THE UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE

Quinn

Hap

III. THE HOSPITAL

Sharyn

Dee

IV. THE COUNTRY CLUB

Mark

Lynne

V. THE ROAD

Chano

Zach

VI. THE CITY

Fay

VII. THE NATION

Ynez

Elena

Juanita

VIII. ALONE

Ben

Δ

The following cast premiered an early version of **BLUES** in the spring of 1987:

Audra Bell, David Councilman, Christina Eakes, Tim Hardin, Julie Harris, Jason Killingsworth, Janie Martinez, Darren Nash, Keith Parr, Sean Pevehouse, John Poston, Cathy Rangel, Missy Rawls, Jo Ann Salazar, Becky Sims, Richard Tamplen, Lori Tenorio, Cindy Valverde, Dino Valverde, Mark Walker, Chris Morehead, and Lori Williams.

Δ

The version of **BLUES** which became this published script was first performed in the fall of 1989 by:

Jennifer Bailey, Misty Bailey, Chad Bittick, Shawn Burleson, Christy Bustamante, Alisa Evans, Shawn Farrar, Simon Frausto, Lisa Gray, Anthony Griego, Brandi Griffith, Michael Hughes, Jenifer Kirby, Roberta Lake, Michael Massey, Kathi McGreevey, Georgeanna McJimsey, Michael Mestas, Carrie Morgan, Stephanie Mullins, Paige Murray, Adam Ochoa, Robbie Pillow, Thomas Ryder, and Christy Shirley.

Δ

BLUES was previewed with a performance at the Texas Educational Theatre Association convention in Houston on Feb. 3, 1990, by the Fox Technical Little Theatre of San Antonio under the direction of Nicki Roberson, with the following ensemble:

J. C. Aldalco, Rudy Amandos, James Cortinas, Jennifer Flores, Stanley Lopez, Mark Ozufu, Linda Pefla, Mike Perez, Molly Vasquez, Liz Villanueva, Danny Ville, and Tamikah Williams.

ABOUT THE PLAY

“Our Town”—a century later. The scene has changed. Up there is the Charity Mission. The Homeless Shelter is a little farther on.

Will you know what to do if it ever happens to you?

Nah, you’ll never be homeless. Street people have always lived on the street. We who live in houses will always live in houses. Won’t we? Only drunks and dope heads and the shiftless, and lazy bums who refuse to work, have to sleep in gutters and eat out of garbage cans.

Is that the way it is? Well . . . not always. *Just in case* it should happen to you, will you be prepared?

BLUES is a sort of “Handbook for the Future Homeless.” It’s your duty to teach these lessons to your actors, and your audiences . . . and yourself . . . just in case . . .

BLUES

By Jerome McDonough

[BLUES has as its setting an open space which is occupied by people and by the things which they have accumulated. Whether the space appears to be a shanty town or a gathering place in the open or a barren shelter is up to the individual production company. The performance space is filled with piles of discarded clothing and remnants of furniture.

As they enter, audience members become aware of many people moving quietly about the seating area or sleeping in various corners, against various items, or merely staring, holding a place, untouched by the clutter and pressing humanity around them. As much as possible, the audience should feel a part of this somber scene.

If possible, the light setting of the performance should already be in effect. A guitar song, a slow blues number, is playing as the Ensemble of the Homeless moves into the performance space. They are dirty and desperate. They work as close to the audience members as possible, even interacting with them a bit. (In environmental productions, they will sit among the audience members. A limited version of this is even possible in proscenium productions.)

There should be no curtain opening, no change of lights. At some point, the MUSIC ends and GINO begins to speak to the audience:]

GINO. Maybe you've seen a play called "Our Town" by Thornton Wilder. It's a picture of America in the early 1900's. The picture has changed some since Grovers Corners. Here's how our town lies now. *[Gesturing, establishing the location of areas]* Up there is the Charity Mission. The Homeless Shelter is a little farther on. *[Indicating the performance area:]* This is a vacant lot. Only twenty or thirty of us stay here nights. *[Pointing]* A big tenement's over by the bridge. Two hundred families live there, but that's probably temporary. Their rent's been raised thirty percent—a cost of living increase. Did you ever wonder what happens when people can't afford the cost of living? *[Gesturing another direction]* Through there are lots of alleyways and some empty,

condemned buildings. There's plenty of room. *[To audience]* Will you be joining us? You're probably right. *[Pause]* But you could be wrong. So we're gonna give you a little—orientation. Welcome to the neighborhood.

[NATE moves to the edge of the apron or out into the crowd and approaches a member of the audience]

NATE. Listen, buddy. Can I talk to you a minute? *[Reacts to rejection, whether it comes or not]* Okay, okay—no trouble. No trouble. *[He drifts along as a young woman (TONYA) speaks to the crowd]*

TONYA. The streets aren't much of a home but they beat the one I had. Maybe. You don't want to hear about that, though. *[The teacher]* You gotta have a scam. If you're too scared for mugging, learn to beg. Guys do good with old ladies. *[A MAN steps down from the Ensemble]* Men won't give 'em anything—they always say . . .

MAN. Get a job, bum.

TONYA. Girls do better with men—if your shirt and jeans fit good. And don't try that "I just got into town" stuff.

NATE. Listen, I just got into town and my job don't start until tomorrow. I just need a couple of bucks, huh? *[Rejected]* Okay, okay—no trouble.

TONYA. Tell 'em you got laid off. They like that.

[An extremely dirty woman, AGGIE, moves to the apron, searching about. She picks up any clutter she finds and places it in one of her bags. She finally sees the audience but is not too interested in them. She begins to speak, still gathering her things]

AGGIE. Don't sleep in no dumpsters. Ya might wake up with a garbage compactor closin' on you. Get to the heatin' vents b'fore night. Guys stay there all day sometimes, then nobody'll give them nothin' to eat. Fair's fair. 'Course, the cops chase you off most of the time. Newspapers'll keep you warm if you don't get a vent—Sunday's best. *[Hands a newspaper to a member of the audience]* Stick it in your shoes 'n' in your shirt and pants. Sleep on the high side of the alley—in case anything's floatin' through there.

TONYA. I work the streets, but I don't walk 'em, you know what I mean? Not yet, anyway. *[PIMPS approach her one by one]* Those guys are cruisin' by in their Lincoln Town Cars every night sayin' . . .

PIMP #1. * You want to make some real money, Mama?

PIMP #2. *You want a good smoke?

PIMP #3. *You want some crystal, Crystal? [**Update as needed*]

TONYA. They've got the perfect answer. They don't mention how they'll beat you until your face looks like a bowl of Gravy Train. I don't have any living friends in that business. One girl I knew may still be around. She used a different name every time she got busted. I'll look her up some day—if I know who she is that day.

[*ICE wanders into the scene*]

ICE. I didn't run away from home. It ran away from me. Home? It was a place where drunks came to drink when their regular drinking places closed up. The kids got breakfast if there was any breakfast money after the beer money was gone. We stayed in one place until the landlord caught up with us or the social workers started asking about the bruises on my brother and sisters.

NATE. [*Drifts farther across. Speaks to various people in the audience, as if each is a "mark"*] Listen, I'm gettin' out of here first of next week. Weather's lousy here. I got a job in Phoenix, on a big building. I work high steel—up where I can look birds in the eye. It's gonna be the tallest one any place—bigger than the World Trade. I worked on that. My daddy worked on the Empire State—he laid the last brick at the top. I laid the last one at the World Trade—East Tower. I signed the brick—you can go see my name. But work's slow now. [*Licks his lips*] I need a few bucks for some food. [*Listening, then denying*] Wine? No—no wine. I quit drinkin'.

AGGIE. Cats in an alley means there's food. 'Course, it might just mean rats, but that's okay with some people. Me, I don't eat rats. Mice, maybe, but there ain't much to 'em. Don't truck with no dogs. If there's food where a dog can get it, he'll get it. And you're not gonna win a fight with him. Unless you got a knife. Then it could be supper time for everybody.

NATE. Don't just give me the money—you write your name [*searching his pockets for a piece of paper*] on this paper—I got. [*Can't find it*] You got some paper? You write your name and how much and I'll send it when I get to Tucson.

TONYA. [*Muscling him aside*] Get lost, you old drunk. This is my turf.

NATE. When I was your age, we had some respect.

TONYA. When you were my age, dinosaurs slept here. Take off!

NATE. *[Retreating]* Okay, okay. No trouble.

ICE. The folks tried hiding us one time. It's nice being locked up whenever the sun's out. They'd have gotten away with it if they hadn't listed us when they filed for welfare. We never had school records so they'd just put us anywhere. I was in sixth grade three years. They finally sent me to junior high when I was the only kid in my class with a beard.

TONYA. Here's the best con of all—tell them you need the money to get back home. Back to Hattiesburg or some other All-American place. You might even raise enough to get there. *[Quickly denying]* But, hey, who needs that? Home? Forget it.

ICE. One night, Dad was sitting behind this table full of beer cans.

FATHER. How old are you, boy?

ICE. Fourteen.

FATHER. I'd been on my own for two years when I was fourteen.

ICE. You told me.

FATHER. You gettin' smart with me?

ICE. No.

FATHER. You respect me. If I didn't respect my old man, he wore me out.

ICE. Got it.

FATHER. You're costin' more than the welfare's payin'—so it's time for you to go. With another baby comin', we won't be out the money. You're grown—go!

ICE. Go where?

FATHER. What do I care? Just go.

ICE. *[Ending scene with Father]* The next morning I left. The kids were crying. I don't know if my parents were upset. They wouldn't wake up. It was a typical morning. I've been on the streets since then. I learned a few things. Like, you don't HAVE to eat as much as you thought you did. And you don't HAVE to stay clean. And the way you smell doesn't matter. Staying alive is all that counts. So you get bad—or you hide where you hope nobody can dig you out. All the time.

[The next two "pitches" will be delivered at the same time, ending this section:]

NATE. *[Moves back toward the stage and begins his pitch again, avoiding Tonya]* Listen, I—I just got into town—and I'm goin' to work tomorrow at . . . *[His voice fades out]*

TONYA. [*Moving back toward Ensemble*] Mister? No, I just want to talk to you. I'm tryin' to put some money together to get back to . . . [*Her voice trails off*]

GINO. What about me? Well, I'm just here for kicks. I had a good job in Detroit, a place in the suburbs, life by the tail. Like most of you, huh? Then Japan and Korea finished what Germany'd been working on since 1950 and you could hear the assembly lines shutting down all over the state. The "For Sale" sign went up in every yard in the neighborhood. Before long the houses and the signs and us were all that was left. Some real estate leech gave me twenty cents on the dollar for my place and we headed for Texas—where the jobs bubble out of the ground. I wound up on a drilling rig. Then the Arabs dumped enough oil to grease the universe and the town turned into another forest of "For Sale" signs. We didn't have to put up a sign that time. We didn't own anything. Now the money's gone. And the kicks keep getting harder. But, hey, being out of work is no big deal. Ask anybody.

[*QUINN moves into place. A line of men and women forms behind him. Action follows narration*]

QUINN. There ARE jobs—for anybody who has the guts to get out and look for one. You wouldn't believe the garbage I see at my unemployment window. Big healthy Blacks and Mexicans and Vietnamese and Laotians are in here every week, living off my taxes, trying to tell me:

UNEMPLOYMENT RECIPIENT 1. There ain't a job in town. I been lookin' all week.

QUINN. [*To audience*] Looking for any job they could find in the bars or while they're snoozing outside the welfare office. Well, I've got a special treat for that type. I find a "problem" with their paperwork. [*To person in line, pointing to paperwork*] You filled this out wrong. And this.

UNEMPLOYMENT RECIPIENT 1. But . . .

QUINN. You want your money or not?

UNEMPLOYMENT RECIPIENT 1. [*Working on paper*] I can just scratch this out and . . .

QUINN. Back of the line. People are waiting. [*UNEMPLOYMENT RECIPIENT 1 grudgingly moves to the back of the line*] When they get to the front again, I say, "No! It has to be such-and-so" and

send 'em to change it back. Sometimes I get 'em four or five times. If they won't find a job, at least they can work for their unemployment. *[Another person is now at the front of the line. He starts to speak]*

UNEMPLOYMENT RECIPIENT 2. I been in this line for two hours. Do I get my money or not?

QUINN. *[To audience]* When one of 'em smarts off at me, I change a few numbers and cut his assistance a month early. *[Speaking to Recipient 2, writing]* According to this, you don't get it. Your eligibility ran out.

UNEMPLOYMENT RECIPIENT 2. There's gotta be a mistake.

QUINN. No mistake.

UNEMPLOYMENT RECIPIENT 2. I got a month left. I know I do. Double check it, huh?

QUINN. I don't have time now.

UNEMPLOYMENT RECIPIENT 2. Hey, no rush.

QUINN. *[As RECIPIENT 2 moves off]* Come back in a couple of days. *[To audience again]* I put 'em off a week, then I find the "error." So what if they get hungry? Maybe they'll get off their fat cans and REALLY try to find some work. And, would you believe it, one of those deadbeats was waiting for me in the parking lot one afternoon.

ATTACKER. *[Approaches Quinn from behind. He grips Quinn and holds a knife against him]* My unemployment ran out, huh? I saw you change those numbers.

QUINN. It was a mistake. Listen—I'll take care of it.

ATTACKER. And call every cop in town.

QUINN. No. I won't report this, I swear. I'll take care of your papers.

ATTACKER. *[Easing his grip a bit]* No cops?

QUINN. No cops. *[ATTACKER releases him and runs off. QUINN speaks to audience again]* He's doing hard time at Rahway now—ten to twenty. You can't give these people an inch. *[He exits]*

[HAP steps forward, speaking directly to the audience]

HAP. The work ran out four years ago. I pounded the streets every day, but there wasn't nothin'. Amy was waitressing at the cafe at a motel where the construction and oilfield guys stayed. When their jobs shut down, the motel went under. But I kept thinking we'd get through it. When I quit believing it, I drank until I believed it again. Even the kids were scared. Shelly wouldn't eat supper one night.

SHELLY. If I don't eat, maybe the food won't run out.

HAP. It tears you up. A 7-11 store out near the refinery started looking good. I took Chip's ski mask while he was asleep. I bumped against his bed.

CHIP. What's goin' on, Dad?

HAP. Get back to sleep, buddy. Everything's gonna be all right. *[To the audience again]* I was drunk enough to believe it. By the time he woke up the next morning, they'd already fingerprinted me. I was on the TV news and a cop was holding Chip's ski mask. That's how Amy and the kids found out. The judge gave me—

JUDGE. Fifteen years.

HAP. I wasn't supposed to be eligible for parole for five years, but they started shipping first-timers out at half-earned time to make room for more. So I went home. But home by then was a one-bedroom trailer with two sad kids and an alcoholic woman in it. I was just what that picture needed. There's a problem with coming back. You're an ex-con. And you're never an ex- ex-con. So I mow lawns and hang out at the Employment Commission office and try to jump in the truck if one stops. Amy can't hold a job. And Child Welfare's been around—the kids' teachers are worried about them. *[Pause; confidentially]* There's a liquor store out where all the motels have closed up. There's not much traffic. And the cash register's back where you can't see it from the street. *[He rejoins the Ensemble]*

[A woman (SHARYN) moves to the center area of the stage. She holds a clipboard in her hands]

GINO. There used to be a lot of mental hospitals in the State. It turns out we didn't need them. *[SHARYN meets several people, including the next character—DEE. She shows each one a place to sign or to make a mark. Each does—and each hugs her before she leaves. At last, SHARYN is alone. After a few counts, she moves Down Center, and looks out above the audience, as if she can see the patients moving away. After a few counts, she speaks]*

SHARYN. *[Reading from a document]* "Directive: House Bill 723. By *[give a date about one year in the future]*, all low-risk patients in state mental health facilities must be returned to their county of responsibility. Transfer will begin immediately, resulting in a ten percent reduction of patient load each month. Patients with a history of violent behavior will be retained temporarily but transfer will take place

at the earliest possible date.” *[Looking up from the document]* I came here to help these people—to give them reasons to live—but now my job’s changed a little. Now I reduce costs by ten percent a month—which means I put ten percent of them on a bus for some place—any place. So what if most counties don’t have the facilities to care for them? That bus ticket makes it somebody else’s problem. *[Pause]*

Some of them are so happy to be “going home.” We aren’t supposed to mention that they don’t have one any more. Others can’t face it. They hide—actually hide under the stairs or in the laundry on the day they’re supposed to go. But we find them, and I see the terror in their eyes as those buses pull out. I see it for days afterward. But I keep signing the check-out forms. And I keep smiling at them. And wishing them well. They don’t know how much I wish that. *[She exits as . . .]*

[A POLICE OFFICER escorts DEE to her SOCIAL WORKER, who is seated Center]

DEE. *[Looking after POLICE OFFICER, who exits]* Why did he bring me here?

SOCIAL WORKER. You can’t sleep in the park, Dee. *[Gestures for her to sit]*

DEE. *[Sitting]* The park is nice—where the flowers are. The flower beds have spaces you can get in. Nobody can see you.

SOCIAL WORKER. You had a bed at the shelter. Why didn’t you stay there?

DEE. Mama had flowers. She cut me some sometimes. Did he think I cut the flowers?

SOCIAL WORKER. No.

DEE. I didn’t. I just sleep there.

SOCIAL WORKER. Why won’t you stay at the shelter?

DEE. I don’t like it.

SOCIAL WORKER. Someone could hurt you in the park.

DEE. They can’t see me in the flowers. The hospital smelled like flowers sometimes. One time we had a garden.

SOCIAL WORKER. The hospital is closed, Dee.

DEE. People eat lunch and leave some lunch and I get it.

SOCIAL WORKER. Why won’t you stay at the shelter?

DEE. I . . .

SOCIAL WORKER. Tell me.

DEE. I don’t like it.

SOCIAL WORKER. Why?

DEE. The hospital—they kept us different places.

SOCIAL WORKER. You mean men and women?

DEE. No. Ones who act scary. Ladies yell all night at the shelter. Or rock and sing songs. *[Some cast members emulate this behavior. Another WOMAN approaches her]* A lady stuck her finger in my face . . .

KNIFE WOMAN. See my knife? I'm gonna slice your throat while you're asleep. *[Action follows the description, ominously underlining it]*

SOCIAL WORKER. She won't hurt you, Dee. *[The KNIFE WOMAN moves among the cast and audience during the balance of this section, threatening]*

DEE. Another one said—

EVANGELICAL WOMAN. You're going to burn in Hell for your sins!

DEE. Is it a sin to sleep in the flowers?

SOCIAL WORKER. No.

DEE. Can I go to the park now?

SOCIAL WORKER. No, Dee. The officer will ask the shelter supervisor to watch out for you.

DEE. She won't.

SOCIAL WORKER. Yes, she will. Don't go to the park, Dee. Promise me.

DEE. Will I go to jail?

SOCIAL WORKER. No.

DEE. Good. I don't like jail.

SOCIAL WORKER. *[Calling to the offstage Police Officer]* Officer. Dee is ready.

[DEE exits into the Ensemble with the POLICE OFFICER. SOCIAL WORKER takes the chairs and exits as the KNIFE WOMAN and the EVANGELICAL WOMAN fade into the Ensemble]

GINO. *[To audience]* What'd you say? None of these people have anything to do with you? You'll never be like that? We're not through yet. *[A nicely-dressed man, MARK, enters]*

MARK. Letters behind your name don't mean much sometimes. BBA, MBA. All those college degrees can't put a spoonful of food in

your family's mouth if your whole industry has dried up. A lifetime of success doesn't count for anything. So you wait, and you tell yourself that things will get better. Finally—all you do is wait. [*A similarly well-dressed woman, LYNNE, speaks, opposite*]

LYNNE. When I went to bed, he was by me, tossing in his sleep the way he had all those months since he lost his job. The next morning, he was gone. No note, no warning. I told the children he had a lead on something and needed to be there early. I wanted to believe it.

He was always home by afternoon. He'd fall onto the couch and try to sleep past the disappointment. That's how he reacted when things went bad. He'd sleep awhile—then work half the night on a way to fix the problem. And he always fixed it. But after the lay-off, he just slept. He didn't come home that afternoon.

MARK. You grew up in a world where working yourself to death got you some place. Then all of a sudden nothing you do matters at all. You tell yourself it's not your fault. But you can't find a way to believe it. And not working is killing you from the inside.

LYNNE. I went to bed without him for the first time since we were married. For a long time, I was afraid he was dead. But now I don't think so. [*MARK pantomimes dialing a telephone*] Every week or so, the phone rings and I answer it [*she does*] and nobody's there—just a silent line for a long time—then whoever it is hangs up. [*He does*] It happens to the kids, too. [*MARK dials again; an Ensemble Member portraying a CHILD answers*] And—it's strange—it doesn't scare us. [*MARK hangs the phone up. So do LYNNE and the CHILD*]

MARK. You watch the kids watching the car being repossessed. And you stop opening the mail because you don't want to know who you owe the most. And your wife never asks you about anything because she knows you don't have any answers.

LYNNE. We married before I finished college. I hadn't worked since then. I've got a part-time job now as a receptionist for a doctor friend of ours, but we're barely hanging on.

MARK. Your family's hurting just makes you hurt more. Then one morning you decide that what's hurting them the most is you. So you walk away. And you keep walking until you get to the airport or the bus terminal or whatever you can still afford. And you put that life in a little package and you leave it behind. And you tell yourself they hurt less now. [*He exits*]

LYNNE. I keep hoping one night he'll kiss me awake. And everything will be just like it was. *[Her LIGHT dims out]*

[LIGHT up on GINO. As he speaks, CHANO, carrying a backpack, moves down to the apron]

GINO. Running away. There's the perfect answer.

CHANO. *[As he sets the backpack down, he starts to speak]* A father, a mother, and six kids need more to stay alive than a father, a mother, and five kids. So I left a note on the truck seat, looked at everybody one last time in the dark, and walked to the road. I stuck out my thumb.

I'd heard that Albuquerque and Santa Fe were good cities for Latinos. And things looked better when a guy I met bought me some clothes and offered me a job. But he wanted me to do things for him, too. I wasn't that hungry.

Life got to be the highway and the next city, the highway and the next city. If I couldn't beg or steal enough to stay alive, I tried the next place down the road.

[He holds his thumb out, trying for another ride. He "watches" cars come by during the following sequence. An ENSEMBLE MEMBER moves to a position downstage, mimes dropping a backpack, lies down and drifts off to sleep. Another Ensemble Member (ZACH) moves toward his position, also carrying a pack. (The device is that the apron of the stage is the highway.)]

ZACH. *[Stopping near the sleeping figure]* If you don't reach a city by midnight, you start looking for a place—any place—to lie down. Almost any place.

A family let me out a few miles from Atlanta one night. I was beat enough to just lay down on the shoulder of the road—like another guy *[gesturing to sleeping figure]* already had. He was sleeping just off the highway by a reflector sign. I was about to stretch out when I heard a car coming fast. The way the headlights were weaving back and forth, I knew it was a drunk. *[Moving rapidly upstage]* I grabbed my pack and ran toward a clump of trees. I screamed at the guy by the sign, "Wake up, man! Wake up!" *[SLEEPING FIGURE awakes with a start]* He raised his head—just in time to see that car come straight over him. *[The FIGURE writhes, crushed by the passing vehicle. He lies, motionless and contorted in death. ZACH's actions reflect his narration]*