

CATCHING THE BUS

By Carl L. Williams

Copyright © MMXVIII by Carl L. Williams, All rights reserved.

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Heuer Publishing LLC. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Heuer Publishing LLC. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Heuer Publishing LLC. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Heuer Publishing LLC.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this Work must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this Work. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the Work. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this Work is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: *Produced by special arrangement with Heuer Publishing LLC.*

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Heuer Publishing LLC.

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC
P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011

CATCHING THE BUS

By Carl L. Williams

SYNOPSIS: A light-hearted man encounters a despondent woman at a bus stop. Confronted by her apparent despair, he challenges her to embrace life and hope once again. Even though they are waiting to catch separate buses, there's a chance they may eventually be heading in the same direction.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 1 male)

JANICE (f)..... A librarian in need of encouragement. *(52 lines)*
 GARY (m) A man with a positive outlook on life. *(60 lines)*

DURATION: 10 minutes

TIME: Late afternoon.

SETTING: A bench at a bus stop.

PROPS

- Man's wallet
- Library card

COSTUMES

Business casual for both JANICE and GARY.

PREMIERE PRODUCTION

First Place Award, Paw Paw Village Players, Paw Paw, MI, Twentieth Annual One Acts Festival

AT RISE: *JANICE, lost in thought, sits waiting on a bench at a bus stop. GARY approaches, looking past her down the street. GARY pats his pockets.*

GARY: Excuse me. Have you got a cigarette I can borrow?

JANICE: *(Explodes.)* No, I don't have a cigarette! You come right up to a stranger and ask for a cigarette? Are you that desperate? Are you that addicted? And what do you mean, can you "borrow" one? Like you're gonna smoke it, then give it back? What's the matter with you? Get some treatment!

GARY: *(Calmly.)* I take it you don't smoke.

JANICE: *(Sarcastic.)* Brilliant deduction.

GARY: *(Almost as an aside.)* And probably not married.

JANICE: What do you mean by that?

GARY: Uh... no wedding ring.

JANICE: Look... all I'm doing is sitting here waiting for a bus. I'm not a vending machine, and I'm not looking for a date with some strange man.

GARY: I never thought of myself as "a strange man." Then again, from my point of view, wouldn't you be a strange woman?

GARY sits down. JANICE moves to the far end of the bench.

JANICE: Do you make a habit of accosting women at bus stops?

GARY: I make a habit of waiting for buses at bus stops. I accost women anywhere.

JANICE: Oh, that is so clever, so humorous. Aren't you so charming? If you were any more charming, I'd barf.

GARY: I wouldn't want to be responsible for any internal upheaval. You seem to have enough of that already.

JANICE: I've had enough of **you** already.

GARY: Fine. We'll just sit here and wait for the bus together.

JANICE shoots GARY a look.

GARY: Not together. Apart. Separately waiting for the bus. Probably not even the same bus. Mine's the 82 Willowbrook.

JANICE: Good.

GARY: Apparently not yours. Another “brilliant deduction.”

Awkward moment of silence.

GARY: I should’ve brought something to read. I don’t suppose you read.

No response from JANICE.

GARY: Doesn’t smoke. Doesn’t read. *(Another moment, starts to sing quietly.)* “Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile. You’ve got a lucifer to light your fag—smile, boys, that’s the style. What’s the use of worrying...”

GARY trails off as he sees JANICE staring at him.

GARY: It’s an old song. Very catchy. Maybe you never heard it before. Maybe you’ve heard it and don’t like it. Maybe you like it, but don’t like hearing me sing it.

JANICE: That one.

GARY: Of course, if there’s some other song you’d rather hear me sing...

JANICE turns farther away with a twitch and a huge sigh of exasperation.

GARY: *(Rises.)* OK, I’m gonna take a little walk now. Stretch a little. Pretend I’m in actual human company. And brother, do I need a smoke. Notice I didn’t say “sister, do I need a smoke.” Wouldn’t want anyone to think I was rudely addressing, approaching, accosting...

JANICE: Where is that damn bus? *(Rises impatiently, looks down the street away from GARY.)*

GARY: Ah. You’re waiting for the damn bus. I might’ve known. I never ride that one myself. It takes a left at Purgatory and ends up on Perdition.

JANICE: I don’t believe in purgatory.

GARY: *(Insinuating.)* You would if you were standing here.

JANICE: All right, I'm being unfriendly. Does everyone have to be friendly all the time? Even with strangers? Can't I just be alone?

GARY: Some people would say being alone is the same as being in purgatory... The one you don't believe in. You're not Catholic, then.

JANICE: I'm not anything. I don't believe in any of that.

GARY: Sorry to hear it.

JANICE: Don't be. Nobody should be sorry for anybody else. It doesn't do any good.

GARY: How did you come to that conclusion?

JANICE: Experience. Isn't that how we learn whatever it is we know? However little that may be.

GARY: The less we know, the more we have to rely on faith to see us through.

JANICE: Nothing sees us through.

GARY: Then how do we get through?

JANICE: We don't. *(Sits back down.)*

GARY: *(A moment's contemplation, sings softly.)* "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile—"

JANICE: What is it with you and that song?

GARY: It's a marching song. I don't know any bus-catching songs. My grandfather always used to sing it. I think he learned it back in the forties, during the war, though really it goes all the way back to the first world war.

JANICE: *(Pensive.)* Did you know that over 400,000 Americans died in World War II?

GARY: Actually, I did know that.

JANICE: Did you know the same number of Americans died last year from smoking?

GARY: That I didn't know. And didn't want to.

JANICE: *(Dwelling on the figure.)* 400,000. *(Pause.)* My mother was one of them.

GARY: *(More serious.)* I would say I'm sorry, but I've been told it doesn't do any good.

JANICE: Your grandfather survived World War II, but my mother couldn't survive cancer. And today's the first anniversary. We remember anniversaries for birthdays and weddings... why not deaths?

GARY: It's not wrong, but it's not useful.

JANICE: Like praying. Oh, yes, I prayed she wouldn't die. Maybe I didn't pray enough. Maybe I didn't believe enough.

GARY: But after a year, I'm pretty sure you've grieved enough. Or do you enjoy being miserable?

JANICE: What I enjoy is not being bothered.

GARY: But obviously you **are** bothered, and you were bothered before I ever came along.

JANICE: I'd be less bothered if you went away, so why don't you?

GARY: I will, as soon as my bus comes. (*Checks pockets.*) You wouldn't happen to have any gum?

JANICE shoots GARY a look.

GARY: No gum.

JANICE: If you're hooked that bad, you could always go chew the bark off a tree.

GARY: No, the trees around here all taste funny. I'll wait till I get uptown. I prefer elms. But you gotta bite up high... above dog level, you know.

JANICE: If I had a cigarette, I'd give it to you just to shut you up.

GARY: Even at the risk of doing me in?

JANICE: Unfortunately, it doesn't work that fast. For my mother's sake, I wish it had. (*Pause.*) There was a date on her death certificate. Time and day. But the dying took a year and a half. There should be a place on the certificate for that. And don't lie about the cause of death. Don't say cancer. Put down what it really was. Tobacco.

GARY: Would you believe smoking is my only vice?

JANICE: You picked the wrong one.

GARY: I knew I should've gone with drinking.

JANICE: When I opened my mother's safe deposit box, I found her original birth certificate. The record of her beginning, with no warning of what lay ahead.

GARY: Too bad those certificates don't come with a guarantee that life will be all we'd like it to be. But life is what it is... and what we make it, of course.

JANICE: I can't make my life do anything.

GARY: Not true. When the bus comes along, you'll get on it, won't you? That's making your life do something. You're choosing to go from point A to point B. And why? Because you don't want to stay at point A. You want to get to point B. OK, it's simplistic to put it that way, but you can stay in one spot feeling wretched about yourself and the whole rotten world, or you can decide you don't want to stay there anymore, and you move on. (*With a humorous twist.*) To a different part of the rotten, wretched world. But hey, at least you're moving.

JANICE: (*A small, reluctant smile.*) All right, I'm sorry.

GARY: There's that useless word again. Sorry for what?

JANICE: For biting your head off when you asked for a cigarette.

GARY: I'd have to have **six** heads for all the bites you took.

JANICE: And I shouldn't have thrown those statistics at you.

GARY: You're a walking encyclopedia. Or a sitting encyclopedia.

JANICE: (*Rueful admission.*) I'm a librarian.

GARY: You're kidding. Where are your glasses?

JANICE: Contacts.

GARY: You're not carrying any books.

JANICE: I leave my work at the office. Besides, you could fit a library in a laptop these days. It's all about computers.

GARY: You mean I learned the Dewey Decimal System for nothing?

JANICE: We learn a lot of things for nothing, don't we? Or what we learn is wrong, which is worse than not learning anything.

GARY: Unless you learn that it's wrong, and then you're back on track.

JANICE: (*Awkward pause.*) So... where's your bus taking you?

GARY: Nowhere, really. I call it home, but it's nowhere, speaking existentially.

JANICE: No, speaking existentially, it would be a somewhere, just not an everywhere. You're always somewhere, wherever you are, and never nowhere, though nowhere surrounds you and defines what you exist within.

GARY: You made more sense when you weren't talking.

JANICE: I've been talking all day, answering research questions for people. Now I'm going home, too.

GARY: Reminds me of another old song from my grandfather. (*Wistfully recites, doesn't sing.*) "Going home, going home, I am going home. It's not far, just close by, through an open door."

JANICE: That's sad.

GARY: Not once you get there, to the land beyond the door.

JANICE: "The land beyond the door." A poetic reference, I suppose, to the heaven you evidently believe in.

GARY: You never learned anything about it in all your research work?

JANICE: Not enough. Not yet. Do you believe your grandfather is there?

GARY: He's been there a long time. I'm looking forward to seeing him again.

JANICE: They tell me I'll see my mother again someday. What does that even mean? "Someday."

GARY: It's a matter of faith. And that isn't something one person can give to another. We have to find it on our own.

JANICE: And you found yours?

GARY: Yes. Maybe you will, too.

JANICE: (*Ironic.*) Someday?

GARY: Or even today.

JANICE: I wish I could. I wish a lot of things.

GARY: As long as you're not wishing them away. Like you wanted to wish me away.

JANICE: I don't anymore.

GARY: Glad to hear I'm making progress. Not that I'm trying to make progress. I really am just catching the bus.

JANICE: (*Mock offense, with humor.*) Now I am insulted. Your only interest here is public transportation. (*Pause, sincere.*) But thanks... for taking an interest in me.

GARY: You're welcome. I'd say it was my pleasure, but we never got that far. (*Looks down the street.*) And if that's your bus coming, it doesn't look like we'll have the chance.

JANICE: That's mine, all right, backed up in traffic. I guess I'll walk on down there. (*Rises, hesitates.*) Well... maybe we'll run into each other again sometime... here at the bus stop.

GARY: I can do better than that. (*Takes out his wallet, pulls out a card.*) I've got a library card!

JANICE: Looks kind of old. You should probably get it renewed.

GARY: I might just do that.

JANICE smiles and exits. GARY looks after her, pats his pockets again.

GARY: But right now, I'd trade this card and all the books in the library for just one cigarette. Oh, well... *(Starts to sing.)* "What's the use of worrying? It never was worthwhile. So pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile."

Blackout.

THE END

DO NOT COPY