

Help Me Reach My Goal
A One Act Play
By Harry Adelman

Time: The present

Cast: Bum A man in his late 20's to early 30's
Pedestrian A man or woman any age

Set: A street with traffic signs and a park bench

Props: Cardboard sign, doctor's bag, whiskey bottle, picture, Phi Beta Kappa key,
Sharpie marker

Lights come up on street in the daytime. A man is holding a doctor's bag and a crudely lettered cardboard sign that says "Help Me Reach My Goal", and is standing off the sidewalk and partly in the road. The man is dressed in clean, but obviously worn clothing. We hear the sound of passing traffic, and the occasional shout of "Get out of the street!" or "Get a job, you bum!" The man holding the sign responds to one of these by throwing the finger. From off-stage enters a pedestrian, who approaches the man.

Pedestrian: "Sir, can I help you in some way?"

Bum: "How could you possibly help me?"

Pedestrian: "Well, to start with, how about getting off the street and onto the sidewalk? Maybe then we can have a talk. I was interested in your sign"

Bum: *(Moving toward the sidewalk and confronting the pedestrian)* "My sign? What, can't a homeless person have any goals? Other than an appliance box with a tarp on it to spend the night in!"

Pedestrian: "Please, I don't mean to offend you." *(Pulls out a wallet and extracts some bills and tries to hand them over)* "Would twenty bucks help?"

Bum: *(Accepting the cash and putting it in his pocket)* "It's not what I was looking for, but I will gladly take it. At least it's not a fish. Thank you. Now please leave me alone."

Pedestrian: *(Puzzled)* "A fish? What are you talking about?"

Bum: "Oh, you know that old expression. Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he'll eat for a lifetime. Well, I tried fishing once, and it's boring as hell. I'll bet it's even boring for the fish. They probably chase after the bait just for something to do, other than swim, eat, and crap in the water. Besides, I hate fish. With the money you gave me I can buy chicken nuggets or something else I like."

Pedestrian: *(Laughing)* "You are most unusual..."

Bum: "For a bum...."

Pedestrian: "Yes, for a bum, if that's how you see yourself."

Bum: "I was a pre-med student at the University of Pennsylvania once, a lifetime ago."

Pedestrian: "Ah, that explains the doctor's bag. What happened?"

Bum: "It's a long story."

Pedestrian: "I have time to listen. How about if we sit down and you tell me about it." *(Motioning to the bench and they both sit down)*

Bum: "My parents had their hearts set on my becoming a doctor. I tried for the first three years, but I got sick of the grind at med school, and decided to drop out and do something else. First I tried the army. When I took the psychiatric test, the results said I was 'belligerent and surly'. You would think the belligerent part was perfect for the military, but they didn't think so. When I got the results and was told no thanks, we don't want you; I responded by beating

up the recruiting officer and landing in jail. It was while I was in the tank that I decided on my new career, homelessness. It is the ultimate exit from society. And I wanted out; out of everything that the rat race had to offer.”

Pedestrian: “And you are happy in this new ‘career’?”

Bum: “More resigned to it than happy. I get by. After all, who is really totally happy in their profession today? Not very many I’ll bet. Besides, the homeless and poor provide an important role in the modern world; people to look down on. Every society in history has had people that are spit on and abused by those in power. The ancients had slaves; the Middle Ages had the serfs; the Nazis had the Jews and the Slavs; the British their servants. Even the classless Communists have two classes, their leaders and everyone else. Lenin and Stalin led much different lives than the rank and file party members.

Pedestrian: “You are quite the philosopher!”

Bum: “Surprising from someone who is cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs, eh? Like most mental patients today, I’m out on the street instead of in an institution. There are simply too many of us around. Let me ask *you* a question. Do you believe in God?”

Pedestrian: “Yes I do.”

Bum: “And the Bible?”

Pedestrian: “What do you mean?”

Bum: “Do you believe in all of it, or just what fits your needs or agenda? For example, Leviticus tells us that homosexuals are an abomination and should be punished by death. There are those that cite that passage as justification for being anti-gay, and yet reject all other teachings of the Torah. Like love your neighbor as yourself. Like Isaiah, when he tells us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and take in the stranger and the homeless.”

Pedestrian: “I wasn’t planning on taking you home, clothing, and feeding you if that’s what you mean.”

Bum: “Just hand me twenty bucks and send me on my way. Out of sight, out of mind. A typical self-righteous, hypocritical response from someone of your ilk.”

Pedestrian: “No, I really want to help you. I want to learn some more about you first. What about the doctor’s bag. Why do you keep it? Are you planning to go back to med school some day?”

Bum: “No, I keep my life’s treasures in it. The bag itself is one of them. Do you want to see the contents?”

Pedestrian: “Sure.”

Bum: (*Opens the bag and starts taking things out*) “There are only three things in here. This is my Phi Beta Kappa key. It reminds me of my former brilliance. Perhaps I can hock it some day for a couple of bucks. This is a picture of me and my fiancé. To remind me of what I once had and never will again. And this is my first love.” (*He pulls out an empty whiskey bottle and*

lovingly cradles it) "You never forget your first love, do you? This is the first bottle I drank in one sitting after leaving med school. I will cherish it always."

Pedestrian: "That's it? A pretty sad accounting of your life, I'd say."

Bum: (*Angry*) "Who asked you? Like I said earlier, I'm resigned to my life now. You can go piss up a drain pipe."

Pedestrian: "Sorry. Is that the belligerent or surly part coming out?" (*They both laugh*)

Bum: "So, you actually *have* been listening to me? Now we get to the sign. See if you can guess what it is. Look at the back." (*He flips the sign over and we see seven tally marks on it*) "I'm at seven, see? My goal is ten."

Pedestrian: "And then what? You turn over a new leaf?"

Bum: "Possibly. Who knows for sure? We have to keep setting goals for ourselves in our lives, don't we? Otherwise, we go crazy, or in my case, crazier."

Pedestrian: "But what are you counting? How can I help you get there?"

Bum: (*Thoughtfully*) "Maybe you can help after all. Come with me." (*He stands up and so does the pedestrian. He takes a step toward the road and the pedestrian follows*)

Pedestrian: "What is it? What do you want me to do?" (*The pedestrian walks in front of the bum and is now facing him*)

Bum: "This!" (*He suddenly pushes the pedestrian out into the road. Lights black out and we hear a squealing of brakes, a scream, and an impact. The lights come back up and the bum pulls a Sharpie from his pocket and draws another tally mark on the back of the sign*)

Bum: "There! That makes eight. Only two more to go." (*He walks off stage as we hear the sound of a siren*)

Blackout

The End