

No Blues for the Cabman

A play in One Act

Written by

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Cast of Characters

Earnest A cab driver in his late forties.

Howard A successful businessman in his middle forties to fifty.

Amy Howard's secretary, mid-thirties.

Sylvia A busy business executive in her early thirties.

Rob Scraggly looking guy who looks like he does not belong in a cab.

Scene: Various locations in the city of Chicago.

Time: Present.

SETTING: The stage can be set up in a simple manner. There are four areas on the stage where action takes place: 1) Howard Stone's office, 2) Amy's office area, 3) Earnest's cab, and 4) a park bench. As we move from one area to another, the lights should dim, but not blackout, until the stage directions so indicate.

AT RISE: Before the lights come up, the following actors should be on stage and in place: HOWARD is in his office sitting on his desk, AMY is at her desk, and EARNEST is in his cab. As thunder and lightening fill the dark stage, EARNEST begins singing "Bluebird on My Shoulder." As the lights come up, EARNEST continues singing. ROB enters and roams around the stage before hailing Earnest's cab.

EARNEST

"... plenty of sunshine heading my way..."

(Earnest's cell phone rings)

Hello. What do mean, you're not going to school today?

(pause) I don't care if you're not feeling well. I didn't pay all of that tuition for you to be lying around the house. (pause) If I have to, I'll come back home and drag your butt to school. Now get going...hey, I gotta go. Looks like a fare is here. I'll call you later.

(Earnest hangs up as Rob waves at his cab.)

ROB

Taxi!

(EARNEST stops singing as he hits the breaks and ROB jumps into his cab.)

EARNEST

Yes sir, where to?

ROB

Wrigley Building.

EARNEST

Wrigley Building next...

ROB

No. The Hancock Building.

EARNEST

Hancock Building next...

ROB

No. The Sears Tower. Yes, the Sears Tower. The tallest building in this great city, one of the tallest building in the world for that matter. I want to go to the top of that fine structure and look out over this vast city at all of the teeny-weeny little people, and the teeny-weeny little cars, and...

EARNEST

Sears Tower then?

ROB

Yes.

EARNEST

Good. You're seatbelt on?

ROB

Seatbelt is on. And I can see from that question what kind of cab driver you are. I am going to make sure that you receive a proper remuneration when I exit your little business establishment on wheels.

EARNEST

Thank you.

ROB

You're welcome. (pause) Weather sure is bad out there.
Must make your life miserable.

EARNEST

You learn to roll with the punches in this job.

(The lights dim on the cab.
SYLVIA enters, umbrella over
her head. She is not after
EARNEST'S cab. It should
appear that she is in a
different part of the city.)

SYLVIA

(shouting)

Taxi! (pause) Taxi!
(She watches it pass her by.)

Damn.
(She sees another cab.)

Taxi, Taxi!
(It passes by.)

Shit, I'm gonna be late.

(SYLVIA exits. The lights
come up on HOWARD who sits
cross-legged on the top of
his desk, eyes closed, and
hands resting on his legs,
yoga like. AMY crosses to
his desk area.)

AMY

Mr. Stone, I'm almost finished with the contract, but I was
just... Mr. Stone?
(HOWARD ignores her.)

Mr. Stone are you all right?

HOWARD

Goddamn it Amy, I'm in the middle of my meditation.

AMY

You meditate, Mr. Stone?

HOWARD

Yes, I meditate, you know that, especially when I have to fly.

AMY

Flying certainly wasn't necessary, Mr. Stone. You could have completed the entire transaction over the phone and then fedexed the contract down to St. Louis. You brought this on yourself.

HOWARD

Thank you, Amy. Since when do you run the business? Besides, I want to go to St. Louis. When I finish up a deal, I want to look the other guy right in the eye. That's how I do business.

AMY

Very well, then fly.

(HOWARD gets up from his desk
and crosses to his window.)

HOWARD

Great, wonderful, fly. Have you looked out the window today? It's raining, storming even. Of all days for it to rain. Goddamn it. If this rain screws up my trip to St. Louis, we could be down the toilet.

AMY

Down the toilet, Mr. Stone? I don't think so.

HOWARD

Thank you Mrs. Accountant for your vote of confidence.

AMY

Your welcome.

HOWARD

I haven't seen it rain like this in years.

AMY

It rained like this yesterday, if you recall. And it is March in Chicago, so you're lucky it isn't snowing.

HOWARD

Now you're a weather forecaster? Is there a reason you came in here to bother me?

AMY

Yes, do you want me to use the A figures, B figures, or C figures in the contract?

HOWARD

The Bs, the Bs, okay?

AMY

You're sure it's the B figures?

HOWARD

Yes. Now leave me alone. And hurry up with the contract, I want to leave soon.

AMY

We all want you to leave soon, Mr. Stone.

(AMY crosses back to her desk and HOWARD goes back to his meditation. The lights dim on the office and come up on the cab.)

EARNEST

Sorry about the delay. Just another block, if this traffic ever starts moving again.

ROB

Only a block?

EARNEST

Yep.

ROB

How convenient.

(ROB exits the cab, reaches into his pocket like he is going to pay.)

ROB

Screw this.

(ROB runs from the cab without paying. EARNEST jumps out after him, as ROB exits the stage.)

EARNEST

Hey, hey goddamn it. What about my remuneration? You owe me twelve-fifty. (pause) Damn.

(EARNEST gets back in the cab.)

Looks like I gotta start rolling with the punches early today.

(SYLVIA enters.)

SYLVIA

Taxi!

(It passes her by. She sees EARNEST'S cab.)

Taxi!

(SYLVIA crosses to Earnest's cab and jumps in front of it.)

SYLVIA

Taxi, taxi.

(EARNEST slams on the breaks.)

EARNEST

Lady, are you nuts or what?

(SYLVIA jumps into the cab
with her umbrella open.)

SYLVIA

Get me to the Wrigley Building. I'm very late for an
important appointment.

EARNEST

You could'a been killed, jumping in front of a cab like
that.

(SYLVIA is trying like mad to
close her umbrella.)

SYLVIA

I'm not interested in all that.

EARNEST

You're not interested? If you had gotten killed, do you
know who would'a paid? Me, that's who. I'd lose my cab
license, or worse, I'd go to jail. Then where the hell
would I be?

(SYLVIA finally closes the
umbrella and comes close to
poking EARNEST in the eye.)

EARNEST

Hey, watch that thing. You expect me to drive with just one
eye?

SYLVIA

It's all hypothetical. I didn't get killed, you didn't lose
your license or your eye, and you're not going to jail. So
drive. And no long cuts, if you know what I mean.

EARNEST

I'll do the best I can, miss. You know what this weather
can do to traffic.

SYLVIA

I'm not interested in excuses.

EARNEST

Yes, ma'am. This day isn't starting out like I expected.

SYLVIA

Well, that makes two of us. Just hurry.

EARNEST

Okay. Your seatbelt on?

SYLVIA

Do you think I'd ride in one of these rolling machines of death without my seatbelt on? Now drive.

EARNEST

Yes, ma'am.

(SYLVIA opens her briefcase
and pulls out her cell phone
and dials a number.)

SYLVIA

Yes, Betty, it's me, give me Alice. (pause) Driver?
(EARNEST ignores her.)

Driver!

EARNEST

Yes, ma'am?

SYLVIA

Don't take Michigan. Cut over to Wabash, I think it might be faster.

EARNEST

They're working on the bridge, might be really jammed up.

SYLVIA

Well, then use your best judgment, you're the cab driver.

EARNEST

Whatever you say.

SYLVIA

(back to phone)

Alice, I'm on my way. Should be there very soon.

EARNEST

I wouldn't bet on that.

SYLVIA

Yes, I'm in a cab right now. Yes, do your best to explain.

(pause) I don't know. Tell Washburn that I had a doctor's appointment. It ran late. (pause) All right, all right.

Good-bye.

(She hangs up and looks around.)

We're not moving!

EARNEST

You got that right. Might as well sit back and relax.

SYLVIA

Shit.

(The lights dim over the cab and come up over the office. HOWARD is on the phone.)

HOWARD

...will he have the limo waiting for me when my plane arrives? (pause) Good, I hate the cabs in St. Louis. What's the weather like down there? (pause) Are you shitting me? Christ. Look I'll see you guys this afternoon, say a little prayer for me. 'bye.

(He hangs up the phone and presses the intercom button.)

Amy!

(No reply from AMY.)

Amy!

AMY
(into intercom)

Yes, Mr. Stone?

HOWARD

Do you know what the weather is like down in St. Louis?

AMY

Partly cloudy, with a twenty percent chance of rain, high in the upper...

HOWARD

Okay, enough with the jokes. St. Louis, right at this very moment, is having thunderstorms, lighting, and hail. My plane's gonna crash for sure. Then where will I be?

AMY

Well, you'll be dead and your wife will be a very rich widow. I hope you left me a little something for all of the years I have served you so faithfully.

HOWARD

That's nice, my wife will be a rich widow, and you want a little token of my appreciation. Everyone wants to make a killing from my untimely demise.

AMY

Mr. Stone, I've got work to do, so shut-up, you're driving me crazy.

HOWARD

Don't ever say that to me again.

AMY

I've said it a million times, you should be used to it. Now, do you want to continue talking about weather forecasts, planes crashing, or do you want me to finish the contract?

HOWARD

Finish the contract, goddamn it. I want it on my desk in five minutes.

AMY

(sarcastically)

I'll see what I can do.

(The lights dim on the office
and come up over the cab.
SYLVIA is on her cell phone.)

SYLVIA

...but Mr. Washburn, please, the doctor was running late and traffic is horrible. (pause) I know you're a busy man, but... Yes, yes. (pause) Well, can I call you next week? I see. Yes, good-bye.

(She hangs up.)

Damn it. I may have just lost my biggest account.

EARNEST

I'm sorry to hear that.

SYLVIA

And do you know whose fault it is?

EARNEST

Mine, right?

SYLVIA

Exactly, right.

(EARNEST laughs.)

SYLVIA

There's nothing funny about this. Do you see what time it is?

EARNEST

Yep.

SYLVIA

From my apartment to Mr. Washburn's office is a ten minute ride. You picked me up at 9:55, it is now 10:25. If you think I'm happy about this, you've got another thing coming, buster.

EARNEST

My name's, Earnest, not buster.

SYLVIA

Earnest, shmernest. Who cares. Just drive.

(The lights dim on the cab and come up over the office. HOWARD sits at his desk looking over some papers, AMY stands by his side.)

HOWARD

You've totally screwed up this contract. I told you to be very careful.

AMY

I put that together exactly as you requested. And if you keep screaming at me, you will leave me no other alternative but to quit. I'm doing the best I can.

HOWARD

That's not good enough. Now sections three and four have to conform to these notes right here.

(He hands her some papers.)

AMY

Well, how are they supposed to conform, if you're sitting on the information that is supposed to go into sections three and four?

HOWARD

Good secretaries know how to anticipate.

AMY

Mr. Stone, I am this close to leaving. Don't push it any further.

HOWARD

You've been this close a thousand times, now go make the changes. And call me a cab, I want to get out of here soon.

AMY

You have plenty of time, I don't know...

HOWARD

Cab, now.

AMY

Oh, Howard.

(The lights dim on the office
and come up over the cab.)

SYLVIA

You know what, Earnest?

EARNEST

I can hardly wait to hear this. What?

SYLVIA

I'm reporting you. That's what.

EARNEST

For what? Making it rain, snarling the traffic?

SYLVIA

I good cab driver would know how to handle this situation. I relied on your good judgment and you didn't do your job.

EARNEST

I can't help it if you didn't plan for the bad weather. What kind of business person doesn't know how to plan?

SYLVIA

What do you know about business planning? You're nothing but a damn cab driver.

EARNEST

That's it.

SYLVIA

What do you mean, that's it?

EARNEST

I don't mind when people are crabby, but when you start making fun of what I do, that's the limit. Get out of my cab.

SYLVIA

Excuse me?

EARNEST

You heard what I said, get out.

SYLVIA

Get out? It's raining. Where will I go?

EARNEST

Go find another cab to bother.

SYLVIA

In this weather? You've got to be kidding.

EARNEST

Nope. Out.

SYLVIA

Okay, okay. I'll get out of your damn cab, Mr. Schmerneest, but if you think I'll pay you one dime, you've lost it.

EARNEST

I don't want any of your money. Just go.

(SYLVIA exits the cab.)

SYLVIA

Very well. And here's a tip for you, don't ever pick me up again.

EARNEST

Don't ever have to worry about that. Have a good day.
(SYLVIA exits.)

The punches are coming fast and furious.

(The lights dim over the cab,
and the lights come up over
the office. HOWARD puts on a
raincoat and AMY hands him
his briefcase.)

AMY

The contract is in your briefcase and the cab is on the way.

HOWARD

You've checked it over? I mean very carefully? There can't be any errors.

AMY

I put it together, just as you asked. Everything is fine. If there are any errors, they are there because you haven't given me the correct information. Now hurry up, the cab should be here shortly.

HOWARD

Thank you for your help Amy. How do I look?

AMY

Perfect, Mr. Stone, absolutely perfect.

HOWARD

Well, I'm off. Wish me luck.

AMY

You don't need luck, Mr. Stone. Give them hell.

(The lights dim over the office and come up over EARNEST'S cab.)

EARNEST

(singing)

"Zippdy-do-da, zippdy-ay, I'll find this building if it takes me all day."

(He stops singing.)

Where the hell is this building? Sixteen west, eighteen west, twenty-four west...

(HOWARD enters.)

HOWARD

Taxi!

(HOWARD gets into the cab.)

EARNEST

Sorry, sir, but I'm waiting for a fare to the airport.

HOWARD

I am the fare to the airport, now let's just get moving.

EARNEST

Are you sure? I don't want to get into any trouble. Today has been tough enough already.

HOWARD

I'm the fare, I'm the fare. Howard Stone.

EARNEST

Yeah, that's the name. Sure don't want to make any mistakes. That's all I need, to be halfway to the airport, and have the front office call me up and start screaming. You can't believe how today has been, first...

HOWARD

I'm not interested in your history, I'm just interested in getting a move on. I've got a plane to catch. I'm in a hurry.

EARNEST

Yes, sir, where to?

HOWARD

What do you mean, where to? The airport. I think we were just talking about it, or do you suffer from some sort of short term memory problem.

EARNEST

No need to get nasty, mister. We have two airports in this city, Midway and O'Hare. Unless you want to take an airport tour, I suggest you tell me which one you'd like to go to.

HOWARD

The big one, okay? The big one. And hurry up, I've got a plane to catch.

EARNEST

Everybody in a hurry today. Traffic is a mess out there.

HOWARD

I don't care about that. I don't want to be late.

EARNEST

Okay, whatever you say. O'Hare airport next stop. Your seatbelt fastened?

HOWARD

What the hell is this, an airplane? No my seatbelt isn't fastened. I don't like wearing seatbelts. They annoy me. They wrinkle my suit. You gonna tell me where the emergency door is?

EARNEST

Hey, this isn't a joke. We're not going anywhere until you fastened that seatbelt. That's the rule.

HOWARD

If I'm late because of you, I'll make sure you never drive another cab. Understand?

EARNEST

Nobody gonna be firing me for following the rules. Put the belt on and we'll be on our way.

HOWARD

Look, I've ridden in a million cabs in my life and I've never had to fasten my seatbelt. Jesus Christ.

(EARNEST gets out of the cab
and goes to HOWARD'S door.)

HOWARD

Hey! What are you doing?

EARNEST

Get out. You're gonna have to get yourself another cab.

HOWARD

Are you crazy.

EARNEST

The rule says you gotta wear that seatbelt. Let's go, I got work to do.

HOWARD

All right, all right. I'll put it on. Now get back in here.

(EARNEST gets back into the
cab.)

HOWARD

I've never heard of such a rule.

EARNEST

Well now you've heard. We get into an accident and you're not wearing the seatbelt, then old Earnest here loses his license and that's the end of my cab career.

HOWARD

Well, isn't that too bad.

EARNEST

Yes, it is. And not only that, if I slam into something, you'll come flying over the back of the seat and crash right into my head.

HOWARD

I said I'll put it on.

(HOWARD puts the belt on.)

HOWARD

Now drive. I've got a plane to catch.

EARNEST

Is it on?

HOWARD

Yes!

EARNEST

Tight?

HOWARD

Oh, Jesus. Yes, tight.

EARNEST

That's good. That's good. Don't want you to come flying outta that thing and crash into my head.

HOWARD

You don't care about me. All you care about is your job and your head.

EARNEST

You got that right, mister. It's a new millennium. Just care about yourself. Don't give a damn 'bout anyone else. It's the new millennium way. O'Hare, here we come

(EARNEST starts singing "Bluebird On My Shoulder," as he begins to drive. HOWARD opens his briefcase and starts to look through some papers.)

HOWARD

Excuse me.

(EARNEST ignores him and keeps singing.)

HOWARD

Excuse me, driver.

EARNEST

Yes, sir?

HOWARD

I hate to be a drag, but is it necessary for you to sing while you're driving? I'm trying to get some work done here. And look at it out there, it's one of the gloomiest days of the spring.

EARNEST

It's not gloomy to me. These are my best days. When it rains like this, that's when I make the most money. So these are good days, well, usually these are good days. But you're paying, so if you don't want me to sing, I won't sing.

HOWARD

Thank you, finally, for something.

(Silence, and HOWARD continues
to look over his papers.)

HOWARD

(screaming)

Oh, my God!

EARNEST

Problem?

HOWARD

No, everything's fine. Just fine.

EARNEST

Sure doesn't sound like everything is fine.

HOWARD

Of course there's a problem.

EARNEST

Seems like today is filled with problems. Maybe I should've
checked my horoscope.

HOWARD

My secretary made a mistake in typing up this contract. I
specifically asked her if she checked it over very
carefully.

EARNEST

Always better to check these things yourself. No sense
leaving it to other people.

HOWARD

Thank you for your unwanted advice.

EARNEST

Anytime.

(HOWARD opens his briefcase
and pulls out a cell phone.)

EARNEST

What the hell would we do without our phones? Love those things, but they sure keep us from having any peace and quiet.

(The phone rings in the
office.)

HOWARD

I'm not interested in peace and quiet, I'm interested in doing...

(The lights come up over the
office as AMY answers the
phone.)

AMY

Mr. Stone's office.

HOWARD

Hello, Amy.

AMY

How are you, Mr. Stone?

HOWARD

I'm fine, thank you. I'm in a cab, on the way to the airport, with the stinking, rotten, no good contract that you put together for me.

AMY

Mr. Stone!

HOWARD

One of these days Amy, I'm gonna fire your ass.

AMY

Well, maybe I'll beat you to the punch and quit.

HOWARD

Forget it, you're not quitting, not until you fix the damn contract.

AMY

If you gave me the correct...

HOWARD

Shut-up and listen to me. Pages 8 and 9 have the B figures not the C figures. I specifically said the C figures.

AMY

The Cs, the Cs? Mr. Stone, you're wrong.

HOWARD

I am not wrong. Now, rework it and fax it down to the airport in St. Louis, I'll pick it up there.

AMY

It's not my fault, Howard, you're the one who...

HOWARD

I'm not interested in your excuses. Be thankful we have fax machines.

AMY

Oh, Howard.

(HOWARD hangs up and the lights dim on the office.)

EARNEST

You sure were tough on her.

HOWARD

She deserved it. And why are we stopped? What's going on here?

EARNEST

Probably an accident or something up ahead. Nothing we can do about it.

HOWARD

Well honk your horn like everyone else.

EARNEST

That's not gonna do any good. Just get everyone mad, including myself.

(The lights come up on the office as AMY picks up the phone and dials.)

HOWARD

If I'm late for that plane...

EARNEST

I know, I know. I'll never drive a cab again. That threat is wearing a little thin today.

(HOWARD'S phone rings. He answers it.)

HOWARD

Hello.

AMY

Mr. Stone, I am...

(AMY starts to cry.)

HOWARD

Now, Amy, stop crying.

AMY

I can't believe you'd treat me this way.

HOWARD

I know, I know, I'm a real bastard. That's the way successful people get to be successful.

(AMY is laying it on thick.)

I can't stand it when you cry, you know that. Listen to me, Amy.

(More crying from AMY.)

Amy! Fix the contract, email it to me, and then take a few days off, with pay. How does that sound?

(AMY stops crying.)

AMY

Do you mean that, Mr. Stone?

HOWARD

Yes, of course. Thank you for your help.

(AMY starts crying again.)

AMY

But, Mr. Stone, you really made me feel...

HOWARD

I said, I'm sorry, what more can I do?

(She stops crying.)

AMY

A week off with pay?

HOWARD

Okay, okay, a week. I'll talk to you later. Good-bye.

(He hangs up.)

Oy.

(The lights dim on the office.)

EARNEST

Certainly can tell who the boss is at your company.

HOWARD

Very funny. If I wanted to, I'd fire her in a second.
(He looks around.)

Are you driving this cab, or is this all pretend? We haven't moved an inch.

EARNEST

Oh, that's not right. We've gone at least 10 feet.

HOWARD

Wonderful, 10 feet. Can't you do something? Find a shortcut.

EARNEST

There's no shortcut to the airport, you know that. You've been out there a million times, right?

HOWARD

First my secretary screws up and now the traffic.

EARNEST

Relax, mister. I'll get you out there in plenty of time.
(EARNEST looks at his watch.)

It's a quarter to eleven, it should only take another 35 minutes. What time's your plane leave?

HOWARD

1:55.

EARNEST

Excuse me?

HOWARD

1:55.

EARNEST

1:55? Did you say, 1:55?

HOWARD

Yeah, that's right, 1:55.

EARNEST

I don't believe this. You're sitting there screaming and moaning about how you're in such a big hurry? You got three hours. What's your problem?

HOWARD

I like getting to the airport early. Is that okay with you?

EARNEST

I don't care if you get out there the day before. What I don't like is when people scream and crab and there's no reason behind it. We got enough time for you to go back to your office, have Amy fix your contract, hand it to you personally, and still make it to the airport on time.

HOWARD

That's all I'd have to do, go back to my office. Then for sure I'd be a nervous wreck.

EARNEST

You're already a nervous wreck. What the hell you do out there for so many hours?

HOWARD

I relax. I read. I drink coffee. What the hell business is it of yours what I do out there?

EARNEST

Just trying to figure it out.

HOWARD

Well don't.

EARNEST

Yes, sir. Whatever you say. (Pause) You sure do have a wire up your ass today.

HOWARD

I don't have a wire up my ass.

EARNEST

Well, if this is your natural way of being, then I feel sorry for Amy, and everyone else around you. Including myself.

HOWARD

Oh, okay, Mr. Psychologist. Drive, please.

(HOWARD shuffles through some papers.)

HOWARD

Hey!

EARNEST

What?

HOWARD

I have a wire up my ass?

EARNEST

Yep, sure do.

HOWARD

I'm a paying customer. Is that a way to talk to a paying customer?

EARNEST

(singing)

"It's the truth, it's actual, everything is satisfi..."

HOWARD

Would you stop with that stupid song. And even if it were the truth, you don't say that to customers. How do you expect to get a good tip?

EARNEST

Experience has taught me a valuable lesson.

HOWARD

Yeah, what's your valuable lesson?

EARNEST

When a customer has a wire up his ass, most likely gonna be a shitty tipper, so might as well tell the truth.

HOWARD

Fine theory. Okay, you want to know why I'm like this? Huh?

EARNEST

If you want to tell me, I'll listen.

HOWARD

First of all, I'm like this most of the time. The people around me get used to it.

EARNEST

I'm sorry to hear that. Luckily, I won't have that opportunity.

HOWARD

Second, I hate to fly. Can't stand it. That's why I go out to the airport early. I figure, if I'm out there, see the planes taking off and landing, smell the diesel fuel in the air, that maybe I'll relax. Get used to it.

EARNEST

Does it work?

HOWARD

No, makes me more nervous.

EARNEST

Then why do it?

HOWARD

Habit.

EARNEST

Sounds like a bad habit to me. I'd break it if I were you.

HOWARD

Thank you, you are a very helpful cabdriver. I appreciate your concern.

EARNEST

No problem. (pause) Going to St. Louis, huh?

HOWARD

Yes.

EARNEST

I love St. Louis. Wonderful town. Did you ever go to the top of the Arch?

HOWARD

No, can't say that I have.

EARNEST

You should give it a try, as long as you're going to be down there. But watch it when you get to the top, it sways like a bitch up there.

HOWARD

That's all I have to do, go to the top of a swaying arch. Flying is bad enough, thank you. Besides, I'm going there on business. I have a one hour meeting, then I catch a 6 o'clock flight back to O'Hare.

EARNEST

Just up and back.

HOWARD

That's it, you got it. Just up and back.

EARNEST

That means you gotta fly twice today.

HOWARD

Yeah. I gotta fly twice today.
(He looks through his papers.)

Hey, thanks. Thanks a million for reminding me. You're a real pal. I gotta fly twice today. Two take-offs, two landings. Jesus.

EARNEST

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get you all nervous.

HOWARD

Flying once a day is enough for me, but I gotta fly twice today. Shit.

EARNEST

Try this, it'll help. "Zippdy-do-da, zippdy-ay, my oh my, what..."

HOWARD

I'm not singing a song, thank you.

EARNEST

It'll help. Give it a try.

HOWARD

I'm not singing Zippdy-do-da, so forget it. Zippdy-do-da, shit.

EARNEST

Helps me. Whenever I get down in the dumps, I sing that song, pulls me right up. Without that song, I'd be one crabby son-of-a-bitch right now, just like you.

HOWARD

Well zippdy-do-da for you.

EARNEST

I have a sister who hated flying like you. She tried that song, and zap, cured her right up. Now she loves to fly.

HOWARD

Well, zippdy-do-da for her. I hate to fly, and I accept it.

EARNEST

It's good to accept things. Especially things we have no control over.

HOWARD

Do you have a degree in psychology or something?

EARNEST

No sir. I'm just a cab driver.

HOWARD

Yeah, sure.

EARNEST

Flying's a funny thing, though.

HOWARD

Let's not talk about...

EARNEST

Whenever I'm driving out to the airport, and I see those big jets taking off or landing, it amazes me that they can stay in the air. No matter how many times I see it. Still amazes me.

HOWARD

Look...

EARNEST

And when you get in one of those planes. First, you gotta walk down one of those long ramps, then you get inside and it smells funny, you sit down, strap yourself in. As if that little belt's gonna do any good at three hundred miles an hour. You crash, that belt'll probably rip you right in half. Right in half! And you know how you have to sit? Uptight. Like you're in an electric chair or something. They give you all those instructions in case you crash. Then the engines start, VAROOM, VAROOM, VAROOM...

HOWARD

Stop it already. Are you a sadist or what?

EARNEST

All I was gettin' to is that when them engines start up, that's when I start singing. Perks me right up.

HOWARD

Who cares. Look, ah...

(HOWARD leans over and looks
at EARNEST'S license.)

HOWARD

Earnest. I'm paying for this cab, right?

EARNEST

Right.

HOWARD

Well, then, shut-up. Don't talk, don't sing, don't do anything but drive this goddamn cab to the airport. Ya got that, Earnest?

EARNEST

Whatever you want, you got. No more talk outta me.

HOWARD

Good. I've never met a bigger pain in the ass in my life.
Zippdy-do-da.

(HOWARD goes back to his
paperwork and then pulls out
his cell phone and dials.
The phone rings as the lights
come up in the office and AMY
answers it.)

AMY

Mr. Stone's office.

HOWARD

Amy, it's me. I was thinking...

AMY

(she laughs)

Trying something new for a change?

HOWARD

Very funny. Look, I'll call you from St. Louis, if
everything goes as planned, we'll celebrate and order pizza
and beer and have it delivered. What do think?

AMY

Beer and pizza? How about lobster at the 95th? That would
be a celebration.

HOWARD

Okay, okay, lobster at the 95th. Call and make reservations
for three. Call my wife and tell her to join us. Talk to
you tonight. And I'm sorry about before. You know how I
can get.

AMY

I know, I know.

HOWARD

Yeah, 'bye.

(The lights dim on the office.
As HOWARD hangs up the phone,
we hear EARNEST sniffing.
HOWARD goes through some
papers. Finally, he looks
up.)

HOWARD

Hey, Earnest.

(EARNEST says nothing and
keeps on driving and
sniffing.)

HOWARD

Earnest. I'm talking to you.

EARNEST

I promised not to say a word.

HOWARD

It's okay, I'm talking to you.

EARNEST

Oh, yes, master.

HOWARD

For Christ sake, Earnest, I didn't mean it that way.

EARNEST

What do you want?

HOWARD

What's your problem? You gotta cold or something?

EARNEST

No.

HOWARD

Then what's with all this sniffing stuff? (Pause) Well?

EARNEST

You hurt my feelings.

HOWARD

Oh, for Christ sake. Not you too. Look, Earnest, you're a grown man, a cab driver. You must be tough. You've probably had to put up with lots of assholes like me. Now stop crying.

(EARNEST starts to laugh.)

EARNEST

Hey, it works. No wonder Amy uses it all the time. Maybe I should start to cry just before we get to the airport, then you'll give me a big tip.

HOWARD

Very funny, Earnest. Okay, you caught me. I owe you an apology. I'm sorry. I was a real jerk back there.

EARNEST

I'm used to putting up with jerks. I got stiffed by two passengers just today. So hearing you bitch and moan is no problem to me.

HOWARD

Yeah, it is. Who the hell am I to talk to another human being that way? You're trying to cheer me up, looking out for my safety, and I'm acting like a real schmuck.

EARNEST

Forget about it. (pause) Look, I know this may sound a little strange, but it's almost time for lunch and I am getting hungry, and you have plenty of time, so why not join me?

HOWARD

You're inviting me to lunch?

EARNEST

Yeah.

HOWARD

After the way I've treated you, you're inviting me to lunch?

EARNEST

That's right.

HOWARD

Hell, I've got more than two hours to kill and I hate eating alone. You got any suggestions? Deli, Italian, maybe Chinese?

EARNEST

How does Earnest's lunch bucket sound?

HOWARD

Your lunch bucket?

(EARNEST holds up a large lunch bucket.)

EARNEST

Yep. I've got four sandwiches, four sodas, pickles, and potato chips. A lunch fit for a king, even two kings. There's a small park just ahead, with a great view of the expressway. We can park there, eat lunch, and maybe see an accident or two. You know what this weather can do the Kennedy. It might be quite a show.

HOWARD

Earnest, I'm in your hands. Let's eat. And leave the meter running.

EARNEST

No way. I don't work, I don't charge. I'll clock her out, and start it up again after lunch.

HOWARD

Fair enough.

(Music up. To show a passage of time, the lights should move from: office, where AMY exits; to cab; to SYLVIA, who enters again looking for a cab. She should be a mess by this time. At the appropriate time SYLVIA exits, the lights blackout over the office, and the music is out. HOWARD is in the back with his suit jacket off, tie undone. He and EARNEST are eating sandwiches and drinking cokes.)

HOWARD

Earnest.

EARNEST

Yeah?

HOWARD

How about another pickle?

EARNEST

One pickle coming up.

(The two eat in silence for a moment.)

HOWARD

Earnest.

EARNEST

Hmm?

(Howard reaches out his hand and the two shake.)

HOWARD

Howard Stone. I've never really introduced myself. It's Howard, Howard Stone.

EARNEST

Nice to meet you, Howard.

(HOWARD takes a bite out of
the sandwich.)

HOWARD

This is the best bologna and cheese I've ever had. You make this?

EARNEST

Nope, my sister. She lives upstairs of me and makes me lunch everyday. She's quite a cook.

HOWARD

Sitting here, eating sandwiches in the car. Kind of like the old McDonalds.

EARNEST

The old McDonalds?

HOWARD

Yeah. My old man told me that in the old McDonalds you had to eat in the car because they didn't have any place to sit. No matter how cold it was, you'd sit there eating cheeseburgers and fries in your car. That must have been crazy.

EARNEST

Yeah, I heard about that too.

(Singing to the tune of "Old McDonald." It should sound like he is making it up as he goes.)

Old McDonalds had no chairs, ei, ei, oh. They ate in cars and on the stairs, ei, ei, oh. With a Big Mac here and a Big Mac there, Old McDonalds had no chairs, ei, ei, oh.

HOWARD

What the hell was that, Earnest?

EARNEST

You drive around in a cab all day by yourself, you gotta do something to break the monotony. I make-up little songs. Keeps me from going crazy.

HOWARD

Talking about going crazy, I remember...

EARNEST

Hey, Howard, look at it out there. The suns coming out and I see a break in the clouds. It may turn out to be a nice day after all.

HOWARD

Holy shit, you're right. Come on, Earnest, let's take a walk. Stretch my legs a little before my flight.

EARNEST

Really?

HOWARD

Yeah, come on.

(The two get out of the cab and start to walk.)

EARNEST

Yep, the weather is clearing. First sun we've seen in days.

HOWARD

Still a hint of winter in the air, though.

EARNEST

Yeah, yeah, that's true, but spring's a coming.

HOWARD

This is nice. Usually, by this time, I'm out at the airport, pacing around like a nut. I have a couple of drinks, make myself miserable.

EARNEST

Most of the time, I sit in my cab alone and eat lunch. I find a place along the lake, or in Lincoln Park, you know, someplace nice. So, it's my pleasure today, Howard.

HOWARD

Well, the way I've acted, I'm not too sure you mean that. Sometimes I can act like a real jerk.

EARNEST

Happens to all of us.

HOWARD

No, this isn't some occasional quirk. I'm a jerk all the time. Amy, my secretary, she's been with me for twelve years. You know how many times she's left? At least ten. If she left, I don't know what the hell I would do. She practically runs the business. I've gotten down on my hands and knees begging her to stay. She cries, I beg. Thank God it works. And my wife, Arleen, one day she's going to divorce me. If she ever goes through with it, I'm in deep shit. With an attitude like mine, who'd want me?

EARNEST

I have a cousin, Millie, uglier than sin. Looks like she ran into a wall, or something. Sad case. She'd take you in a second.

HOWARD

I'll keep it in mind, thanks.

(The two stop walking and sit
on the park bench.)

EARNEST

Look at that expressway down there. Where are all these people going? Away from the city, into the city. It never seems to stop. Rush, rush, rush.

HOWARD

I've never really paid much attention. Look at all those cars.

EARNEST

Know what, Howard?

HOWARD

What?

EARNEST

I don't really know you, but that's you down there. Rushing here, rushing there. Trying to get somewhere as fast as you can. Never looking to the side, never looking back. Honking your horn 'cause someone's blocking your way.

HOWARD

I think you got a point, Earnest. When you're driving as fast as I am, you just hope you can keep everything under control. Don't hurt anybody too much.

EARNEST

Well, a successful man like you has got a lot of pressure on him.

HOWARD

No I don't. This meeting in St. Louis? You'd think it was a life and death matter. It's not.

EARNEST

Sure sounds like it. Falls through, everything comes to an end.

HOWARD

Hardly, Earnest. The chance of this falling through are slim and none. Most everything's been worked out in advance. It's a 99% certainty.

EARNEST

What's the one percent?

HOWARD

The plane crashes.

EARNEST

That's even less than one percent.

HOWARD

Right.

EARNEST

So then, what's the problem?

HOWARD

I'm so used to getting my own way, that if there's the slightest chance of it falling through, I get crazy.

EARNEST

You gotta learn to relax.

HOWARD

That's what my wife keeps telling me. I don't know what my problem is. I worry about everything. You'd think I came from some deprived childhood or something.

EARNEST

Did you?

HOWARD

Hell, no, Earnest, no deprived childhood for me. I had everything I wanted. When I graduated from high school, I decided to go to the University of Arizona. All my friends stayed close to home, Champaign, Carbondale, you know the state schools. But, no, I had to go to Arizona. I partied my brains out, played golf, and still got great grades. Got a BA in business and went to UCLA for my MBA. When I got out, I interviewed a bunch of businesses, and they all seemed like jerks. So, I called my father, told him I wanted to come back to Chicago and work with him in the family business. He was thrilled. Two years later he decided to retire to play golf, and turned the whole thing over to me. That was 24 years ago and business is better than ever. And when this deal in St. Louis is completed, I'll probably double my business in two years. I've got nothing to worry about and nothing to complain about. Life, as they say, is a piece of cake. And here I am, everyday, singing the blues.

EARNEST

Sounds like you got it made, Howard.

HOWARD

I do. And what about you, Earnest?

EARNEST

No blues for the cabman. Can't afford to have the blues.

HOWARD

So life is good?

EARNEST

I can't say that.

HOWARD

So life is bad?

EARNEST

I can't say that, either. It's not easy though. Got two beautiful children, Andrew and Dianna. Very smart. Both of them in college. Proud as hell of them.

HOWARD

Married?

EARNEST

No.

HOWARD

Divorced?

EARNEST

No. I'm a widower.

HOWARD

I'm sorry, Earnest.

EARNEST

Nothing to be sorry about, Howard. Happened a long time ago. She was walking home from work one night. Some guys in a gang got into a fight, started shooting. Annie never knew what hit her. Died on the spot. She was a beautiful woman. Best friend I ever had. So, I've done the best I could to raise our kids. Make her proud of me.

HOWARD

Sounds like you've done a hell of a job, Earnest. Putting two kids through college on what a cabbie makes, isn't easy.

EARNEST

You got that right.

HOWARD

It's funny. I've got everything in the world. I could cash in all the chips right now. Sell everything, and I could live very well for the rest of my life. And I bitch and moan and act as if the whole world was coming to an end at any minute. And you, you seem to act as if the bluebird of happiness has a permanent home on your shoulder.

EARNEST

It does. Maybe I'll loan him out to you some time, 'till you can find your own.

HOWARD

You'd do that for me?

EARNEST

Sure, what the hell, I trust you'd send him back to me when you've cheered up a bit.

HOWARD

You're a good guy, Earnest.

EARNEST

I do my best.

(HOWARD reaches into his pocket and takes out a card.)

HOWARD

Take one of my cards. Call me next week. I'm going to look around, see if I can find a spot for you in my company.

EARNEST

Howard, you don't have to do that. I'm happy driving a cab.

HOWARD

Take the card. You don't want the job, you don't have to take it.

EARNEST

I guess it can't hurt anything to talk.

HOWARD

That's right, Earnest.

EARNEST

(looking at watch)

Hey, look at the time. We better get going. Don't want to miss that plane, especially since you gave yourself three hours to get out there.

HOWARD

I suppose so.

(They cross back to the cab.)

EARNEST

Seeing those blue skies starting to pop through the clouds, I have the feeling there's not gonna be a plane crash in your future.

HOWARD

Your probably right, Earnest.

(EARNEST and HOWARD get back into the cab.)

EARNEST

O'Hare airport, next stop.

HOWARD

Earnest?

EARNEST

Yeah.

HOWARD

Not O'Hare, downtown.

EARNEST

Downtown? You're not going to St. Louis?

HOWARD

No. Amy's right, I don't have to fly down there, drive myself crazy.

EARNEST

You're the boss. Change of flight plans, downtown Chicago, next stop. (pause) Oh, Howard...

HOWARD

Relax, my seatbelt is on and it's tight . And pass me another coke, if you don't mind?

EARNEST

Not at all, Howard.

(HOWARD pops open the can.)

HOWARD

Here's to staying home.

EARNEST

To staying home.

(They drink. HOWARD looks out the cab window for a moment as EARNEST drives.)

HOWARD

Hey, Earnest.

EARNEST

What?

HOWARD

Sing the song.

EARNEST

What song?

HOWARD

You know damn well what song.

EARNEST

Under one condition.

HOWARD

What's that?

EARNEST

You sing it with me.

HOWARD

Hell, no. I don't sing.

EARNEST

You don't sing, I don't sing.

HOWARD

All right. All right. You start and I'll jump in.

(EARNEST starts up with "Blue Bird On My Shoulder." Slowly and reluctantly HOWARD joins in. It doesn't take long and soon the two are singing at the top of their lungs. EARNEST stops.)

EARNEST

Howard?

(HOWARD keeps singing.)

EARNEST

Howard!

HOWARD

Yeah?

EARNEST

You sure you don't want to go the airport?

(He looks at his watch.)

We still got plenty of time to catch your plane.

(HOWARD thinks for a second
and suddenly starts singing
"Bluebird on my Shoulder."
EARNEST jumps in and the two
are singing at the top of
their lungs once again. The
lights slowly fade to
BLACKOUT.)

THE END