

“A Hobo Holiday Harmony”

Scene one: A dirty alleyway in wintertime. There is a big cardboard box on stage with a cold, shivering hobo sleeping inside it. A barrel with “fire” in it is center stage. Hobo shivers himself awake. It is night, lights only about half way up

George: Cold... cold... (Music to somewhere over the rainbow starts. George starts to sing)

Somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high, there’s a land that I dream of, where I’ll be warm and dry. Somewhere over the rainbow, this street no more my home, family gathered around me, never again to roam.

Some day I’ll wish upon a star and wake up where this alley’s far behind me, where hunger never more will be and friends and loved ones I will see that’s where you’ll find me...

Somewhere, over the rainbow way up high, there’s a land that I dream of where I’ll be warm and dry.... If happy little blue birds fly above the rainbow why O why can’t I?

(George goes back to lay down, shivering, lights fade away. Curtains close.)

Scene two: Another box is on stage, another hobo is sitting in front of it. Morning, lights are up

Bill: Yo, freight train!

George: (startled awake) Heh!?! Aw man, why’d you have to go and wake me up. I was dreaming about a steak. Big, juicy, baked potato on the side covered in butter, salad, desert...

Bill: Well I know where you can get that steak, cause you snore like you’ve got a cow in your belly!

George: And who exactly are you? Last time I checked, this was my alley, and I didn’t invite you into it.

Bill: Hey buddy, last time *I* checked, you homeless people didn’t have any right to claim an alley as your own.

George: I beg your pardon. I sir, am not homeless. I, am a hobo! There is a big difference.

Bill: Well well well! It seems I may have misjudged you, my good man. I did not recognize you for a man of such quality. I myself am also a hobo!

George: No!

Bill: Oh yes.

George: Well now. If that is true, you must be fairly familiar with the diet of a hobo.

Bill: Ah, yes. The finest cuisine the world over.

George: Vienna sausage...

Bill: Bologna and cheese.

George: Cold ravioli...

Bill: And black eyed peas.

George: But if a real hobo you truly are...

Bill: I sir, have drunk deeply from life's cool aid jar...

George: Then one thing that will doubtless make you stomach quiver, is any and every mention of...

Both: Liver!

(Song, I hate liver. This was a song from the 1970 by Second City. Just go through the chorus two times: "I hate liver, liver makes me quiver, liver makes me curl right up and die, makes me cry. It gives you hives, gives you scurvy, turns my stomach topsy turvy, liver just simply ain't my bag, makes me gag, yes, I hate liver, liver makes me quiver, liver makes me curl right up and die, makes me cry. It gives you hives, gives you scurvy, turns my stomach topsy turvy, liver just simply ain't my bag, makes me gag!")

George: Why sir, tis evident that you and I are cut from the same checkered cotton cloth! Allow me to formally invite you to spend as much time as you like residing in my humble and temporary alleyway abode.

Bill: Why thank you, my good fellow. I am Bill. Hobo Bill from Claytonville.

George: It's a pleasure to meet you, Bill. I am George. Hobo George from Valley Forge.

Bill: A pleasure indeed, George. Listen, I've got something special in my hobo pack...

George: Special?

Bill: Special. I have two barely used peanut butter and jelly sandwiches!

George: Oooh! This one only has one bite out of it!

Bill: Uh huh! To the life of a hobo! Cheers! (They tap sandwiches and sit down to eat.)

Bill: Say George, what made you choose to be a hobo?

George: Mmm. It's sort of a long story, but I'll try to give you the short version. My wife of twenty five years got sick. Cancer. When she passed away, I just couldn't bear to go on with the life I was living.

Bill: Didn't you have any kids?

George: Actually I do. I have a boy, twenty-three, and a girl age twenty. They both offered to let me come live with them, but I just didn't want to be a bother. I've often regretted not taking them up on their offer, but now... I have nothing left. I'm just an old hobo with no job and no money. If I went home, they'd end up having to take care of me. I just couldn't do that. What about you? What's your story?

Bill: My story could be summed up in two words: my fault. I have a dear wife. I know she wants me to come home.

George: Why don't you? Surely that would be better than wandering around all the time.

Bill: It's like this. I had a successful business, everything in the world was going my way. We had a huge house, nice cars, took two or three vacations every year.

George: What happened?

Bill: Let's just say I wasn't quite as smart of a business man as I thought. I invested everything in a dot com company. We lost it all. We had to move into a little one bedroom apartment, and I couldn't even find a job. My wife had to go to work at a little burger joint just to put food on the table. I couldn't bear putting her under such pressure through my incompetence. So one day I just packed up a few possessions, and told her goodbye. You know what the worst part is? She told me she'd be there waiting for me, and I know she means it.

George: Man, why don't you go home?

Bill: For the exact same reason you don't. I just can't bear the thought of being a drain on family resources. When I make it big, then I'll go home.

George: How are you gonna do that?

Bill: I have no idea.

George: (laughing) Well, looks like you and I are gonna be a couple of stubborn hobo's for many more years!

Bill: I suppose so... (Lights fade down, curtains close)

Scene three: Another box is in the alley. Another hobo is sitting by his box, cleaning out his fingernails while the other two sleep. The other two are snoring back and forth to the tune of Mary had a little lamb. When they finish, the third hobo claps.

Ron: Bravo! Bravo! A fine performance indeed. Why I remember the first time I heard Mary had a little lamb, it was my first performance. I was five years old. Ah, those were the days... (Both hobos jump up with a start)

George: Good morning. What brings you to our rapidly shrinking alley?

Ron: Ah, a true hobo always knows the difference between a common alleyway and a hobo haven. When I passed by and heard your melodious snores, I knew that men of fine bearing were somewhere near.

Bill: That's a fine bit of flattery, friend. But we do seem to be running out of room here. If you're going to join our little hobo haven, you're going to have to contribute something of value to the mix.

Ron: Ah, the law of the hobo. Well friend, to quote Peter, silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. I have the one thing every hobo values most...

Bill and George: Story time!

Ron: That's right friend, I do have a compelling story to tell. It's the story of a handsome, dashing young man who ended up giving it all up for the life of a wanderer...

George: So how did you end up out here? It's not exactly a luxurious life.

Ron: There was a girl.

Bill: Isn't there always.

Ron: Aw, for some reason she was crazy about me. We were married, everything was picture perfect.

George: But...

Ron: But, there was one thing she wanted more than anything else in the world. We tried for 9 years.

Bill: Couldn't have kids, huh.

Ron: No. What made it worse was that we went to a bunch of doctors, did test after test, and they all came to the same conclusion. She's not the problem, I am. She said that it didn't matter, she said that she loved me anyway. But night after night, after she thought I was asleep, I would hear her start to cry. She would cry herself to sleep night after night. So one day when she left for work before me, I got up, packed a few things and left a note telling her that I was giving her her freedom, and that she should go to a lawyer, end the marriage, and find somebody else who could give her kids.

George: Did she?

Ron: That's the weird thing. I've called her a few times, and she says that she wants me to come home, and she's waiting for me.

Bill: Why in the world aren't you home yet?

Ron: Man, the only work I know how to do is janitorial. It costs over 20,000 dollars to have the medical work done that will allow me to give my wife children. I can't go home till some kind of miracle happens that drops a wad of cash in my life.

George: Well, Bill, it looks like our little hobo family is growing. Ron, welcome to our alley.

Ron: Thanks, guys. Your kindness makes me want to...

Bill: You're not going to cry are you?

Ron: No. I was about to say, your kindness makes me want to sing!

(To the tune of “my girl”)

Ron: I’ve got sunshine, on a cloudy day, when it’s cold outside, I’ve got an alleyway... I guess you’d say, what can make me feel this way, my guys, (others join in) my guys, my guys talkin bout my guys, my guys...

I’ve got so little money, no-one envies me, but I’ve got a sweeter song, than the birds in the trees, I guess you’d say, what can make me feel this way, my guys, my guys, my guys, talkin bout my guys, my guys...

George: Tell you what fella’s, let’s go see if we can round up some grub.

Bill: Good idea... (Lights fade, curtain closes)

Scene four: Another box is in alleyway when the three hobo’s return. As they walk up, they hear and see a fourth hobo singing

Jimmy: (sings “I’ll be home before dark”)

Bill: (clapping with the others) not bad friend, not bad at all. Names Bill, this is Ron, and this is George.

Jimmy: Howdy. Jimmy’s m’name.

George: Hello, Jimmy. Looks like you have officially filled up our alley to the last box. Our cardboard conclave is complete! A pleasure, sir.

Jimmy: The pleasure is all mine.

Ron: So. We already know each other, and our unique stories, but...

Jimmy: But, you want to know mine. Well, you’ve welcomed me into your alley, I suppose it’s the least I can do. My mom died when I was young. I’m an only child, I’ve never been married yet. Dad’s gotten pretty old, but I made him a promise a few years ago. I promised him that as long as I was alive, he would never go to a rest home. That turned out to be a promise that I couldn’t keep. His health got so bad, he needed round the clock care. He told me it was ok, but I just couldn’t handle it. I made up my mind that I would go out and find a way to make a fortune so that I could hire round the clock care in my own home.

George: It doesn't look like that plan worked out.

Jimmy: No. I sunk what little money I had into a business venture that didn't work out at all. I have nothing left but what little you see. I let my own dad down.

Bill: Welcome to the hallway of heartbreak. Looks like we've all blown it pretty good. Tell you what, fellas. Why don't we agree that if any one of us ever strikes it rich, we split it up and go home?

George, Ron, Jimmy: Agreed!

Ron: In the mean time, fellas, let's enjoy our special view of the stars, and sleep like kings... (Lights fade, curtain closes)

Scene five: The hobos are sleeping, a man walks into the alley with a poster and a hammer. He hammers the poster in place, and that hammering wakes up the Bill as the man walks away.

Bill: What in the world! It's getting to where a hobo can't even get a good night's sleep in his own box anymore. What's so important that it couldn't wait till a decent hour. Let's see, "December 15th, quartet contest. Winners receive a guaranteed recording contract worth one million dollars." One million dollars, ONE MILLION DOLLARS! Hey, hey fellas, wake up! Wake up now!

George: What, what?

Bill: Look at this! This is our ticket. This is it! One million dollars!

Ron: What are you babbling about? (Takes poster) "Quartet contest. Winners receive a guaranteed recording contract worth one million dollars. Rock, country, or gospel, sing what you are." Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?

Bill: Yes. Quartet means four. Singing means us, and a million dollars means we go home as successes. December 15th is two weeks away, we practice, we win this thing, we're home before Christmas.

Ron: Helloooo. We're hobos. We live in boxes. We smell terrible, and our clothes are nothing more than rags.

George: So much the better!

Ron: What?

George: When was the last time you saw a singing group that didn't have an angle?

Jimmy: An angle?

George: Sure! Michael Jackson turned white, Cher has more fake body parts than a 69 volkswagon, Donnie and Marie were the wholesome family types, every singer or singing group has an angle!

Jimmy: And our angle is?

Bill: We're hobos, we live in boxes, we smell terrible, and our clothes are nothing more than rags!

Jimmy: Ok, then assuming we actually do this, what kind of singers are we? I'm assuming we're too crackery to be rappers.

George: Oh yeah. How about Italian opera? I've always liked that. "O sola meow, O sola me, O sola meow, o sola me.... (Others are staring at him dumbfounded.)

George: Ok, so we don't do the Italian opera thing. What then?

Bill: Barbershop!

Ron: We're hobos, not hippies. None of us need haircuts.

Bill: No, barbershop quartet! We put together gospel and Christmas music, barbershop quartet style. Have you heard what passes for music these days? Fellas, we sing at least as good, maybe better than any of the superstar wannabes out there. We can do this!

Jimmy: Guys, the odds are that we'll lose.

George: We already have.

Ron: What?

George: Every one of us has already lost everything that's important to us. We have an edge in this contest, guys. We have nothing left to lose...

(A moment of silence follows. Slowly, the hobos all clasp hands in the middle, smile and the lights fade out)

Scene Six: An announcer is in front of a video camera.

Announcer: Well, we're back at the most exciting musical event of the year. When this week is finished, America will have the star of a new singing group rising into the airwaves. After tonight, there will only be two groups left to sing in the final competition on Friday night for the recording contract worth one million dollars. The competition has been fierce so far. Let's return to our contest with the next entry, perhaps the most unique group here today, the Hobo Barbershop Quartet.

(Hobo's make their way in, sing their song, they leave to applause, light's fade out.)

Scene seven: A little girl is lying in a sickbed, her mother and little sister beside it stroking her hair.

Little sis: Mamma?

Mom: Yes baby?

Little sis: I want my sister to feel better:

Mom: I do too Baby, I do too...

Girl: (Groaning) Mom, why won't the pain go away?

Mom: Honey, the cancer is pretty far advanced now. The doctors are doing all that they can for the pain, but they're not able to give you much more medication than they already are. I'm sorry baby.

Girl: That's ok mom, I know they're trying. Everybody's been pretty nice to me, haven't they?

Mom: They sure have, sweetheart. Your dad has stayed up with you every night for the past month, and all of the doctors and nurses have loved you like you were their very own. They all think you're pretty special. I do too.

Little sis: I do too!

Girl: Thanks, mom, thanks Brianna. Mom?

Mom: Yeah?

Girl: I'm not going to make it till Christmas, am I.

Mom: No honey, I don't think so. Tell you what. Why don't we let you open all of your presents today, just in case?

Girl: Oh that's ok. I don't imagine I'll need any new clothes in heaven, or the new radio.

Mom: The new radio? (Smiling) Why you little rat, how did you know about that?

Girl: Hey, I'm never too sick to snoop...

Mom: Well little miss snoop, if you don't want to open your presents, is there anything special we can get for you or do for you? Name it! *Command me to bring thee the moon or the stars, and it shall be done!* What about it honey. What can I do for you while you're still with me?

Girl: Well...

Mom: Ah! So there is something...

Girl: I can't sing anymore, my voice is so weak and tired.

Mom: You always were the little songbird.

Girl: But even though I can't sing, there's still a song in my head. And...

Mom: What is it honey?

Girl: Oh, it's nothing. You'll think I'm silly.

Mom: Oh baby, I could never think that. What's on your mind?

Girl: Do you remember when we stopped at the drug store last week? You went inside

while I stayed in the car with daddy. I had the window rolled down. For a minute I thought the pain medication was playing tricks on me, cause I heard singing coming from the alley beside the drug store. Mama, it was beautiful. When I looked up, I saw four men, they looked homeless, but they were singing the most beautiful music! I haven't been able to stop thinking about it. Mama, I want to hear them sing again, just one more time.

Mom: Honey, you know the doctor says we can't move you anymore, you're too weak.

Girl: Well, maybe you could bring them here!

Mom: Oh sweetheart, I don't know. To bring four strange homeless men into our home and your room?

Girl: Mama, what are they going to do, kill me? Please mama, that's all I want before Jesus sends for me. (She drifts off into sleep.)

Mom: Doctor?

Doc: (Comes and checks her pulse.) Maam, whatever you're going to do, you need to do it soon. She'll be gone any time now. I'm sorry. (Lights fade down)

Scene eight: Back in the alleyway, the hobos are practicing tones, warming up.

George: Well fella's, this is it. Tonight we trade in our rags for riches. In exactly one hour, we sing our way to fame and fortune.

Bill: By this time next week, I'll be sitting in a new home, in front of the Christmas tree, and my wife won't ever have to flip burgers again. I miss her so bad.

George: My boy and my girl won't believe it when I show up. We always had big Christmases together.

Ron: My wife and I will spend Christmas making doctor's appointments, cause buddy, within a month after I get home, she's gonna be pregnant!

All: Amen!

Ron: What about you, Jimmy? What are you gonna do with your share of the wealth?

Jimmy: Me an dad are going to drive away from that rest home and never look back. We'll have the finest in - home care for him, and our very own place to live. He's going to spend his last few years in luxury with his son.

All: Here here!

(At that moment, mom and Brianna walk up behind them in the alleyway)

Mom: Excuse me, I hate to interrupt anything, but...

Bill: Oh not at all, dear lady. It's not often that we have such illustrious company in our humble alleyway. Can we offer you a seat?

Ron: Ham sandwich?

George: Napkin?

Jimmy: Water?

Mom: No, but thank you.

Bill: Well, ma'am, if you don't mind me asking, what can we do for you? It's sort of unusual to have someone as well dressed as yourself come into a hobo's alley!

Mom: Well, I know this may sound kind of odd, but there is something I need from you.

George: Ma'am, just say the word, and we'll surely do our best!

Little sis: My sister is sick.

Mom: She has cancer. She only has a few hours left to live... (Begins to cry softly)

George: My wife passed away of cancer a few years ago. I understand a little of what you're going through. But If she only has a little time left, what in the world are you doing here?

Mom: She asked me to come.

Ron: Ma'am?

Mom: She used to sing like a little bird. Her whole life has revolved around music. About a week ago, we were parked just out there by the drugstore. Molly had the window rolled down, and she got to here you gentlemen singing.

Jimmy: Right. We're in a contest for a recording contract.

George: Hobo harmony (singing)

Ron: Harmony

Jimmy: Harmony

Bill: Harmony!

Mom: Hm. No wonder she was impressed. You guys have terrific voices. Just a little bit ago I asked her what I could do for her. Believe it or not, the only thing she wants before she dies is to hear you men sing to her in person. It would mean so much to her. Could you come?

Bill: Ma'am, after tonight's performance, we'll be glad to. How about tomorrow morning at 10:00?

Mom: Oh I don't think you understand, I need you to come now. She won't live more than an hour or two at most. I brought the van so we could all fit...

Ron: Ma'am, there's a problem. We have to be at the square in 15 minutes, and we'll be there for the rest of the night. We can't come now. If we win this contest we're going to, we'll all be able to go home to our families!

Mom: A contest? My little girl is dying and you're going to a contest? For money?!? My daughter isn't a recording studio owner, but I love her. All she wanted was to hear you sing. Go win your money. Here's my address, send a copy of your recording for us to play at her funeral! (She runs away crying)

Jimmy: What could we do? This is our big chance.

Ron: This could give us everything we've ever wanted.

Bill: We could be home by Christmas!

George: There's a little girl dying of cancer. All she wants for Christmas is to hear us sing...

Bill: Ok look. We're in this thing together. Whether we go to the contest or to sing for

that little girl, we go as a group. Now what's it gonna be? (Lights slowly fade down)

Scene nine: Back in the room of the little girl, mom is stroking her hair, dad is beside her.

Girl: Mom, are they gonna come sing for me.

Mom: I don't think so honey. They were... busy. I'm sorry.

Girl: That's ok. I wish you could have heard them sing though. It was beautiful. They were singing "away in a manger." It was so pretty (she begins to weakly sing) away in a manger no crib for His bed, the...

(One hobo after another begins to drift into the room, they join her and harmonize with her in the song. As the song ends with "and take us to heaven to live with thee there," the girl speaks)

Girl: Oh mama! They came! And now all of their friends are coming. They look so bright and pretty. And the singing, it's even more beautiful than before. And I get ... to sing... with... them...

Doctor: (steps over, checks her pulse) We've lost her...

Mom: No sir, we haven't lost her. We know exactly where she's at... (Looking up at the hobo's) thank you so much for coming. You'll never ever know how much this meant to my baby, and how much it means to me. But, this means...

Bill: Yes ma'am, we missed it. But that's ok. It seems I remember Jesus saying that it's more blessed to give than to receive. We'll be going now, and we'll be praying for your family.

Mom: Will we ever see you again?

George: Oh, I suspect so. Your little girl sang soprano. Bill and I will be to the right of her in the tenor section...

Jimmy: I'll be behind her in the bass...

Ron: And I'll be nearby in the baritone. Merry Christmas, ma'am, until we meet again. (Lights fade on bedroom, as hobos make their way to center)

George: Well fellas, what now? Seeing that family together sure makes a person think, doesn't it?

Bill: Oh yeah. They didn't have much, did they?

Ron: No, but they had each other. They had family.

Jimmy: Kind of like Mary and Joseph. They were as poor as we are, but reading their story in Matthew and Luke, it didn't much seem to matter. You know, just thinking about it makes me miss my dad.

Ron and Bill: Our wives...

George: My kids...

Bill: Fellas, that train moves along pretty good, and those boxcars make a comfortable way to travel. Especially when every click of the track brings you one step closer home. We could still be home by Christmas, and I don't think our empty pockets will matter much.

George: See you guys in Heaven?

Ron, Jimmy, Bill: Agreed

Bill: But before we go, one more, one more...

(They turn to audience, and close with the song "Will the circle be unbroken.")