



R. Eugene Jackson

Adapted from the story "The Cop and the Anthem" by O. Henry

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Soapy and the Island
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P.O. Box 1401
Rapid City, SD 57709

Soapy and the Island

CLASSIC. Adapted from the O. Henry short story, “The Cop and the Anthem.” Soapy, a New York City hobo, longs to spend the winter months at his favorite island “paradise”—the jail on Rikers Island! Soapy’s friend tries to convince him to stay at the local mission instead, but Soapy is determined to get to “The Island” any way he can. But how can he get there? It’s easy! All he has to do is to get arrested. The only problem is that no matter how hard Soapy tries, he can’t convince the police to arrest him!

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

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Left: Portrait of O. Henry by W.M. Vanderweyde, 1909. Red Skelton as Freddie the Freeloader with Allen Jenkins as his friend, Muggsie, in a 1958 enactment of "The Cop and the Anthem" on Skelton's television program.

O. Henry is the pen name for William Sydney Porter, who was born in Greensboro, NC, and later lived in Texas and in New York City. After cash was found missing at the First National Bank in Austin, TX, where Porter worked as a teller, he was called to stand trial for embezzlement but fled to Honduras. In 1897 when Porter found out that his wife was dying, he returned to Texas, where he was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison for embezzlement, though his guilt was much debated. While in prison, Porter began to write short stories under the pen name of O. Henry. After serving three years in prison, Porter was released and changed his name to O. Henry. Today, his best known works include "The Ransom of Red Chief," "The Cop and the Anthem," and "The Gift of the Magi." O. Henry's stories are famous for their humorous depictions of ordinary people and use of surprise endings. The O. Henry Award was established in 1918 and is awarded annually for outstanding short stories.

Characters

(12 flexible)
(With doubling: 10 flexible)

SOAPY: New York City hobo who is determined to spend the winter in jail at Rikers Island; wears layers of tattered clothing, a woolen cap, and worn-out shoes; flexible.

BUD: Soapy's friend and a New York City hobo who encourages Soapy to go to the mission instead of Rikers Island; flexible.

MAÎTRE D': Works at a fancy restaurant; flexible.

COP 1: Pursues Running Man for a broken shop window; wears a police uniform; flexible.

COP 2: Believes Gentleman's umbrella story; wears a police uniform; flexible.

COP 3: Arrests Soapy for loitering; wears a police uniform; flexible.

RUNNING MAN/WOMAN: Suspected of breaking a camera shop window; flexible.

GROCER: Local grocer who has a fruit/vegetable cart; flexible.

BONGO: Grocer's very large and imposing security guard; flexible.

SHOPPER: Shopper who carries a purse if female or a wallet if male; flexible.

GENTLEMAN/LADY: Carries an umbrella; flexible.

JUDGE: Judge who sentences Soapy to three months in jail; wears a judge's robe; flexible.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

Options for Doubling

COP 1/COP 2 (flexible)

COP 1/COP 3 (flexible)

NOTE: One actor may play all Cop roles, but three Cops are preferable because they give a sense of different locations and times.

Setting

Autumn, New York City. The present.

Set

New York City. There is a park bench. At SL is a lectern and at SR is a grocery store's sidewalk display or cart of fruit or vegetables.

Props

Newspaper
Fancy menu
Assorted fruit or vegetables
Plastic bag or sack
Another sack
Purse (or wallet if male Shopper)
Umbrella
Judge's gavel
Police baton
Police whistle

Sound Effects

Sound of clinking glasses (restaurant sound)
Sounds of vehicles and car horns
Breaking glass
Burglar alarm
Tugboat whistle
Cars honking
Church organ music

**"My island retreat!
Ahhh!
Three meals a day,
warmth,
and a bed!"**

—Soapy

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(AT RISE: Autumn, New York City, late afternoon. There is a park bench. At SL is a lectern. At SR is a grocery store's sidewalk display of fruit or vegetables. Soapy, a hobo, is lying, shivering on a park bench. Thin sheets of newspaper cover him. He sneezes and turns over, readjusting the newspaper as he does. Bud, a hobo, enters SR, spots Soapy, and approaches.)

BUD: Soapy. *(Soapy doesn't move.)* Soapy?

(Bud grabs Soapy's shoulder.)

SOAPY: *(Sleepily.)* Huh? What?

BUD: Wake up.

(Soapy faces Bud and yawns.)

SOAPY: Well, I'm awake...

BUD: Good.

SOAPY: Now that you've awakened me...what do you want?

(Sits up and blows on his hands to warm them.)

BUD: It's going to be a cold one tonight.

SOAPY: Tell me something new.

BUD: You're going to freeze out here.

SOAPY: That's not new.

BUD: I didn't see you at the mission last night.

SOAPY: Nope. Maybe it was because I wasn't there. Brrr!

(Holds himself and shivers.)

BUD: You see? You're starting to freeze already.

SOAPY: I'm not freezing. *(Shivers.)* I'm just c-c-cold.

BUD: I'm headed over that way now. Want to walk with me?

SOAPY: I'm not going there.

BUD: To the mission? Why not? There's food, there's drink, there's warmth.

SOAPY: And we have to pay for it.

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BUD: Pay for it? What do you mean? It's free.

SOAPY: It's not free. For every bite of food, we have to take a shower. *(Condescendingly like a mother talking to a child.)*

"Here's the soap. Here's the shampoo. Here's a washcloth and towel. Now, be sure you wash behind your ears."

BUD: Well, yeah.

SOAPY: For every drink of water, there's an inquisition.

"What's your name? Where do you live? Do you have any relatives who can take you in?"

BUD: They're just trying to help.

SOAPY: For every ounce of warmth, there's a cold reprimand.

"You can't stay here during the day. We may not have room for you tonight. We only have so many beds here, you know."

BUD: That's life, Soapy. You have to take the bad to get to the good.

(Soapy stands and faces Bud while trying to warm his hands.)

SOAPY: No, Bud. Nope. No. I just can't do it.

BUD: But the mission—

SOAPY: I know it's good for most people. It's even helped me in the past. But it's not for me—at least not when the cold weather breezes in and turns everything to ice.

BUD: Do you want to freeze to death out here?

SOAPY: No.

BUD: Then what to you propose to do?

SOAPY: The same thing I've done for the past three winters. I plan to visit...The Island!

BUD: Oh, no.

SOAPY: Oh, yes!

BUD: But that's so...confining.

[END OF FREEVIEW]