

The Alamo

by

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DESCRIPTION

A mouthy panhandler and a sophomore at a prestigious university have very different philosophies about life.

CHARACTERS

- STEEL EYE, vagrant, large female, age hard to determine but certainly a veteran of the streets
- RONALD BITTERS, Tisch sophomore with camera

SETTING

- Astor Place, at the Alamo

NOTE: A program note, if necessary: “The Alamo is the name of a large metal sculpture in Astor Place, near the Tisch School of the Arts of New York University.”

As an actor challenge, have STEEL EYE in a wheelchair.

Two large hand-scrawled signs propped up against a shopping cart or a flock of filled bags.

Sign 1:

Victim of global downsizing = McFucked
Victim of religion = stigmata 20% off
Victim of advertising = seeking mental enema
Victim of credit cards = plastic is Death
Victim of gender = penises 20% off
Victim of coffee = Starsucks corporate swill
Victim of clothing = no off the rack body
Other categories of victimhood on request.

Sign 2:

The Sayings of Steel Eye, Street Savant

What you see before you is a full human being. Do not forget this.

The only difference between begging and brokering stocks is office location—possibly deodorant.

When poor people beg, they call it begging; when rich people beg, they call it fundraising.

Street person’s motto: Longevity need not apply.

Pick up on me and you pick up the clue phone.
First rule of paranoids: You hide. They seek.
A Rolls Royce covered in astroturf is still a Rolls Royce.
You don't need to give; just acknowledge. However, I can't eat smiles.
What you see before you is a full human being. Do not forget this.

A third sign leans against the can or bucket where STEEL EYE collects her money: NO PHOTOS ALLOWED.

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STEEL EYE is out trolling for change at the Alamo, a container at her feet. As she begins speaking, she will acknowledge the contributions of people. Half way through her first spiel, BITTERS enters with a good camera taking photos—he's good at what he does.

STEEL EYE

Practice your Catholic charity, Muslim piety, Sufi mysticism, Buddhist mindfulness, Lutheran—whatever you guys do—drop some dough in my can below—I don't take contributions from United Way, Amway, the Eightfold Way, or curds and whey. I just hit the highway, the byway, and do it my way—much appreciated—

BITTERS prepares to move on.

Hey! STEEL EYE

Hey! BITTERS

Hey! STEEL EYE

Hey what? BITTERS

Don't ignore me. STEEL EYE

I'm not ignoring you— BITTERS

STEEL EYE
What do you think you're doing?

BITTERS

What?

STEEL EYE

I said, what do you think you're doing?

BITTERS

I'm not doing anything—

STEEL EYE

(spiels)

Make these mean streets sweeter.

(to BITTERS)

You saw the “no-photos” sign?

BITTERS

Yeah.

STEEL EYE

From Tisch, right?—

BITTERS

Right again.

STEEL EYE

(spiels)

Charity begins at my home—which you're walking on—

(to BITTERS)

—that means you can read—

BITTERS

Yeah, of course I can read—

STEEL EYE

And you read it and did what I asked you not to do, yes or no?

Yes or no?

BITTERS

Well, yeah, I guess I did do that—

STEEL EYE

(spiels)

Love in your heart, do your part—

(to BITTERS)

And so you admit you stole from me—

BITTERS

I definitely didn't do that—

STEEL EYE

What would you call it?

BITTERS

C'mon—no big deal—a couple of pictures—you're always around here—

(makes a gesture of leaving)

—I gotta, you know—I got class—so—

STEEL EYE

And so the thief, like all thieves, chooses to run away. So. Go. Go!
I got no use for a thief.

STEEL EYE turns away from BITTERS to continue her spiel. BITTERS sidles away, stops, then turns and comes back.

STEEL EYE

(spiels)

Help me make it through—

BITTERS

You know, I'm not—

STEEL EYE

(spiels, ignores him)

—the night—and day—

BITTERS

I'm not what you say I am. I'm not.

STEEL EYE

Is me knowing that important to you?

BITTERS

I just don't want you to think—

STEEL EYE

Why shouldn't I think?

(spiels)

I don't want your social change, just your spare change—

(to BITTERS)

You steal from people you care about?

BITTERS

Of course not—I don't steal [at all]—

STEEL EYE

So you must not care about me because you just stole from me.

BITTERS

That's the point here, isn't it—what we're arguing about—

STEEL EYE

You're arguing, I'm not arguing—I'm just pinning down a fact.

BITTERS

And my point is that your "fact" is wrong—

STEEL EYE

You read the sign, you took the pictures, you walk away, ergo you
don't care about me: fact fact fact and fact—

(spiels)

Legal tender makes me tender—

STEEL EYE points at BITTERS' face.

STEEL EYE

What am I seeing there? Determination? Indecision? Indigestion?
If Tisch has got a clear soul, then Tisch is free to roll—

BITTERS

I just don't like—I don't like it when people—

STEEL EYE

"People" done that a lot to you—misjudge the marvelous you?

BITTERS goes to say something, but STEEL EYE cuts him off with a gesture.

STEEL EYE

Here's my opening offer: If you don't want me to think what I'm thinking, then give me ten dollars.

(spiels)

If money grew on trees, poor people wouldn't have axes—

(to BITTERS)

Now you're gawking—

BITTERS

I'm not [gawking]—

STEEL EYE

Yeah, you've got that—

(demonstrates)

—kind of look—come on, ten bucks.

BITTERS

I didn't take anything you own—

STEEL EYE

(indicating her face)

You stole this—my copyrighted face—that's "the point" here, Tisch.

BITTERS

You can't copyright—

STEEL EYE

Some people put faces on canvas, right?—they get copyrights?

BITTERS

Yeah—

STEEL EYE

My canvas is my bones. Deltas, escarpments, faults, exfoliations—like a map. My whole life inscribed here. My property.

BITTERS

Come on—

STEEL EYE

You took its picture without paying—you admit it—which means you stole from me, which makes Tisch a thief who doesn't care, end of story—

BITTERS

Look, I learned about copyright last semester—

STEEL EYE

Neither here nor there, Tisch—

BITTERS

Really, you should [listen]—

STEEL EYE

Now that you've stolen 'em, what're you going to do with 'em? Tell me that.

BITTERS goes to protest, but STEEL EYE cuts him off with a gesture.

STEEL EYE

Don't—repeating a lie will rot your teeth—

BITTERS

Don't ever cut me off—

STEEL EYE

Or you'll do what? Or you'll do what?

BITTERS neither moves nor speaks.

STEEL EYE

Thought so.

(spiels)

No middle man here, no overhead—see, nothing over my head—

STEEL EYE gets something to eat from her belongings.

STEEL EYE

Always used to getting what you want—respect—which the thief doesn't bother to give anyone else.

STEEL EYE offers BITTERS something to eat.

STEEL EYE

Unlike me, who gives—

BITTERS

I definitely don't want to be like you.

STEEL EYE

You could only hope.

STEEL EYE finishes eating.

STEEL EYE

You may fancy yourself a copyright expert, Tisch, and a demander of respect, but you are just not ready to know yourself—

BITTERS goes to say something, but STEEL EYE cuts him off with the same gesture.

STEEL EYE

Hep! Hep! Here's the final deal, Tisch, because your threats of innocence are making me bored—for ten bucks—a measly sawbuck—you get my copyrighted face—"She has the face that launched a thousand quips," the Tisch'd one secretly thinks, "and not only do I want to know about it, I will pay the price for the knowledge"—and a guaranteed "A" for whatever class you're doing this for—I can smell it that you're on a deadline—and as a bonus you get to prove your parents did a good job raising you—and I get to know there's one less thief, liar, and coward in the world, which is a big thing for me. Are you, Tisch, man enough—dare I say, human enough, Tisch—to take the deal? To know who you are? I have already named you—ten bucks'll prove me wrong.

BITTERS raises his camera and takes a picture. They lock eyes. BITTERS starts taking pictures again as he circles her. Then he punctuates it with one last picture taken very close-up.

BITTERS

A little of that crazy shit you say—"not your social change just your spare change"—really whacked but good—mix it up—turn it in—you're not getting ten bucks and I'm getting my "A"—that's what you get for cutting me off—

STEEL EYE picks up her can and cradles it, then speaks in a very loud but measured tone and gestures as if to gather people around.

STEEL EYE

Help. Help. This cream-faced loon is trying to steal from me.
Someone please help me.

BITTERS

Stop—that—stop—

STEEL EYE

(loudly)

Help. Help. He is trying to rob me.

BITTERS

Hey! Hey! Enough.

STEEL EYE

Think I haven't buddied up to the cops around here?—

(loudly)

Homeless people need protection too—

(to BITTERS)

My turf, ladrone. Got enough below the belt to face it?

(loudly)

Look at what the son-of-a-Tisch is doing—

BITTERS

I've only got—

STEEL EYE

(loudly)

Come gather around—

BITTERS

Damn! I can't [believe]—

STEEL EYE

If you see something, say something—

BITTERS

I've only got five dollars.

STEEL EYE

Ten minimum.

(loudly)

Please help me—I am being assaulted—you all can see that!

BITTERS

(pulls out bill)

It's yours, for Christ's sake!

STEEL EYE takes it.

STEEL EYE

But you are not done.

BITTERS

Oh, I am [done]—

STEEL EYE slams the can on the ground at his feet.

STEEL EYE

Redeem yourself, who so loves and demands his self-respect.
Can you do that? Can you earn me fifty cents?

STEEL EYE backs off slightly, then speaks to the passing crowd.

STEEL EYE

It's fine, folks—just a street life project for an NYU class.

(to BITTERS)

A little of that panache lurking in your Tisch genes. Come on, just two measly heads of Washington!

BITTERS

I can't do what [you do]—

STEEL EYE

All right—I'll downgrade your redemption to make it even easier.

Convince me to give you two quarters.

(takes two coins from her pocket)

Starting now. C'mon. Curtain's up. Watch him, folks.

BITTERS is frozen.

STEEL EYE

You've been nattering all in my ear, poking in my face, wasting my time—you are free to go, Tisch, always have been—but can you really do that?—leave and live with what you just learned about yourself?

(whispers)

This is the great adventure!

BITTERS

I'm hungry—

STEEL EYE

Excuse me.

BITTERS

I'm hungry—

STEEL EYE

Oh, you've started—

BITTERS

I am hungry—

STEEL EYE

Not buying it—

BITTERS

—and I need a place to stay [tonight]—

STEEL EYE

Lame-o.

BITTERS

Won't you give me [some money]—

STEEL EYE

Performance review—

BITTERS

I did what you [asked]—

STEEL EYE

Didn't convince me.

(to crowd)

Convince you? Didn't think so.

(to BITTERS)

So what? Your average barricaded human being—like this Tisch student I met one time—is not moved by simple want or need. They require a return on investment. So beggars need an angle, a hook, a shtick. I got mine. What's yours?

BITTERS

I don't have an angle. I have money at my apartment. I'll come back—

STEEL EYE

But you're so close to being saved! C'mon, one more try. I know you have it in you, somewhere in that fatted-calf body of yours. A little force, a little—sizzle, a little show biz, some hot pizzazz—

BITTERS bursts into a clownish rendition: spastic soft shoe, e.g.

BITTERS

"I don't care if it's a nickel or a dime / I'll take the money if you'll take the time."

A goofy smile surprises BITTERS' face, and for a moment he is nothing but a very pleased child.

STEEL EYE

Bravo, Herr Tisch. Bravo.

STEEL EYE encourages the crowd to applaud.

STEEL EYE

Bravo, bravo—

BITTERS

Yeah—

STEEL EYE hands the two quarters to BITTERS.

STEEL EYE

Now I know I have spent my money well for I have been entertained by the masses. Off I can go. Bravo.

STEEL EYE bundles up her things.

STEEL EYE

You are released.

(to crowd)

You are released as well.

(to BITTERS)

I have to go to my late afternoon location. May your documentary strategies swell and succeed.

BITTERS doesn't move.

BITTERS

How do you do it?

STEEL EYE

Why should I tell you anything? When a thief kisses you, count your teeth.

They hold each other's gaze. Then BITTERS holds up the two quarters and gestures for STEEL EYE to come to him, which she does. He hands her the quarters, then holds up the camera so they can both see the screen.

BITTERS

Tell me which—if it's okay—

BITTERS scrolls the pictures of STEEL EYE—she selects.

STEEL EYE

That one—and the one just before that—yeah—and that one—I think maybe you felt something when you took that one—

STEEL EYE moves away from him, getting ready to leave.

STEEL EYE

That face in there—this face—and this is all I'm going to say—was once where you were. Once where you were. It don't take much at all, as the song goes.

BITTERS holds out the camera toward STEEL EYE. STEEL EYE takes up the camera in a way that shows she knows exactly what she's doing with it and takes several pictures of BITTERS, finishes, hands back the camera.

STEEL EYE

We are dismissed. Oh, city life can be so interesting! Now quite the story to tell—Tisch survived the Alamo.

BITTERS

You need a hand?

STEEL EYE considers BITTERS.

BITTERS

I guess not.

STEEL EYE

I said we're done, so we're done.

BITTERS

Yeah.

STEEL EYE

So go.

BITTERS leaves. STEEL EYE takes out BITTERS' five-dollar bill, interfolds it with some other bills, tucks the wad away on her person, then leaves, carting off her materials.

BLACKOUT

