The

Stop !!!!!

By

Paloma Freitas

WHY I LIKE IT: ***Acting Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes…***

Victims of circumstance. No I am not talking about you or I.

It's a phrase I see flashing like a neon sign at The Bus Stop (by Paloma Maria Freitas) in my mind. What happens when two strangers, bound due North like bats out of Tucson, yet end up struck by fate? I'm not quite sure, but if there is a level of humor and naturalistic wit similar to what Paloma conjures in The Bus Stop*, you bet we will all be fat pigs at the trough always coming back see what she conjures up next. (Spacing is playwright's own.)*

SCENE 1

Tires going down the freeway. The honk of a semi truck.

BUS DRIVER
(fading in and out over a speaker)
Anyone not going to Las Vegas will need to get off at the next stop. Attention, all passengers transferring will need to get off at the next stop.

AVERY
Want some?

Goldfish bag shaking

JENSEN
Huh?

AVERY
I'll finish the whole bag if you don't.

JENSEN
That's alright. Thanks anyway.

AVERY
Are you a missionary?

JENSEN
I.. uh, oh, the necklace.

AVERY
Oh, God, sorry. I didn't mean anything by-

JENSEN
I'm not a missionary. My friend gave it to me, for safe traveling.

AVERY
It's beautiful.

JENSEN
I'm guessing you're a missionary?

AVERY
Fuck no, I'm a writer.

(Quickly)
There’s a convention in Carson City. That’s where I’m going. I just thought I'd ask.

JENSEN
A writer's convention.

AVERY
Ya.

JENSEN
Didn't know they had those.

AVERY
Ya

JENSEN
Alright, so what's the difference between someone saying they're an author and saying they're a writer.

AVERY
Ego mostly.

She waits for him to laugh. He doesn't.

I guess they're interchangeable. I like to think you're not an author until you've published something.

JENSEN
So are you an author?

AVERY
No.

A short, awkward silence.

JENSEN
I hope you have a good time.

AVERY
You too.
(Quick beat)
Shit.

JENSEN
You're fine. You're on the bus. We're all a bit embarrassed here.

AVERY
It's the liminal space. That's what a bus is.

JENSEN
He's surprised she knows this. Or perhaps that they both do. He hasn't decided.

Right... Yes, actually. That's exactly right.

AVERY
That's why I like busses so much. And bus stops and bus stations.

JENSEN
Ya. For me it's stair wells or the side of a highway.

AVERY
I mean, how wonderful and terrifying and illogical is that.

JENSEN
Illogical?

AVERY
Well it's its own sort or logic. Because they're places meant to be moved through, you can't inhabit them. No one inhabits them. Instead they have to be claimed and defined by a purpose. Going up and down or taking a piss behind the billboard advertising cancer screenings.
That's why it feels so spooky the longer you stay there. You're not fulfilling the only purpose that place has for existing. And the purpose of this bus is to take me where I need to be.

JENSEN
Do you go every year?

AVERY
To? Oh, the conference! I try to. It's always somewhere different, so that can make it difficult. Last year it was in Oregon, but not Portland like you'd expect. It was in Willamette. Which was fine.

JENSEN
I drove through Oregon once. It was nice. Actually, the whole time I kept thinking how close to being beautiful everything was.

JENSEN
What about next year?

AVERY
It'll be New York.

JENSEN

Exciting. Have you been before?

AVERY
Once, when I was kid. You?

JENSEN
I went for a trip with school.

AVERY
Did you visit the top of the Empire State Building?

JENSEN
(He's trying too hard to sound clever and humorous.)
All twenty of us in khaki pants and plaid neckties squeezed into a single elevator going up to the top.

AVERY
And how was it.

JENSEN
High.

AVERY
Ya.

JENSEN
Very High.

Jensen Chuckles

AVERY
No I
mean, when you got there, when you reached the top, do you remember looking over the edge? Cause at five years old I remember looking over the edge and thinking: "I could throw this Betty Spaghetty doll I'm holding, my most prized possession I just got from the world's coolest Toys-R-Us with a Ferris Wheel inside, right over the edge and watch her plummet to her death. I won't; I don't want to, but I could." Except I did kinda want to. I really wanted to. But it doesn't make sense. I'd lose the doll and it might hit someone on the head and my mom would have yelled at me. You have to know what I'm talking about.

JENSEN
No, sorry.

AVERY
Really?

JENSEN
I've never had a Betty Spaghetty doll.

AVERY
But you know what I mean.

JENSEN
L'appelé du vid.

AVERY
Hold on; I can get this.
(Trying to translate)
The call... of the

JENSEN
Call of the void. Your mind would rather sabotage the entire situation than deal with it. Strange to think doing something destructive is the first place our minds go. Honestly, it's--

Avery groans

JENSEN
You alright?

AVERY
(still queasy)
Ya, I'm fine. Just been on this bus too long.

JENSEN
Motion sickness?

AVERY
A little, but it's something else I get. Like just being alive gives me motion sickness.

JENSEN
That's awfully edgy.

AVERY
I'm serious. The worst part is I'm not allowed to enjoy it either.

JENSEN
Ok?

AVERY
I've gotten too old. When you're young, you're supposed to have those wonderfully angsty thoughts. You feel horrible at the time, but feeling horrible means you're doing in right. Now it just means I'm depressed.

JENSEN
I think that's alright.

AVERY
I know.
(Beat)
I never asked where you were headed.

JENSEN
I'm going to Reno, to visit my parents.

AVERY
We'll both have to transfer soon.

JENSEN
It's not much of a transfer. Get off one bus. Wait a bit. Get on another.

JENSEN
You'd think they would have one bus going all the way up. A straight shot from Tucson to-

AVERY
Bus drivers need sleep too.

JENSEN
Right.

AVERY
And it only sounds so appealing because that's where you're going. What if you weren't headed to Reno?

JENSEN
Ya.

SILENCE:

JENSEN
I know what you mean, about all that angst. When I was nineteen, I went to visit my uncle who was living in-
(Beat)
Did I do something wrong? I feel like I did something and it changed the... energy of the conversation. Alright, that sounded stupid, but still.

AVERY
We made a mistake.

JENSEN
A mistake?

AVERY
Of taking things past their natural cutoff. We should have stopped when this was casual and enjoyable, a back and forth between strangers. Now we're actually talking. We've ruined it.

JENSEN
Ruined what, exactly?

AVERY
Like you said, "the energy," "the flow of things. It's gone now.

JENSEN
Do you think we can... bring it back? I'd like to bring it back.

AVERY
I've honestly never tried before.

JENSEN
This happened before?

AVERY
And I did it again.

JENSEN
But if we just keep talking-

AVERY
I don't want to make it worse.

There is some ambient noise, then silence, showing the passage of time.

AVERY
You're reading my favorite book.

JENSEN
Ya?

AVERY
Well, one of my favorites.
(Referencing "Of Mice and Men" by John Steinbeck)
"Just look at the rabb
its, Lenny. Just look at the rabbits."

JENSEN

Stop! I'm only half way through.

AVERY
And do you like it?

JENSEN
Ya. Its nice reading Steinbeck. A little break from all the alcoholic Hemingway types.

AVERY
Hemingway wasn't an alcoholic.

JENSEN
Oh come on.

AVERY
He had an unhealthy addiction for sure. But that's not the same as being an alcoholic. You're only an alcoholic if it stops you from doing the things you should be doing. And you get to decide what those things are.

JENSEN
Wel-

AVERY
Besides, all distractions are the same.

JENSEN
(clearing his throat)
You said it's one of your favorites.

AVERY
It's good, but not Steinbeck's best work.
(beat)
Did that sound too pretentious?

JENSEN
Maybe. I'm still listening.

AVERY
I like "Travels with Charlie". I mean, he damn near predicts the future with that one.

JENSEN
Steinbeck predicted the future?

AVERY
Sure did.

JENSEN

I'll have to check it out.

AVERY
There is- Well there's one part that bothers me.

Avery takes a copy of the book out of her bag.

Backpack unzipping.

AVERY
See, right here, he says-

JENSEN
You have the book in your bag.

AVERY
Yes.

JENSEN
And the page is bookmarked.

AVERY
Ya. Now right here he says there's no proper translation for the world "vacilar" in English. That only Spanish has this word for wandering towards a place without much worry about getting there. And it's supposed to be a profound statement about American culture.

JENSEN
Sure.

AVERY
Except we do have a word for it in English.

JENSEN
Vacillate.

AVERY
Exactly.

JENSEN
I don't know if I've ever actually used it, though. Can't remember where I learned it either.

AVERY
But you did at one point. It exists and people learn it and remember it too.

JENSEN

Can you really eat a whole bag of goldfish?

AVERY
Yep.

JENSEN
In one sitting?

AVERY
Sure. I can also sit down with a pack of Oreos or a bag of party sized chips and just--

She makes a vacuum sound with her mouth

consume.

AVERY
What would happen if I didn't get off?

JENSEN
Well, you'd miss your stop.

AVERY
No, that's what wouldn't happen. I wouldn't get off when I was supposed to. But what would happen while I was on the bus when I wasn't supposed to be?

JENSEN
I guess anything. Maybe the bus would blow a flat.

AVERY
That's the bus, though. That's still not me.

JENSEN
Maybe someone else would come sit down, and you'd meet an actual missionary. You really shouldn't get yourself caught up with that, the what if's, I mean. You'll keep going on forever that way with every decision you make. You'll get stuck in a loop.

AVERY
I'll be stuck in one too if I don't get off the bus.

JENSEN
You're not really thinking of doing that. Are you?

AVERY
I am. I won't, though. I payed too much for that conference ticket. But I can imagine what I would do, Imagining doesn't cost me.

The bus pulls to a stop.

SCENE 2

JENSEN
How did they not put a cover on this?

AVERY
Over the bus stop?

JENSEN
Ya. These kind with the scratched up plastic and metal frames with chipped blue paint.

AVERY
(She recognizes importance in this.)
What about them?

JENSEN
Well, they're usually built with r
oofs in case it rains.

AVERY
It's not supposed to rain

SILENCE:

AVERY
What do you do when you're the most bored?

JENSEN
The most bored?

AVERY
The most.

JENSEN
It's been, what, forty minutes? You can't be-

AVERY
I didn't say I was the most bored right now.
(Beat)
So?

JENSEN
When I am most bored, I go into the shower- and I don't turn the shower on, but I rub my fingers over all the little silicone putties I used to patch the tub. They have these tips kinda like

Hershey kisses and you'd think they'd be hard like meringues but they're not. They're squishy like the sparkly pencil grips I used to beg my mom for at back to school sales.

AVERY
You're hungry.

JENSEN
What?

AVERY
That was two food descriptions in a row. I'm a writer; I know what that means. You're hungry.

JENSEN
I'm fine.

AVERY
Why didn't you accept my offer. I had food earlier.

JENSEN
Well, you were a stranger on the Greyhound.

AVERY
And you were hungry. Should have had a little faith.

There is a loud repeated ringing sound.

AVERY
What's that?

JENSEN
My alarm. I have to take my meds.

A zipper being pulled. Rustling through a bag.

JENSEN
Shit.

AVERY
What's wrong?

JENSEN
Oh come on.

AVERY
Did you forget them?

JENSEN
No I wouldn't have- I swear I had them. They're just not in here!

AVERY
Maybe they fell out.

JENSEN
Ya, ok. Um, look on the ground. It's a little Orange bottle with the name Jensen Steele. Shit, what if they're on the bus.

AVERY
I'm sure they're there somewhere. You can dump it out when you-

JENSEN
(firmly)
No. I really need to take them now.

Jensen empties the contents of his bag.

AVERY
Alright, hold on. Worse come to worse, maybe there's a pharmacy nearby.

She takes out her phone.

AVERY
What happens if you don't take them now?

JENSEN
That's not the point. I need to take them.

AVERY
Alright, but what happens?

JENSEN
Nothing immediately. I'll notice if I miss a day. I start noticing everything if I miss a day.

AVERY
So make sure you take them before tomorrow. You can do it later if you find them, or get a refill when you see your parents.

JENSEN
No, it's- it's about keeping schedule. Keeping a schedule is important.

AVERY
Is that why you take them?
(Beat)
It's ok if you do. It's not unheard of.

JENSEN
Fuck.

AVERY
Listen. One day won't make a difference. If there's no medical reason you absolutely have to take them right now-

JENSEN
You don't know that.

AVERY
You just told me.

JENSEN
That doesn't mean you know about it. You don't know and you don't understand. You don't understand how stupid I feel.

AVERY
I just spent all that time talking to you. I know you're not stupid.

JENSEN
You think I don't see how ironic it is.

AVERY
No.

JENSEN
That I don't see what I'm doing.

AVERY
No.

JENSEN
How I'm putting myself into the same vicious cycle the meds are trying to prevent.

AVERY
No! Jensen-

JENSEN
How I fail to see how pathetic it is.

AVERY
That's not-

JENSEN

But how do you know I'm not? How can you say I'm not--

As the tension of the scene mounts and Jensen becomes more and more upset, not at Avery but at himself, we hear a car speeding down the road, honking its horn as if begging him to stop. Breathing heavily.

…when I'm allowing it to happen.

THERE'S A LONG SCREECH OF BREAKS. THEN A CRASH.

SCENE 3

AVERY
Jesus, I hope they're ok.

JENSEN
I don't see anything on the road. We could keep going.

AVERY
They would have crashed nearby.

JENSEN
Or drove into a ditch.

AVERY
It's flat for miles.

JENSEN
And the car definitely hit something. I still don't see anything...

NUN
(From a little ways away)
Hello!

AVERY
Where in Hell did she come from?

JENSEN
You can't say things like that; she's a nun!

JENSEN
Hi there! Are you alright?

Footsteps against gravel.

NUN

Yes, I'm fine. Thank you. A little bit shaken.

AVERY
We heard the crash.

NUN
Something bolted past me on the highway; it must have been a deer. I went off the road and straight into a tree.

JENSEN
You're lucky to be alive. Or, I suppose-

NUN
I believe a good deal in this world is just plain luck. Some of it might be chance.

AVERY
Aren't they the same?

NUN
Luck applies when we want something to happen. Chance comes without expectations.

AVERY
So which is this?

NUN
You mean are we here by chance, or luck, or divine intervention as you might suppose, or maybe even purpose?

JENSEN
We're waiting for the next bus. We have to be here.

AVERY
And it's not chance or luck that I have a hotel reservation, or that Jensen's parents are waiting for him.

NUN
So it's purpose then?

JENSEN
Yes, of course it's purpose. Avery was just saying that, everything has a purpose.

AVERY
I said every place has a purpose.

JENSEN
Well, everything has to be driven by some something else. A cause or a reason. And yes, even Steinbeck and the rabbits and the Oreos. And the reason you first asked me about the cross on the bus.

AVERY
I was curious. I didn't think it would mean anything.
Sister, what about the things we don't mean to happen, things we don't expect? I guess sometimes we're trying to do something else, but not always.

JENSEN
Everything else is an accident or a coincidence. She didn't mean to crash your car.

NUN
No, I didn't.

JENSEN
So that was an accident.

AVERY
Or maybe chance; chance that all of us would meet?

JENSEN
Now you're bringing in fate.

NUN
(She cuts them off before Avery can respond.)
You two aren't together then.
(Beat)
You're headed to different places. It's chance that you met. Or an accident. However you'd like to put it.

AVERY
We met on the bus earlier. I'm Avery. This is Jenson.
(Beat)
Don't be fooled. He's not a missionary.

JENSEN
And she's a writer who can finish off an entire bag of Goldfish. But I don't even know her last name so we-

AVERY
Steele.

JENSEN
That's right. That's my name.

AVERY
I think you mentioned it.
(Beat)

And now, I'm realizing we never asked for yours.

SR. MARY COLETTA
Sister Mary Coletta.

JENSEN
Do you want us to call someone for you, Sister? A tow truck or a cab or someone you know?

SR. MARY COLETTA
My phone still seems to be working, even if the screen is cracked.

TYPING ON HER PHONE'S KEYBOARD.:

SR. MARY COLETTA
I have an Uber credit I need to use. Thank you, though.

JENSEN
I w
asn't sure you'd have a phone.

SR. MARY COLETTA
I'll call a tow-truck as well. Do you need a ride somewhere?

AVERY
We're still waiting for the bus.

SR. MARY COLETTA
How long has it been?

AVERY
Seems like forever.

JENSEN
It's been a little less than an hour.

AVERY
You say it so casually.

JENSEN
Not much we can do about it.

AVERY
There's nothing forcing us to stay here. You want to get home to your family and that's very understandable. So why not look to see if there's another bus or a hotel or an Amtrak or something. The bus isn't coming. We would have been on it by now. Getting some sleep and figuring it out in the morning seems a much better option that standing out here all night.

Silence.

JENSEN
I thought you would understand.

SR. MARY COLETTA
Understand, or agree with you?

JENSEN
Understand. We talked on the bus about how-

AVERY
You keep saying that.

SR. MARY COLETTA
And you?

AVERY
What?

SR. MARY COLETTA
Are you staying as well?

Music plays, end of scene.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS*:* *In writing the "The Bus Stop" I wanted to explore and highlight where in everyday life we experience and confront absurdism. I wanted to champion the absurd as far more than a basis for a literary and artistic movement which often arises after global tragedy. For as many times as I had (ironically) reread Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead over and over again or ordered the lobster bisque, hoping it would lead to a revaluation on the true nature of the afterlife, I wanted to go further than simply writing my own absurdist play. I wanted to argue the absurd is grounded far more in the reality of our seemingly mundane lives than we may suspect. In this play, I was able to accomplish that through exploring the nature of the journey, memories, mental illness, and unexpected encounters.*

After playing around with the idea for several years in various mediums, I wrote and produced this excerpt of "The Bus Stop" as an audio play for my Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing.

AUTHOR BIO: I am an emerging Latinx writer and American expat living in London, England. I received my BFA in Creative Writing from Southern Oregon University and is currently studying for a Masters in Children's Literature. Previously my short fiction piece "No Need to Wash Bowls" was published in Midway Journal. I have also had multiple poems featured in Main Squeeze Magazine and once tied for third in a junior league pinball competition at the Dixon May Fair.