

RESCUE

By Karl Miller

WHY WE LIKE IT: *We love the way Miller creates a powerful sense of isolation and false hope, exemplified by the desolate train station and the people who believe, against all reason, that the train will arrive. The theme nods to Beckett but the wonderful colloquial dialogue and the open-ended conclusion reminds us of Sam Shephard. This intriguing existentialist one act is the first play we've published and we couldn't have asked for a stronger debut.*

RESCUE - A One Act Play

Cast of Characters

PHIL

Male between 30 and 40.

LISHA

Female between 25 and 35, with a scarf over her head.

HOMELESS MAN

Older. Ragged-looking.

Place

City.

Time

Contemporary.

Setting

A bench at a bus stop.

(PHIL enters talking on cellphone.)

PHIL

No, no. What I'm looking for is the time the next bus comes through. I'd check myself but the internet's down on my phone . . . What? . . . Yes, there's a schedule. I'm looking at it right now. It says 4:15, which was, like, 20 minutes ago and I've been here for an hour - and no bus. . . Of course, I didn't miss it. I'm not blind.

(Sarcastically)

Oh, thanks very much. . . .I've been looking the whole time. I don't want to be here, not with that storm on the way.

(PHIL brushes his fingers
through his hair)

Is it still headed right at us? . . . That's gonna tear the hell out of this place. . . .Wow, I guess I don't even need to worry that my car broke down. Probably gonna get blown away anyhow. . . .Did you find out if the buses are still running? . . . Right . . . Hello? . . . Hello?

(PHIL takes the phone away from his
ear and looks at it.)

Great, great, great. This is just great. Does anything work anymore? The weather sure doesn't.

(LISHA enters and sits at bench.
She opens a book and begins
reading without making any contact
with PHIL. After a moment, PHIL
walks over to stand by the sign.
They don't talk for about 10
seconds. Then PHIL checks his
phone again and shakes his head.)

PHIL

Excuse me. Do you have a phone on you? Mine's not
working.

LISHA

(Pauses before answering)

I'm sorry. Mine isn't working either.

PHIL

Technology's great, isn't it? Do you know if the 4:15 bus
is still coming here?

LISHA

I'm not sure. I hope so.

(Pause, then LISHA's phone
starts to ring. PHIL stares at
her as she extracts the phone
uncomfortably from her purse.)

LISHA

Hello . . . Yes, I'm still waiting for the bus. Can you
check? . . . OK - thanks. . . Hello? . . . Hello? . . .
Are you there?

(LISHA places phone back in her
purse.)

PHIL

(Suspiciously)

Sounds like you may have a signal now.

LISHA

Yes, but as you can see, but I lost it. I thought I was out of range earlier.

PHIL

(Skeptically)

Whatever.

(PHIL and LISHA are silent for a moment.)

PHIL

So it looks like the bus is still going to come? Is that what the person on the phone said?

LISHA

I'm not sure. I didn't get a clear answer before the call dropped.

PHIL

I guess the storm's keeping everyone late. The bus is no exception.

(Silent for a moment.)

Not trying to be rude, but why do you wear that?

LISHA

Wear what?

(PHIL gestures to the scarf.)

PHIL

You know - that. The scarf.

LISHA

I don't think you'd understand.

PHIL

You think I'm not smart enough?

LISHA

No, not at all. We're just different.

PHIL

Everyone's different.

LISHA

Maybe sometimes people are just too different to understand each other.

PHIL

Maybe.

(Silence again.)

LISHA

OK, well I wear it to show modesty.

PHIL

(Incredulous)

What? Really?

ALISHA

(Annoyed)

Forget it.

PHIL

I didn't mean to make you angry.

LISHA

I'm not angry!

(LISHA studiously ignores PHIL.)

PHIL

Oh, now you're ignoring me? Nice.

(LISHA continues to look at the ground.)

PHIL

OK. I'm sorry.

(LISHA does not respond. A moment later, HOMELESS MAN enters.)

HOMELESS MAN
I'm trying to get something to eat. Do you have any change?

(LISHA says nothing.)

PHIL
She's not talking right now.

(Whispers)
She's angry.

(LISHA shifts on the bench to face away from PHIL.)

HOMELESS MAN
(Chuckling)
What's she angry about?

PHIL
(Rolls his eyes and shrugs.)
Maybe it's just better to leave it alone.

HOMELESS MAN
(Turns to PHIL)
OK. Whatever. How about you? Do you have anything?

PHIL
Sorry, no.

HOMELESS MAN
All right, if that's how you want to be. (pause) What are you two doing here anyhow?

PHIL
Waiting for the bus.

HOMELESS MAN

The bus? Fat chance. No bus is coming here.

PHIL

How do you know?

HOMELESS MAN

No bus ever comes here.

PHIL

There's a sign for it.

(PHIL points to sign for bus.)

HOMELESS MAN

It's an old sign. I've been out here a long time and I can tell you there's no bus.

PHIL

I'm pretty certain one's been stopping here.

HOMELESS MAN

OK, I'll play along. Even if there was a bus here some time ago, it sure as hell isn't coming today, not with a storm headed this way.

PHIL

Why are you so sure?

HOMELESS MAN

I was on the internet earlier today. Right before the library closed. All service is suspended. I kind of think bus drivers don't like the idea of coming out to pick up folks with a storm like this on the way. We've messed with the weather and now the weather's messing back.

PHIL

But the storm's still a ways off. It's too early for them to just stop their routes.

HOMELESS MAN

They gotta put the buses away and drivers gotta get home to take care of their own stuff, right?

PHIL

I guess.

(It's quiet for a moment.)

PHIL

Why are you out here?

HOMELESS MAN

Why is anyone? Something breaks or is broken to start with. A lost job. A lost woman. A bad habit.

PHIL

Which was it for you?

HOMELESS MAN

Does it matter?

(HOMELESS MAN walks to LISHA and sits down. She slides along the bench away from him.)

HOMELESS MAN

You're not really waiting on this imaginary bus too, are you?

(LISHA ignores him.)

HOMELESS MAN

Come on, you're not stupid. I know you can use your head and see nothing's coming.

(LISHA continues to ignore HOMELESS MAN.)

OK, OK, play that game. (Pauses) You know, I know a place we'd be safe when you find this bus isn't showing.

PHIL

Where's that?

HOMELESS MAN

So you won't give me money but expect me to help you out?

PHIL

Come on.

HOMELESS MAN

The stairwell at the bank. There's a door there that's unlocked.

(To LISHA)

You can come with me.

(LISHA doesn't react.)

HOMELESS MAN

(To LISHA)

Come on, whadya say?

(HOMELESS MAN puts his arm
around LISHA.)

LISHA

Don't touch me!

(PHIL has been standing off to the side the whole time, looking in the distance and occasionally checking his phone. He suddenly stands between HOMELESS MAN and LISHA.)

PHIL

Hey, ease up.

(PHIL leans into HOMELESS MAN
so they're face to face.)

HOMELESS MAN

All right, tough guy.

(HOMELESS MAN and PHIL, fists clenched,
are ready to fight. Finally, HOMELESS
MAN backs off.)

HOMELESS MAN

So that's how it's going to be.

(Looks at them both)

You know what? Both of you can keep standing here like
idiots. I don't care.

(HOMELESS MAN retreats and
exits.)

LISHA

Thanks for what you did just then.

PHIL

No problem.

(Pauses)

I'm sorry I was kind of a jerk before.

LISHA

I could have been nicer.

PHIL

What's your name?

LISHA

Lisha.

PHIL

That's pretty. What does it mean?

LISHA

The darkness before midnight. What's your name?

PHIL

Phil. Which means . . . Phil.

(LISHA smiles.)

Do you mind if I sit? It may be a while.

(LISHA slides to the left side of the bench so that her body is pointed slightly to the left. LISHA gestures to the open right side of the bench. PHIL sits, his body pointed slightly to the right. After a moment, PHIL and LISHA shift their positions so they are both facing straight ahead at the audience.)

(Blackout.)

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This short play was inspired by the worn and damaged hope we can still find commonality past our differences. Some writers that have influenced me are Martial, William Carlos Williams, John Updike, Raymond Carver and Etgar Keret*

BIO: *Karl Miller's fiction and poetry have appeared in various periodicals including Galley Sail Review, Mudfish, Cold Mountain Review and others. His play 'A Night in Ruins' was produced Off-Off Broadway. 'Elena', a novelette, was published in 2018. A Best of the Net nominee, Miller lives in Coral Springs, FL.*