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

(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

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.)

LISTA
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.)
All right, tough guy.

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

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.)

Thanks for what you did just then.

No problem.

(Pauses)

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

I could have been nicer.

What’s your name?

Lisha.

That’s pretty. What does it mean?
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.