

# Stalled

A treatment for a full-length film

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## Stalled – A Treatment

Late one evening along a sparsely traveled highway, a handful of strangers converge at an unremarkable roadside restaurant and gas station. The place is forgettable in every way—fluorescent lighting hums overhead, waitresses refill coffee without enthusiasm, and travelers pause only long enough to continue toward lives waiting elsewhere. Among the patrons are men carrying quiet burdens: Larry, withdrawn and emotionally stalled; Dick, abrasive and defensive behind physical limitation; Arthur, anxious and rule-bound; and a deaf traveler whose isolation persists even in company. None of them notice one another for long. They are simply passing through.

One by one, several patrons excuse themselves and enter the restaurant's restroom facility.

Moments later, something is wrong.

The doors refuse to open.

At first the inconvenience seems trivial—a jammed lock, faulty hinges, perhaps a cruel prank. Attempts to force the exit fail inexplicably. Windows do not shatter. Cell phones lose signal simultaneously. Plumbing fixtures behave unpredictably, sometimes functioning, sometimes not. Panic spreads slowly, then all at once, as the trapped strangers realize that no amount of strength or ingenuity affects their confinement. Even more disturbing is the absence of response from outside. The restaurant continues operating normally. No one appears aware that anyone is missing.

As hours pass, the group's discomfort turns to fear, then desperation. The physical indignities of confinement—thirst, exhaustion, sanitation, injury—erode civility. Personalities harden under pressure. Old resentments and lifelong coping mechanisms surface. Dick lashes out at others rather than accept cooperation. Arthur retreats into procedure and indecision. Communication barriers isolate the deaf man at critical moments when unity might matter most.

Larry, initially quiet and detached, begins reluctantly to assume responsibility. He organizes rationing, diffuses arguments, and searches for rational explanations. Yet increasingly, events defy reason. Doors unlock briefly only to seal again. Supplies appear at suspiciously convenient moments. Crises seem triggered by selfish behavior or moral failure. The possibility emerges—first whispered, then feared—that their imprisonment may be intentional.

The restroom becomes less a trap than a crucible.

Under mounting psychological strain, alliances fracture. Violence erupts not from evil intent but from fear and frustration. One member of the group dies after refusing opportunities to adapt or trust others, a loss that forces the survivors to confront an unbearable question: survival here may depend not on intelligence or strength, but on change.

Gradually Larry abandons his instinct toward emotional withdrawal. Faced with a final crisis, he risks himself not to escape, but to help another. In choosing cooperation over self-preservation, he becomes something different from the man who entered hours earlier.

Shortly thereafter, without warning or explanation, the restroom door opens.

Morning light floods the space.

Larry steps outside alone, shaken but alive. No authorities arrive. No evidence remains. The world continues with indifferent normalcy, leaving the ordeal feeling almost unreal. Believing he has narrowly survived an inexplicable nightmare, Larry returns to the restaurant seeking grounding in familiarity.

Instead, subtle inconsistencies begin to emerge. Staff members recognize him before introductions are made. His usual order appears without request. Conversations pause as he enters, replaced by quiet observation. Slowly, realization dawns: nothing about the night was accidental.

The people around him—the waitstaff, patrons, even those who seemed incidental—belong to an organized consortium that has been observing him all along. Through implication rather than explanation, Larry understands the truth. The confinement was a controlled evaluation designed to test individuals whose lives have stalled—people trapped not by circumstance but by their own limitations. Those unable to change do not leave. Those who demonstrate growth are released.

Or recruited.

Larry has not escaped. He has passed.

Later, on a quiet golf course overlooking open sky, Larry prepares to take a shot while a young companion, Maddie, watches nearby. He stoops carefully to place a tee in the ground, then straightens fully, standing taller than before. The hesitation that once defined him is gone. He swings cleanly, sending the ball long and straight into the distance.

For the first time, Larry moves forward.