THE LAST STOP

A one-act play in five scenes

by

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Cast of Characters

Martin: A man in his late 40s to mid-50s, slightly dishevelled, wearing a rumpled work suit. He appears weary, his face lined with years of quiet disappointment and restless self-doubt. There's a deep sadness in his eyes that he tries to mask but can't quite hide. He's the image of someone who has done everything right but somehow feels like he's done everything wrong.

The Stranger: A figure of calm menace and unyielding confidence, whose gender is intentionally ambiguous. Played with an air of quiet authority and sinister charm, the Stranger speaks in a soothing, almost hypnotic tone, their movements measured and intentional. There's a timeless quality to their presence, suggesting they might be anyone—or no one at all. Though they initially appear approachable, perhaps even kind, there's an unsettling energy that gradually builds, revealing a calculating mind. The Stranger's voice is unwavering and holds a hint of something cold and manipulative, like a spider spinning a web.

The Voice: Present only in the Epilogue, this character can be played as appropriate. It may simply be a voice (live or recorded), or an extra character such as a homeless person who was on set the entire time, or even the Director themselves breaking the 4th wall.

Synopsis

In the stillness of a desolate bus stop, two strangers collide in a haunting conversation that blurs the lines between reality and introspection. Martin, a man haunted by regrets and unresolved choices, is confronted by The Stranger, a figure whose unsettling calm unravels hidden truths. As the dialogue unfolds, the layers of Martin’s life are peeled back, revealing a man caught at the crossroads of his own existence.

Scene

A city bus stop at night

Time

The present.

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Author’s Note

The Last Stop emerges from my work counselling men grappling with mental health challenges. Over time, I've witnessed how many find themselves at a crossroads, where life feels devoid of meaning, and the allure of ending it all seems like the simplest escape. Contrary to popular belief, this descent isn't always marked by complexity or overt turmoil; often, it's a quiet, pervasive emptiness that erodes one's sense of purpose.

This play delves into that void — a stark exploration of the final destination many men reach when hope diminishes. It's a close-up examination of the psychological transition that occurs in those haunting moments between life and death.

Who is The Stranger? The script refers to The Stranger as "them". We don't know for sure. Maybe Martin's father, his Mother, or even a younger version of himself. The Stranger is a projection of Martin's inner emotions and self-image.

How do Scenes Transition? Scenes flow. However some might be punctuated with some street activity, a passing car, a dog barking, a person walking by. There is a stillness in the scene that complements The Stranger, but contrasts the growing emotions from Martin.

The Epilogue is entirely optional. It is simply a means by which the mirror is turned to the audience.

Scene 1: The Arrival

SETTING: A cityscape bus stop at night. Lit by a single street lamp.

AT RISE: MARTIN sits alone on the bench, fidgeting and glancing down the road. The street feels desolate, and every movement he makes echoes in the silence. After a while, THE STRANGER approaches from the shadows and sits at the far end of the bench, leaving a polite gap.

STRANGER

Quiet night.

MARTIN

Yeah. Quiet.

STRANGER

Waiting for the bus?

MARTIN

What else would I be doing here?

STRANGER

Fair enough. (Beat) Long day?

MARTIN

Something like that.

STRANGER

Salesman, right?

MARTIN

(Pauses)

How do you know that?

STRANGER

Just a guess. You have the look—buttoned-up, but not too much. Tired eyes. The kind of weariness that comes from… convincing people to want things they don’t need.

MARTIN

Yeah, well. It’s a job.

STRANGER

A job that keeps you here, night after night, waiting.

MARTIN

What’s that supposed to mean?

STRANGER

Nothing. Just an observation. (Pauses) You seem like someone who’s always waiting for something… more.

MARTIN

Don’t we all?

(MARTIN shifts in his seat, pulling his coat tighter. A bus approaches in the distance. He stands, hopeful, but it speeds past without stopping. He sighs, defeated, and sits back down)

STRANGER

Wrong bus?

MARTIN

Story of my life.

STRANGER

Funny, isn’t it? The things we wait for, hoping they’ll take us somewhere better.

MARTIN

You’ve got a lot of opinions for a stranger.

STRANGER

And you’ve got a lot of patience for someone who’s clearly running out of time.

(MARTIN looks at them sharply but doesn’t respond. The silence stretches)

Scene 2: The Provocation

AT RISE: The sounds of the city and traffic start to merge with an ominous soundscape, very quiet at first. After a long silence, THE STRANGER resumes, his questions seemingly harmless but probing.

STRANGER

Do you ever wonder if you’re in the wrong place? Not just here, I mean, but… in life.

MARTIN

(Sighs)

Look, I’m just trying to get home, alright? I don’t need a philosophy lesson.

STRANGER

Home. Funny word, isn’t it? It means something different to everyone. For some, it’s a place. For others, a person. And for some… it’s an idea they’ll never quite reach.

MARTIN

What are you getting at?

STRANGER

Nothing. Just… wondering what it means to you.

MARTIN

It means four walls and a roof. Somewhere to sleep. That enough for you?

STRANGER

(Laughs softly)

Oh, Martin. Always so defensive.

MARTIN

How do you know my name?

STRANGER

You must have told me.

MARTIN

No, I didn’t.

STRANGER

Maybe you did, and you just don’t remember. Or maybe… I just know things.

MARTIN

(Stands abruptly, agitated)

Alright, that’s enough. Who are you?

STRANGER

Just someone passing through. Like you.

(MARTIN glares at them, then turns away, pacing. Another bus passes without stopping. He mutters a curse under his breath and sits back down again, visibly defeated)

STRANGER

You really have no idea, do you?

MARTIN

What are you talking about?

STRANGER

The crossroads. The waiting. It’s not about the bus, Martin. It never was.

MARTIN

What is it with you? You talk like you know me, like you’ve got me all figured out. Well, you don’t.

(Pauses)

You’re wrong about “crossroads” or whatever you call it… the waiting. It’s just a fucking bus stop, alright? Nothing more. And you’re just some guy sitting here with too much to say. So, stop trying to make it something it’s not. Whatever game you’re playing, I’m not part of it.

Scene 3: The Mirror

AT RISE: There is a lengthy pause as if The Stranger is defeated by Martin. However the Stranger's tone becomes more probing, their questions cutting deeper. Martin is visibly struggling to maintain his composure in the face of the relentless questioning

STRANGER

Tell me, Martin. What keeps you up at night?

MARTIN

(Brief hesitation)

What?

STRANGER

You know what I mean. Those thoughts that creep in when everything's quiet. The ones you can't quite shake.

MARTIN

(Defensive)

I don't know what you're talking about.

STRANGER

(Smiling)

Oh, but you do. The regrets, the doubts. The feeling that maybe, just maybe, you've been… wasting your time.

MARTIN

(Sharply)

Shut up! You don't know me.

STRANGER

Don’t I?

MARTIN

(Visibly shaken)

You’re just some damn weirdo trying to mess with me. That’s all.

STRANGER

Or maybe I’m the only one who’s honest with you. You ever think about that?

(MARTIN’S hands are shaking now. He takes a deep breath, trying to steady himself)

STRANGER

Ever heard the one about the guy who stared at his own reflection too long?

MARTIN

(Glances up, wary)

What?

STRANGER

He said, "I don’t know if I’m losing my mind or just meeting someone I don’t like."

(There’s a beat of silence. MARTIN blinks, torn between annoyance and a reluctant smirk. THE STRANGER chuckles softly, the tension momentarily diffused)

Scene 4: The Choice

AT RISE: MARTIN is visibly on edge, his composure unravelling as THE STRANGER'S calm demeanour takes on a chilling, manipulative quality. The sounds of the city can no longer be heard, and the dark soundscape is now more apparent, underscoring the building tension.

STRANGER

So… you're waiting for the bus?

(MARTIN'S frustration boils over. He stands, confronting the Stranger, who remains eerily calm)

MARTIN

(Shouting)

What do you want from me?

STRANGER

(Quietly)

Nothing. I'm just here to talk.

MARTIN

Talk? Is that what you call this? You're messing with me. Trying to… what? Break me?

STRANGER

You're already broken, Martin. I'm just holding up the mirror.

MARTIN

You… you don't know anything about me!

STRANGER

Oh, but I do, Martin. I know what keeps you up at night. I know the way you bury your disappointment, pretending that everything is "fine." Tell me, how does it feel… being so completely alone?

MARTIN

I'm not… I'm not alone. I've got friends. Family. People who… care about me.

STRANGER

(Chuckles)

Yes, of course. Friends who forget, family who drift away. They've all left, haven't they? And all that's left is this… waiting.

MARTIN

Stop it! You're twisting everything. Why are you doing this?

STRANGER

Doing what? Simply talking? Martin, you wanted someone to listen, didn't you? Someone who sees you, really sees you.

MARTIN

(Struggling)

I… I just wanted… I don't know. Something more.

STRANGER

But you'll never have it, Martin. Deep down, you know that. You're just… waiting for the years to drain away, with nothing to show for it.

(THE STRANGER watches MARTIN intently, a faint smile playing on his lips, his eyes gleaming with dark satisfaction)

Scene 5: The Departure

AT RISE: MARTIN is visibly exhausted, his shoulders slumped and his hands fumbling with his coat buttons. He glances at the Stranger with a mixture of reluctance and resignation. There’s an air of vulnerability about him now, as if he’s struggling to hold onto his own sense of self. This is a silent and extended exchange as the mood darkens further.

MARTIN

(To himself)

I don’t know why I’m still here. Just… waiting. Feels like I’ve always been here.

STRANGER

Maybe you’re waiting because it’s all you know. Better to wait than to face the idea that… perhaps there’s nothing to wait for.

MARTIN

That’s not true. There’s… things I want. Things I thought I’d have by now. A family, someone to come home to. Something real.

STRANGER

(Quiet intensity)

But you’re here instead. Alone, at a bus stop in the dead of night, clutching to the idea of something that was never within your grasp. Why?

MARTIN

(Trembling)

I—I did what I was supposed to. Worked hard. Tried to be someone my parents would… be proud of. I've done everything they wanted, and yet, here I am. Alone. (Bitterly) Funny, isn't it?

STRANGER

Funny? No, Martin. Tragic. You've spent so much of your life seeking approval, running in circles, hoping for something to come and pull you out of this… this endless waiting. But deep down, you know it won't come.

MARTIN

Don't say that. It's not true. I can—things could still change. There's still… time.

STRANGER

(Smiling)

Time? Time is a story you tell yourself to fill the silence, Martin. You can't fight what's already been written. The longer you wait, the louder the silence becomes.

(MARTIN looks away, staring out into the dark road, his face etched with doubt and despair. A slight shiver runs through him, as if he's standing on the edge of something he can't quite comprehend. THE STRANGER regards MARTIN with a calm, almost soothing expression, his gaze unwavering. Finally, after a pause, he speaks again, softly)

STRANGER

So… you're waiting for the bus?

MARTIN

Stop saying that! Why do you keep asking me that?

STRANGER

(Unsettling calm)

Because you don’t seem to know what you’re really waiting for. Every time I ask, you look… uncertain. Like you’re holding onto some faint hope. But look around you, Martin. The road is empty. The night has gone cold.

MARTIN

I don’t know what I’m supposed to do. I don’t know… if anything I did even mattered.

STRANGER

That’s the thing, isn’t it? You’ve spent so long being afraid of failure, of disappointment, that you forgot how to live. You’re nothing more than a shadow… haunted by the dreams you were too afraid to chase.

MARTIN

(Pleading)

Please… stop. Just… stop! I can’t— (voice breaks) Why are you saying these things?

STRANGER

Because I’m the only one who will. You’ve avoided these truths for too long, hiding behind empty hopes and polite lies. Waiting, wasting your life away, pretending it would all… just work out. And now, here we are.

MARTIN

What am I supposed to do? (Pauses) What am I supposed to do?

STRANGER

Stop waiting. There’s only one way out. One final choice.

(MARTIN stares at the road ahead, the distant lights of an approaching bus casting faint shadows around them. The Stranger stands beside him, unwavering, his face calm and almost pitying as the bus draws closer)

STRANGER

(Softly)

Just take the step, Martin. Embrace the silence.

(With a trembling hand, MARTIN steps forward to the kerb, his face a mixture of fear and resignation. THE STRANGER places a gentle hand on his shoulder, almost comforting, and with a slight push, MARTIN is propelled forward. He disappears into the approaching lights.

The sound of screeching tyres fills the air, followed by a sickening thud as the bus strikes MARTIN. The vehicle doesn’t stop; it continues, the blaring of its horn echoing into the night. MARTIN’S body crumples beneath the wheels, but the bus barrels on, indifferent, leaving only silence in its wake.

THE STRANGER watches impassively, his expression unreadable. He turns slowly, his figure fading into the night, as if nothing has happened at all)

Epilogue

AT RISE: The stage remains still. MARTIN'S lifeless form lies beneath the dim streetlight, a stark silhouette against the encroaching darkness. The soft hum of the bus, now distant, lingers faintly like the fading echo of a choice made too late. From the silence, A VOICE rises—a calm yet unyielding presence that carries the weight of something timeless, something inevitable

VOICE

He waited.

Not for rescue, nor for absolution.

Just… waited.

And the world passed by.

Not cruelly, not kindly.

Simply passed, as it always does.

(A pause, heavy and cold)

Shadows gather where light falters. You see them in the corners of the ordinary, where certainty fades. But are they strangers? Or do they wear your face, reflected in the glass of something long forgotten?

(A breath, quieter but cutting)

He listened. For a voice, for a hand, for something to draw him back. But the only voice that came was his own, fractured and hollow, echoing in the void he thought was the night.

What do you hear, when you're alone?

(Curtain)