

# THE BUS STOP

By Jeff Dunne

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## CHARACTERS

- KEITH                      An older man in a hospital waiting to depart the world.
- PRESTON                  A younger man who is struggling to find a reason to continue on in the world.

Note: The names/genders of the characters are completely arbitrary, specified merely to make writing easier with pronouns. Directors should feel free to adjust them as desired. Also, Keith's Scottish brogue can be changed to any other distinguishable accent such that Preston's repeat of his words at the end is discernable as mimicry.

## SETTING

A bus station.

SCENE

*(The lights come up on a bus station. Keith is sitting on a bench, waiting for a bus to arrive. He is wearing a hospital gown, and we see that he's tied to the bench with some kind of thin chain or wire. He wears a look of resignation, and idly switches from looking around to checking his watch. He sighs. After a few moments, Preston enters wearing a backpack. He looks around as if lost, then walks over to the bench. To Keith's surprise, he takes off the pack and has a seat.)*

KEITH

I think you're at the wrong place.

PRESTON

No. Right place.

KEITH

This bus goes to—

PRESTON

I know where it goes.

*(Keith looks at him oddly, uncomfortable. There's an awkward silence.)*

KEITH

A lot of buses go through here. Goin' to a lot of places.

PRESTON

Yep.

KEITH

Lot of options.

*(Preston just looks at Keith, then back forward. He doesn't reply.)*

If you don't mind my askin'—

PRESTON

I do.

KEITH

I wasn't proposin'.

*(Preston smiles just a little, then returns to brooding.)*

Not that you aren't a nice enough fellow, you ken, it's just that—

*(He's interrupted by the look on Preston's face.)*

I'll leave you in peace.

PRESTON

Thank you.

*(They sit in a silence that grows uncomfortable for Preston...)*

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude.

KEITH

It's alright. Looks like you've got a lot on your mind.

PRESTON

Yeah.

KEITH

Me too.

PRESTON

I bet.

KEITH

Still... this bench has a way of puttin' things in perspective, ya' ken?

PRESTON

How so?

KEITH

Well, this is it, right? The penultimate stop. No turning back.

Right. PRESTON

KEITH  
I mean, all the rest of it really doesn't pile to a rat's ass anymore, does it?

Nope. PRESTON

So what's in the pack? KEITH

Everything. PRESTON

That's a lot of crammin'. KEITH

Yeah. PRESTON

Must be heavy. KEITH

Yeah. PRESTON

KEITH  
Decided to take it all on the bus with you, eh?

PRESTON  
It's all I've got.

KEITH  
So you said. So what's so important in there?

*(Preston looks at Keith for a hard moment, then decides "why not?" He opens the pack, takes out a book, and hands it to Keith.)*

A bible?

PRESTON

A diary.

*(Keith was about to open it, but stops.)*

No, it's fine.

*(Keith flips through it, turning to the last page, reads.)*

KEITH

Wow. Fired just like that.

PRESTON

Yeah.

KEITH

Wasn't even your fault.

PRESTON

Worse. I was trying to help the stupid woman. If she had... Never mind.

KEITH

It's okay. Go on. It's not like I've got something else to be doin'.

PRESTON

It doesn't matter.

KEITH

Sure it does.

PRESTON

*(Suddenly angry...)*

Does it? For what? So I can pat myself on the back and say "well, at least you tried"? That's such a load of crap. Trying doesn't count for anything.

KEITH

Well—

PRESTON

Oh, don't give me some horseshit about team spirit, or how everyone's a winner. You know what's the biggest lie in the world? Those stupid participation trophies they hand out to every kid. Here you go, Preston. You sucked. Congratulations.

KEITH

I bet you have one in there.

*(Preston stops, then digs into his pack and pulls out a small trophy. Then another. Then another.)*

So if they're just crap, why're you carryin' them around?

PRESTON

Like I said, they're all I've got.

*(Keith weighs a couple in his hands, then puts them down on the bench.)*

KEITH

You know, I used to wear glasses.

PRESTON

Okaaay...

KEITH

Yep. Big, thick ones. You can see the ridge on my nose from all those years of wearin' 'em.

PRESTON

Okay...

KEITH

They're over there somewhere. I threw 'em away just before I sat down.

PRESTON

And why'd you do that?

*(Keith rattles pulls a little against the cord/chain binding him to the bench.)*

KEITH

I'm getting' on the bus.

PRESTON

And?

KEITH

What's there to see on that ride?

PRESTON

Huh. Guess so.

KEITH

No. Really. It's a question.

PRESTON

I don't know. Nothing, I guess.

KEITH

No. Not nothin'. Just nothin' out there.

PRESTON

I don't follow.

KEITH

You can still see your life, your past.

PRESTON

Great. And if your life sucked? No thanks. I'll pass.

KEITH

Want to know somethin' funny?

*(Preston just stares at him, but then relinquishes.)*

I can actually see better here without 'em. Somethin' about the station, maybe. Maybe the bench.

PRESTON

Let me guess? You see my glorious life, filled with opportunities.

KEITH

No. *(Flips the pages of the diary.)* Looks like a tough life.

*(Preston pulls out other things from his backpack, random mementoes, for example a report card, a small stuffed animal, a medicine container, a ring...)*

PRESTON

Here. My dad's disappointment. My sister's drug addiction. Oh, look, migraines. Oh, here's where my fiancée... *(He fades off.)*



KEITH

Lot of trophies.

PRESTON

A lot of failure.

KEITH

I don't know. You see things differently when you take off your glasses.

PRESTON

Right. Everything's blurry.

KEITH

That's *right*.

PRESTON

What? If you're trying to be deep or something, you... What?

KEITH

You know, I always thought that the world was full of these crisp lines. Sharp edges. It's this or that, it's here or there. But now, there's nothing to see going forward, so I've been looking back. And you know what? I don't see any sharp lines. Nothin's painted in neon to say "look, you won" or "you chose right". All I can see is the road I traveled, and the choices I made. No scores. Just memories.

PRESTON

And what if your memories all suck?

KEITH

Do all your memories suck?

PRESTON

Yeah.

KEITH

Every single one?

PRESTON

Yeah. Every single one.

*(Keith just stares at him.)*

Most of them. Certainly the major ones.

KEITH

Ah, major ones. For me, I can't see anything that says what's major or minor. There's only which ones I focus on.

PRESTON

Well, I don't have that choice.

*(Keith laughs lightly.)*

That's funny to you?

KEITH

Are you tellin' me that you can't detect just a whiff of irony there? *(He tugs on the cord.)* About which one of us has a choice?

PRESTON

You may have memories you want to look back on. I don't.

KEITH

Sounds like a good argument for making more.

PRESTON

I don't want to make more. I'm tired. I'm done. I just want to get on the bus.

*(There's a long pause as Keith considers him.)*

KEITH

Did you help her?

PRESTON

What?

KEITH

That woman you wrote about. The one who got you fired. Did you make things better for her?

PRESTON

What does it matter? I made her mad.

KEITH

But did you *help* her?

PRESTON

It doesn't—

KEITH

Just answer the fuckin' question! Did you help her?

PRESTON

Yeah.

KEITH

Did you think you'd get fired?

PRESTON

I don't kn—

KEITH

Bullshit. Did you think you'd—

PRESTON

Yeah! Fine. Yeah. I knew.

KEITH

But you did it anyway.

PRESTON

Yeah.

KEITH

Let me tell you somethin'. Somethin' you can't see until you take your glasses off, until you stop expectin' the world to work like everyone says. Value doesn't come from what others think, or say. It comes from what you invest in somethin'.

PRESTON

That's a load of crap. If I spend a hundred bucks buying a rock, it's still just a rock.

KEITH

Is it?

PRESTON

Yeah. It is what it is.

KEITH

Said like someone who's still got their world glasses glued to their forehead.

PRESTON

World glasses.

KEITH

Right. The glasses you wear to see the world the way everyone tells you to see it.

PRESTON

And you're telling me that they're all wrong.

KEITH

Ain't that a kick in the head, hmm?

PRESTON

Right. And so how come you're the only one who can see this deep "truth"?

KEITH

I'm not. Ask anyone who's played the game long enough. Ask 'em what matters, and why it does.

PRESTON

So then why does everyone wear these *world glasses* then, if they're so wrong?

KEITH

Habit... Ignorance... Expectations...

*(There's the sound of a bus pulling up.)*

Well, that's that.

*(He gets up, the cord falling away from him.)*

You know, one other thought. I know you can't see what the future holds, but maybe there's a reason for that.

PRESTON

Oh? And what's that?

KEITH

Not knowing the future is the only way you have a chance to change it.

*(Keith starts to exit. Just before he does, he turns back to say...)*

You comin'?

PRESTON

*(No longer so sure he wants to get on the bus...)*

You go on. Maybe I'll catch the next one.

*(Keith nods, then turns and exits. There's the sound of a bus leaving, and Preston watches it go. He repeats, lightly mocking Keith's accent...)*

Not knowing the future's the only way you have a chance to change it.

*(He sits, thinking about this, but it's clear the words are sinking in. After a few moments, he decides. He gets up, returns his things to the backpack, and takes a step. He stops. He carefully places the backpack against the side of the end of the bench, steps back, looks at it. He then turns and exits. Lights out.)*