

THE LAST STOP

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BLACK

PNEUMATIC BRAKES HISS loudly as the film's title appears.
A DIESEL-POWERED GREYHOUND pulls away.

The FOOTSTEPS of a screaming runner grow closer.

JEREMY
(from a distance)
Wait! Wait! Stop! Please!
Stop!

CUT TO:

EXT. DAY - A RURAL BUS STOP

JEREMY is in his late 20s. A small backpack flops up and down on his back as he thunders left to right, past an empty park bench, without stopping. Off screen, his FOOTSTEPS slow to a stop. He PANTS with exhaustion, his breath momentarily eclipsing the DRONE OF SUMMER INSECTS.

JEREMY
(V.O.)
Can you...? Stop! Dammit!

Listlessly, Jeremy reenters the frame, digging a phone from his pocket. He studies the screen, swiping. He hears a loud POP.

WOMAN
Just missed it.

Startled, Jeremy looks from his phone to the bench. There sits a WOMAN in her late 60s. She sips from a water bottle. Jeremy's face registers a second's confusion before he looks back at his phone.

JEREMY
6? The next one's at 6? Crap!

WOMAN
6:04.

Continued urgent phone swiping.

JEREMY

Wait. There's another one at 4.
Or, wait. Wait. There's an
earlier one going to Cleveland.

WOMAN

4:10 goes to Indianapolis. 6:04
goes to Chicago. That Cleveland
bus you're talking about. That's
about 3:15, isn't it?

JEREMY

Yeah.

WOMAN

You know those are all in
different directions.

JEREMY

What?

WOMAN

65 runs north to Chicago, south to
Indianapolis. Cleveland's way east
of here. They're all in different
directions.

JEREMY

I guess. So?

WOMAN

Oh. Okay. I see.

Dejected, Jeremy chucks his backpack onto the bench and
plops down beside it. The Woman glances at the pack
between her and Jeremy.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Traveling light.

JEREMY

Huh?

WOMAN

You haven't packed much.

JEREMY

Yeah.

WOMAN

Weekend away?

JEREMY

What?

WOMAN

I say you're traveling light. You taking a short trip?

JEREMY

Maybe.

No. No. Probably not. Not really.

WOMAN.

Just leaving the heavy stuff.

JEREMY

(sighs, almost to himself)

God, I hope so.

(more pointedly, to Woman)

Are you always—? You're kinda nosy, aren't you?

WOMAN

Not nosy. Curious. Just... interested. You know.

You were running pretty hard. You run track or something? I'll bet you lettered. 400 meter maybe?

JEREMY

I was just late. Obviously. But... yeah, actually. I ran the 400 in high school.

WOMAN

Go Panthers.

JEREMY

What?

WOMAN

Man, you were tearing down that road. Looked like Tom Cruise in one of those old impossible movies. Like the devil was chasing you.

JEREMY

Why does it have to be running away? Why can't it be running *toward* something? Opportunity or dreams or the future?

WOMAN

Sure, sure. Could be. Absolutely.

But it's not, is it?

JEREMY

No.

WOMAN

I guess some people run from guilt or hard lives or responsibility. Stuff like that.

JEREMY

Yeah.

WOMAN

Your family okay?

JEREMY

Actually, they're pretty messed up, if you want to know the truth.

WOMAN

I'm sorry to hear that.

JEREMY

At the church. That wasn't Mom. Or Aunt Liz, either. I don't know. That was Valium or something. Some kind of get-me-through-the-day tranquilizer. God...

WOMAN
(not a question)
You think... you think some of
that's your fault.

Jeremy rises from the bench.

JEREMY
Some? Of course I do.

WOMAN
So... Indianapolis. Chicago. You
really don't care.

JEREMY
It just can't be here.

WOMAN
C'mon, Jeremy. How were you
supposed to know?

Jeremy paces like a caged animal.

JEREMY
How was I supposed to know? How
was I supposed to know that
Margaret could crawl under the
fence? I'm the one who taught
her, okay? I taught her!

Jeremy succumbs to a surge of gravity and slumps back to
the bench.

JEREMY
Wait. How do you know my name?

WOMAN
You must have said it.

JEREMY
I didn't. Did I? No, I—

WOMAN
Me knowing your name. That's not
important. What's important is
knowing what your family needs,
knowing what you want before you
just hop on the next bus.

JEREMY

Okay, here's what I want: I want Margaret to grow up. I want a niece who lives. I want a niece who stops before she sneaks into the neighbor's pool. She should... Margaret should date. She should vote. And drive. And have kids of her own.

WOMAN

You know, uh... you ever heard of Schrödinger's cat?

Jeremy eyes her scornfully.

WOMAN

I'm just saying. Maybe she did. Maybe your niece did all those things.

Jeremy leaps angrily off the bench.

JEREMY

Shut up. That's crap. That's awful. That's an awful thing to say.

WOMAN

Maybe some version of Margaret is still alive in some other... something. Maybe she has a fine life. And years left ahead of her.

Jeremy listens intently, his back to the Woman. His eyes, his face suggest a slow, thorough processing, a dawning awareness.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

And maybe... maybe she loved her Uncle Jeremy... the guy who taught her how to run the 400. How to parallel park. How to speak up in class. The uncle who taught her to swim. Maybe she loved him until the day he died.

Jeremy hears a loud POP. Wide-eyed, he whirls to face the Woman.

JEREMY

Margaret?

But no one is there. Jeremy is utterly alone at the bus stop. Panicked, he searches the horizon in multiple directions, calling for the niece that might have been.

JEREMY

Margaret! Margaret!

CUT TO BLACK

CREDITS