

Heat Lightning

SCENE

The drab interior of a bus station along a deserted highway somewhere in the midwest. There are two long benches stage Right, back to back; one faces the audience and one faces the rear wall. A door up Center leads out onto the road. It has a single glass pane in the top and the bottom is wooden. Two doors, up Left and down Left. Up Left door reads "Men"; down Left door reads "Women". The room is lighted by an overhanging light with a dull green shade. A large bus schedule on the wall up Right Center. A window is up Right of Center and another at Right.

The sound of heavy RAIN can be heard outside. LIGHTNING flashes outside followed by large bursts of THUNDER. With each flash of lightning the light in the room dims almost to the point of going out, but somehow feebly struggles back to its full strength.

When the curtain rises the stage is bare. Then a Man enters from the "Men's" room. He is a pleasant looking Man of about thirty-five. He takes off his hat and shakes the water from it; puts it on the bench downstage. He glances at the door up Center. Moves to it and peers out; turns and moves to the Schedule on the wall and reads it. He then moves downstage and sits on the bench facing the audience. He picks up a discarded newspaper that lies on the seat beside him. He glances back at the door, then turns his attention once more to the paper and begins going through it casually.

The door up Center suddenly bursts open and a Girl of about twenty-three rushes into the room. She is sobbing and is out of breath. She throws her body against the door, slamming it. The Man turns about quickly. She throws the bolt into place and turns slowly, seeing the Man. The Girl's clothes are wet and muddy. Her hair is dishevelled. She sobs and rushes to the Man quickly.

Girl *(Hysterically).* Thank God! You're here! Oh, thank God!
(She almost falls and the Man catches her.)

Man My dear! What is it?

Girl Help me. Oh, please—please help me!

Man Good Heavens! You're in a terrible state. What has happened?

Girl Don't let him in. Please. He's after me. Please don't let him in.

Man Who? Who's after you?

Girl He'll be here any minute. Please—help me!

(The Girl looks to the Center door. The LIGHTNING flashes and the LIGHT dims slowly. The Girl looks at the light and begins sobbing again.)

Man Please, my dear, try to tell me what happened. You've locked the door. No one

can come in. Now try to calm yourself.

(The LIGHT has recovered again.)

Girl You're waiting for the bus, aren't you? Oh, don't leave me! *(She rushes into his arms.)*

Man There, my dear! Of course I won't leave you!

Girl The bus. What time – Oh, tell me it will be here soon.

Man The last one's due any time now. The storm has probably slowed it down. Now, listen to me. I shall do whatever I can for you, but you must tell me what has happened.

Girl Yes – Yes – I must get hold of myself.

Man Here. Sit down. *(He brings her down to the bench facing the audience.)* There, now, that's better, isn't it? Now –

Girl I was at a party. I – I could have stayed all night with a friend, but I thought I had enough gas to get home –

Man Where do you live?

Girl About eight miles from here.

Man I see.

Girl About a mile from here, I suppose – I don't really know, I ran out of gas – I took my flashlight and locked the car and started walking down the road. There are so few cars this time of the morning, but I thought – anyway – I knew I could get the bus when it came along and then – go back for the car later. *(She breaks off and glances at the door again. She shudders at her own thoughts.)*

Man Come on, now. You were doing fine.

Girl I must have walked – I don't know – just a little way, when I noticed a car pulled off into a lane. I saw the rear light burning. I wanted to call to them. I thought I'd just call out to them and ask if they could help me – if they might let me have some gas.

Man Did you?

Girl No – I – I didn't get the chance to. I walked near enough to the car to be heard if I called, but – before I could call out, I saw someone. The front door of the car was open and someone was standing by it. A man – he hadn't heard me – he was – he was pulling something out of the car. I couldn't tell what it was at first – and then the lightning – and I – I saw her hand and then – her head – her hair was light and long and it dragged in the mud.

Man This is dreadful!

(There is a flash of LIGHTNING and a crash of THUNDER.)

- Girl** He'll be here. He'll be here. I'm scared. Oh, God, I'm scared.
- Man** Did he see you?
- Girl** Maybe my flashlight – maybe I screamed – I don't know – I don't think I screamed. I was too frightened. He looked up – I knew he saw me. I dropped the flashlight and started running. I could hear him behind me. I could hear the water splashing under his feet as he ran. I knew he was behind me – I was afraid I was going to faint. I ran crazy like all over the road – then I ran off the road and into the woods – I circled round and round hoping I'd lose him, but I kept hearing something behind me – I ran until I fell – I knew there was no use – I couldn't keep it up – but then I realized I must have lost him – because I didn't hear him anymore.
- Man** And you came straight here, then?
- Girl** Yes – Yes – Oh, he's still out there – somewhere. He'll be here. Oh, God! I know he will.
- Man** The bus will be here soon and you'll be all right.
- Girl** Yes. Oh, God, please let it come quickly.
- Man** You'll have to get to the police immediately.
- Girl** No – I couldn't. I don't want to – I'm afraid.
- Man** But you must. It's your duty. This is a dreadful thing.
- Girl** I know, but – what could I tell them?
- Man** Tell them what you told me just now.
- Girl** That wouldn't be enough – they'd want me to describe him. Maybe identify him. I couldn't – I just couldn't.
- Man** Are you sure you couldn't think of something that might give them a lead. Anything?
- Girl** I don't even know what he looked like. I couldn't see him very well – I was so frightened.
- Man** Nevertheless you've got to go to the police.
- Girl** I don't know – I –
- Man** They'll ask you a lot of questions, of course, but I'm sure you can answer most of them. After you tell them the story the way you told it to me, there'll be routine questions, but they'll be simple. They'll probably ask you something like – was he wearing a hat? How was he dressed?
- Girl** I don't even know that!
- Man** Or – was he tall? Was he short? How would you describe him generally?
- Girl** I don't know – I swear – I just don't know.
- Man** In the lightning – are you sure you didn't see his face at all?

Girl I don't remember. Maybe he was wearing a hat or something. I don't remember seeing his face.

Man But you saw the girl.

Girl No – I didn't.

Man But you said her hair was light – and you saw her hand.

Girl Yes, I did. In the lightning, I think – Yes.

Man But you don't remember seeing him?

Girl No – I don't. *(She begins sobbing.)*

Man I'm sorry – I shouldn't be going on like this – you are much too upset to even think any more about it. Don't worry about it anymore. Something will come to you later – that you've forgotten about right now. You'll see.

Girl Perhaps.

Man Your flashlight – for instance. You could identify that, couldn't you?

Girl Yes – but –

Man There, you see! Now – look – *(Points to "Women's room.")* Go in there, and dry your eyes and fix yourself up. You'll feel much better.

Girl You won't leave, will you?

Man Of course not, my dear. I'll be right here!

(She moves toward the door up Left. There is a brilliant flash of LIGHTNING. The LIGHT begins to dim. The Girl looks toward the Center door. There is a second flash of LIGHTNING illuminating the Center door. The Girl screams. In the flash of lightning, a Man's face can be seen pressed against the glass outside the door. The door rattles viciously. The LIGHT in the room has almost dimmed out.)

Man *(Pushing her toward "Women's room")*. Get in there. Stay until I tell you to come out.

(The Man pushes her into the room quickly.)

Second Man *(Outside the door. Rattles the door viciously once more)*. Let me in. Open this door. Let me in!

Man What do you want?

Second Man *(Outside)*. I want to get out of this storm. What the hell do you think I want? What's the idea of locking this door? You think you own this place? *(The Man goes to the door slowly, throws back the bolt and the Second Man enters quickly. He is a nondescript sort of person. Tall, nice-looking and about thirty years of age. He looks about the room as he enters.)* You've got no right to lock that door – keeping people outside in this kind of weather. *(The Second Man moves up to the Schedule on the wall.)* Has there been a bus?

Man No – not yet.

Second Man Late, huh? Good.

Man Why?

Second Man Why? I'd have missed it if it were on time – wouldn't I?

Man Yes – of course – how stupid of me.

Second Man There's someone else here, isn't there?

Man What do you mean?

Second Man I saw somebody else when I looked in.

Man There –

Second Man A girl, wasn't it?

(The two Men look at each other a moment; then the First Man walks to the door where the Girl has gone and knocks on it. The door opens slowly and the Girl enters. When she sees the other man standing in the room, she starts to cry out, but the Man puts his finger to his lip conveying silence to her and then guides her downstage to the bench.)

Second Man I thought you said –

Man I didn't say anything.

Second Man You tried to tell me there was no one else here. I thought there was –

Man Did you?

Second Man Yeah, I was sure there was. What was the idea of lying?

Man I wasn't conscious of lying about anything.

Second Man Yeah? I guess I'm imaginin' things. Oh, well – forget it. How far you going?

Man Just into town.

Second Man How about you, Miss?

Girl Not far.

(The Second Man starts moving down toward the Girl. She sees him coming, and moves over to the wall, appearing to read the schedule.)

Second Man It's pretty late, isn't it? I was in luck, don't you think? I told that to our friend here, but he didn't get it. *(To First Man)*. I'll bet she's smarter than you are.

Man Yes – I suppose she might – be.

Second Man *(noticing the Girl's nervousness)*. Say, you look pretty nervous about something. Storm upsets your plans? You can expect storms to slow up buses. If people were smart they wouldn't be out on a night like this. Just try to get somewhere when it storms – can't be done – especially if you're in a hurry.

Girl I'm – I'm in no particular hurry.

Second Man Well, I'm sure as hell am – but there's nothing I can do about it – I guess.

(There is another flash of LIGHTNING and the LIGHT dims very low again. The Girl is pressed against the Right window in fear. The LIGHT recovers.)

Second Man Say – you're really upset, aren't you? Has somebody been bothering you? *(The Second Man moves toward her again.)*

Girl It's – it's just the storm.

Second Man Afraid of storms?

Girl Yes – I – am.

(The Girl seems as if she is about to faint. The First Man pushes ahead of the Second Man and takes her by the arm and leads her down to the bench.)

Man She'll be all right. Why don't you leave her alone?

Second Man Yeah! Sure! *(He moves away, watching the Girl.)*

(There is another brilliant flash of LIGHTNING and a crack of THUNDER. The LIGHT dims slowly and goes out. The Girl lets out a muffled cry.)

Man Here! Have a chewing gum, my dear.

(The Man opens the packet and gives her one. The Second Man pushes his head between them.)

Second Man Don't mind to have one more, do you?

Man No, of course not. *(Gives him one more.)*

(The LIGHT comes up slowly.)

Second Man Thanks. *(He strolls up toward the Center door.)* God! What a night! Always wonder what brings people out on nights like this. Wouldn't catch me out if it weren't pretty important. *(To Man.)* How about you?

Man I have early business in town.

Second Man *(To Girl).* And you?

Girl I was visiting – with friends. I should have stayed the night.

Second Man Oh! You're not together then?

Man Er – no –

Second Man I see. *(He moves down toward the Girl.)* How far did you say you were going?

Girl Not far – about eight miles.

(The Second Man sits beside her and she moves away suspiciously.)

Second Man I never saw anybody so afraid of a storm.

Girl It's the lightning – I –

Second Man Lightning. I used to be afraid of it, when I was a kid, but I got over it. All by myself too. *(He takes the Girl's arm.)* Look! Come here. I'll show you. *(He*

leads her up to the window rear Right.) Watch the sky the next time there's a big flash. One of the really beautiful sights in this world if you look at it right – like a great big Fourth of July. *(There is now a brilliant flash of LIGHTNING.)* Look! See! What did I tell you? It's just like it was cutting the whole world in two. *(The Girl breaks away and goes Right.)* You wouldn't even watch it. You'll never get over being afraid of things if you won't face them.

Girl I can't.

(There is the hum of a MOTOR in the distance. They All listen. The Second Man goes to the window.)

Second Man I guess that's it – Yep – Looks empty.

Girl Empty!

(There is the sound of BRAKES being applied. Each waits for the other to make the first move.)

Second Man Well – are we going?

Man No!

Second Man What?

Man I'm not going!

Second Man Why?

Man I don't see that I have to give you a reason for what I do.

Second Man No – I guess you don't at that – *(He looks at the Girl, then moves to her, reaching for her arm.)* Well, in that case, I guess we'll just keep each other company, won't we? *(The Girl is stunned. She looks to the First Man, who stands behind the Second Man. The First Man shakes his head "no." There is the sound of a HORN outside.)*

Girl *(Backing away from the Second Man.)* No – No – I don't think I'll go either. I'll wait-

Second Man I think you'd better come on. We'll have it all to ourselves.

Girl No – No – I won't. Leave me alone. I'm going to stay here – with him.

Second Man *(Looks from one to the other.)* I get it. Waiting for a bus! *(He laughs.)* No wonder you had the door locked! *(The Second Man exits laughing.)*
(The Girl rushes after him, slamming the door and throwing the bolt once more. She listens to the sound of the BUS pulling away. Then she turns quickly to the Man.)

Girl Thank God!

Man I tried to tell him you weren't here.

Girl But you let him in – In God's name – why?

Man He was making such a disturbance out there. Besides there was really no way

to tell for certain that –

Girl No – He's gone – He's gone – I guess it wasn't – No – I somehow don't think it was –

Man You don't think it was he?

Girl No – I – don't –

Man Yes – You do! You know that wasn't the man. Why? That's a step to remembering.

Girl No – only that he – left. He left –

Man Yes, you do! I knew it would come back slowly – that you'd remember something.

Girl No!

Man First, you would say – That wasn't the man because I remember – and then later – That was the man because I remember. Yes. You would remember!

Girl No! *(There is another brilliant flash of LIGHTNING and the LIGHT begins to dim.)* Oh – no – the light – Dear God – No!

Man Don't worry, my dear. You'll have light.

(He has taken a flashlight from his coat pocket. The Girl stares at it as the LIGHTNING crashes again and the already very dim LIGHT dies completely. The piercing light of the flashlight is the only light in the room. The Girl runs up to the Center door and pulls at it. She bolts the door before the Man comes near her. A dog that comes there by chance to save itself from the storm jumps and seizes the Man with its sharp teeth. The light plays over, and highlights the inside of the room. The dog forces the Man to run away and the Girl comes out to pat the dog.)

CURTAIN

Theme

In this play a frightened young woman, running from a killer on a dark and stormy night, thinks that she has found a safe haven in a bus station. The situation of the play is highly emotional right from the moment the curtain rises until it falls. There is terror from the outset, and there are all the components necessary to create a melodrama – a dimly – lit bus station, a storm accompanied by flashes of lightning, and the promise of violent action or emotion.

The scene is tense and highly emotional, and the ingredients of a good thriller are present from the opening speech. As is the case with good melodrama, theme and characterization are secondary. The mood and the suspense of waiting for the development of the plot are the factors that draw the reader / viewer quickly into the final stage of the play.

Glossary

hysterically	with outbursts of emotion
I must get hold of myself	I must become calm
I had enough gas to get home	I had enough petrol to reach home
ran out of gas	ran out of petrol
breaks	stops speaking
come on	continue, keep speaking
just a little way	only a short distance
I'd lose him	I'd escape from him
give them a lead	provide them with a clue
sobbing	drawing in the breath sharply and with irregularity from sorrow or pain
rattles	knocks sharply
viciously	giving or doing with evil intention
what's the idea of	what's the reason for
nondescript sort of person	uninteresting person
pretty late	quite late
in luck	fortunate
he didn't get it	he didn't understand
I sure as hell am	I am very much sure
suspiciously	showing suspicion
stunned	shocked
I got over it	I recovered from it (the fear)
all by myself	completely alone without any help from someone else.
piercing	going into or through

EXERCISES

I. Choose the correct answer.

i. The bus was late due to

a) rush.

b) storm.

c) accident.

d) change in schedule.

- ii. The girl was coming from
 a) the party. b) a tour.
 c) a hill station. d) a station.
- iii. The girl was afraid of
 a) the policeman. b) a friend.
 c) a killer. d) a person.
- iv. She thought of reaching the house but
 a) the car broke down. b) the brakes failed.
 c) the car ran out of gas. d) the road was blocked.
- v. She saw the man dragging out of his car
 a) the corpse of a woman. b) a sack.
 c) a statue. d) a dog.
- vi. Why did she circle round and round into the wood?
 a) to escape from the killer b) to reach a safe place
 c) to cheat a man d) to save herself
- vii. "You couldn't think of something that might give them a lead" means
 a) to find a culprit. b) to find a treasure.
 c) to persecute. d) to get a clue.
- viii. She saw in the flash of lightning
 a) a dog. b) a bus.
 c) a car. d) a man's face.
- ix. The difference in the ages of the two men is
 a) ten years. b) five years.
 c) two years. d) one year.
- x. If people were smart they wouldn't be out
 a) on a day like this. b) on a holiday.
 c) on a tour. d) on a night like this.

II. Mark the statements true / false.

1. The car ran out of gas about two miles from here.
2. She was too frightened to tell the details of the incident.
3. The Girl went to the police to report the matter.
4. Second Man wanted to save himself from the storm.
5. First Man wanted to go to town for business.
6. They heard the hum of a motor in the distance.

7. She could not remember the description of the killer.
8. She bolted the door before the man came near.

III. Answer the following questions.

- (a) Why couldn't the Girl describe the killer?
- (b) What were the circumstances that forced her to leave her car?
- (c) Why did she ask for help from First Man?
- (d) What was the condition of the weather?
- (e) How did Second Man accuse First Man of lying?
- (f) Does the Girl become suspicious of First Man as the play progresses?
- (g) What is her impression about Second Man?
- (h) Why didn't she accompany Second Man?

IV. Answer the following questions in 100–150 words.

- (a) Write down the story of the play in your own words.
- (b) Have you had any experience of a similar situation? Write at least ten sentences.
- (c) Why did the Girl consider First Man her helper?
- (d) What are the factors that played a role in saving the Girl?
- (e) How did she realize the truth?

V. Punctuate the following lines.

i want to get out of this storm what the hell do you think i want what s the idea of locking this door you think you own this place

VI. Fill in the blanks using a preposition given in bracket.

(to, down, along, of, over, in, with)

1. She sobs and rushes _____ the Man quickly.
2. He brings her _____ to the bench.
3. I could get the bus when it came _____.
4. I run like crazy all _____ the road.
5. I'm sure you can answer most _____ them.
6. I saw somebody else when I looked _____.
7. You'll never get over being afraid _____ things.
8. The dog jumps and seizes the Man _____ its sharp teeth.