

STOP REQUESTED

By Gail Phaneuf

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SYNOPSIS: "Stop requested." Lewis and Christine meet on a city bus, each focused on their own destination - Lewis is headed for the dentist, while Christine is going shopping downtown. When Vietnam vet Lewis insists that he knows Christine, however, their individual journeys merge for a brief time as they develop an unlikely friendship for the duration of a bus ride.

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(1-2 female, 1 male)*

CHRISTINE (f).....25 years old. She is wearing a camouflage (Army) jacket as a fashion accessory. She has a backpack with her

LEWIS (m).....60 year old African American man – a Vietnam vet. He is very sweet and not threatening, but he is schizoid. Lewis is speaking to a young woman named Christine and to the recorded voice on the bus. He has warmth and a crazy charm when he speaks. Each and every time Lewis says Christine’s name, it’s with emphasis – almost a prayer. He is in constant rocking or rhythmic motion, even though he is sitting down (as if he may be hearing music). His speech has a songlike rhythm and he is very upbeat, positive and likeable.

VOICE (f)A pre-recorded or off-stage female voice on the bus.

SCENE: *A summer day on a Boston city bus. (We hear the sound of a bus door closing.) CHRISTINE gets on the bus and sits in front of LEWIS, trying not to pay attention to him.*

LEWIS: *(Enthusiastically.)* Hey, I know you.

LEWIS leans in closer to CHRISTINE. She pretends not to hear him.

LEWIS: *(Sweet.)* I know you. What's your name?

CHRISTINE turns to face LEWIS. LEWIS leans into her.

CHRISTINE: Excuse me?

LEWIS: *(Warm and smiling.)* I know you.

CHRISTINE: *(Turning back – laughing a little to herself.)* I don't think so.

LEWIS: *(Flattering.)* You got pretty eyes. And a *smile*. Yes, sir. I know you. What's your name?

CHRISTINE: *(Self-conscious.)* It's... Christine.

LEWIS: That's right! *Christine*. I knew that. You ride the bus. I ride the bus. I know you.

A female electronic VOICE comes over the bus loudspeaker.

VOICE: Berkley Street. Change here for the number nine.

LEWIS: *(To the VOICE.)* I know, I know, I know. I can't change. That's not for me. No sir. *Christine* and I are going for a ride. We won't change. Yeah I know. *(To CHRISTINE.)* I have to go to the dentist. I got pain, but it's not too bad. I like the bus. *(Leaning into CHRISTINE.)* Where you goin'?

CHRISTINE: Sorry?

LEWIS: Where you goin' to?

CHRISTINE: *(Half facing him.)* Downtown.

LEWIS: (*Knowingly.*) That's nice – that's good. Downtown. I like *downtown*. Don't go there much. I have to go to the dentist. See this tooth – if I had a bad tooth when *I* was in 'Nam (*He points to her army jacket as if she is a fellow soldier.*) – they pulled it out. See the empty ones? (*Showing his teeth and pointing.*) We didn't have Novocain. No, sir. There was a lot of pain. No Novocain. I had bad shoes. No dentists. No downtown. It's warm there, I like it warm. Don't you? Don't you like summer? It's – **you** have a nice smile. (*Pause.*) Do you have to go to the dentist, *Christine*?

CHRISTINE: No, (*Pause.*) I'm going... shopping.

VOICE comes over the bus speaker.

VOICE: Stop requested.

LEWIS: (*To the VOICE.*) Stop?! I like to keep movin'. That's for me, movin' and a-groovin'. We don't want to stop. (*Calling to the driver.*) Christine did **not** request a stop. I kept going. Lots of guys stopped, but not me. No sir – I ran. I ran fast – in my bad shoes. Can you run fast, *Christine*? Did you run **fast**?

CHRISTINE: Not really.

LEWIS: Sometimes you have to run fast. Yes, sir. (*Pause.*) You goin' to the dentist?

VOICE: Transportation building.

LEWIS: Yeah, I know. (*To VOICE.*) Leave me be!? I have a pass – for the bus. (*To CHRISTINE.*) It's good to have a pass, *Christine*. Saves money. Keep movin'. I like to meet people. You have pretty eyes. Very pretty eyes. (*Pause.*) Yes, sir. (*Pause – he notices her backpack.*) I went to college. I studied philosophy. I wanted to study **philosophy** and so I did. Then I was drafted. They don't – hey! (*To VOICE.*) Yeah, I know. (*Pause.*) When you ride the bus, it's hard to be alone. (*Whispering to CHRISTINE.*) They – say things at night. I live with my mother – she doesn't like the bus. I know. I take the bus – she stays home – I ask her to ride the bus, but she won't. (*Pause.*) She missed

me when I was over there. (*He taps her jacket again.*) Does your mother miss you? Does she **miss** you, *Christine*?

CHRISTINE: Yes, she does.

LEWIS: (*Holding his hand out to shake hers.*) My name is Lewis. That's my name. You can call me *Lewis*. Your mother *misses* you, *Christine*?

CHRISTINE: (*Slightly amused.*) Yes... Lewis.

LEWIS: (*Laughing and smiling.*) That's right! That's my name. I know you. You're *Christine*! You ride the bus.

VOICE: Stop requested.

LEWIS: I studied philosophy. You know Plato? He was a *philosopher*. He said things. That was before the war. He said things before the war. I used to know what... *Great things*. I know that.

VOICE: Charles Street.

LEWIS: (*Hurt, to VOICE.*) Charles is dead. He's dead. He was my friend. He had a hard time. (*To VOICE.*) Yeah, I know. No peace. No peace from them. (*Pause.*) Charles has peace – now. He didn't see it coming. I heard the noise. A click. I hate that – why is there so much noise, *Christine*? I knew it was bad. Bad for Charles. That's for sure. He never rode the bus. (*Pause.*) He was from Texas. I never been to Texas. Charles – he heard the click – it was very loud – the explosion. Do you hate noise, *Christine*?

CHRISTINE: Not *all* noise... Lewis.

LEWIS: (*Amiable.*) Oh, no – not all noise, yeah, I know. Not **every** noise. I know, I know. You can't hate every noise – (*Paranoid.*) but the click... Charles was... gone. I ran fast – in my bad shoes. I can't run anymore, I have the shrapnel in my leg. (*Shows his leg to CHRISTINE.*) I ran away from Charles. He... disappeared. (*Pause.*) Never went back to Texas – no. I hate that... click. I like music. Do you like music, *Christine*?

CHRISTINE: Yes... Lewis.

LEWIS: That's right! That's my name. Lewis. You can call me Lewis. I like to sing. I ride the bus all day. Until **they** don't want me no more. I like music. What song do you like, *Christine*? What's your *favorite* song?

CHRISTINE: That's a tough one... Lewis. I like a lot of songs.

LEWIS: (*Big broad smile.*) Yeah, me too. **Me too.** I like a lot of songs – like you. Yeah, I know. I sure like a **lot** of songs.

VOICE: Stop requested.

LEWIS: (*Annoyed.*) *Christine* does NOT want to stop – **we** do NOT want to stop. **We** like the bus.

VOICE: State House.

LEWIS: (*Paranoid and frightened.*) Don't get off here – stay on the bus! Did you ever go in **there, Christine**? I don't like it. It's loud and it's quiet – you know? I heard a click, but it was the door. A loud click. Charles never heard it. I got a medal in *there* – a purple heart. It's loud, and it's quiet. (*Suddenly accusingly.*) The dome is not *real* gold. **No**, it's not. I got *real* gold in my tooth. The dentist says it's **real**. It's not worth much. Not too much – no – not much. (*Pause – to VOICE.*) Yeah, I know. (*Pause.*) Can I sit with you? *Christine*? Can I sit next to you? Can I please sit *with* you?

CHRISTINE: (*A little hesitant.*) Yes... Lewis.

LEWIS gets up and quickly sits next to CHRISTINE.

LEWIS: (*Very happy.*) Now we're closer. We're closer now. We're on the bus... together. I like to meet people. (*Slightly long pause.*) You're very quiet. I noticed that. Why are you quiet? Because you **hate** noise? Except music – you *like* music. What song do you like?

CHRISTINE: (*Embarrassed but giggling.*) I like – I don't know.

LEWIS: Sure you do. You *know*. Just can't think of it. It will come to you. Things come to you – they do. I know... come when you least expect it. Like – when you're ridin' the bus! You think you don't know – but you do. What song do you like?

CHRISTINE: (*Amused.*) The "Theme from Ice Castles."

LEWIS: (*Perplexed.*) The what?

CHRISTINE: (*Playing with him.*) The "Theme from Ice Castles."

LEWIS: That's a song? That doesn't sound like a song. (*Pause.*) Are you sure? Your favorite song? It sounds more like a movie. Who sings that song?

VOICE: Stop requested.

LEWIS: (*Excited.*) "**Song** requested," *Christine!* Would you sing that song? Would you sing? Yeah, I'd like that. Sing that song.

CHRISTINE: (*Giggling.*) Not on the bus... Lewis.

LEWIS: Why not? Why not on the bus? It's a public place. We ride the bus. We can sing. That's not a crime. It's a free country, *Christine*. It's free. The bus isn't free, but we're free. We should *all* sing.

VOICE: Next stop – Park Street. Change for the Green line.

LEWIS: That's where our money is! Yes, sir! It's green. It should be gold – like my tooth. In other countries, it's... (*Perplexed.*) Why's it green? (*To CHRISTINE.*) You have pretty eyes. Green like the money. (*Suddenly.*) We stopped? Keep movin'. Why are we stopped?

CHRISTINE: (*Pointing.*) Traffic jam.

LEWIS: (*Agitated.*) Yeah, I know. A jam. A jam. Can't get out. Have to wait. Yeah, I know. It never ends. **War never ends.** (*Pause.*) Plato said, "Only the dead has seen the end of war." He said that. (*Pause.*) Charles is dead. Plato is dead – he said things about the war. That was before the war. I know. (*To VOICE.*) Yeah, I know. (*Pause.*) He was a good man. Charles. He used to sing -in Texas. Do you have a *favorite* song?

CHRISTINE: (*Smiling, amused.*) Do you? Lewis?

LEWIS: (*Very enthusiastic.*) That's my name – Lewis. A song? Oh – yeah, I know. A song. My favorite song is – will you sing with me? Will you sing, *Christine*?

CHRISTINE: Not on the bus... Lewis.

VOICE: Stop requested.

LEWIS: We already stopped! I like to keep movin'. **We** like to *ride the bus*. "Friends have all things in common." Plato said that, too. I remember that. He said that. We're *friends*, aren't we, *Christine*? I know you.

CHRISTINE: (*Chiding him.*) What's your favorite song, Lewis?

LEWIS: That's right! That's my name! Lewis. You can call me Lewis. A song. My favorite song. Will you sing it, *Christine*?

LEWIS stands and begins to sing the National Anthem.

LEWIS: (*Singing.*)

OH, SAY CAN YOU SEE, BY THE DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT,

VOICE: Stop requested.

LEWIS: (*Singing.*)

WHAT SO PROUDLY WE HAILED
AT THE TWILIGHT'S LAST GLEAMING?

(*CHRISTINE looks around frantically.*)

CHRISTINE: (*Loud urgent whisper.*) Lewis!

VOICE: Stop requested.

LEWIS: (*Singing more boldly, with feeling.*)

WHOSE BROAD STRIPES AND BRIGHT STARS—

LEWIS: Sing with me, *Christine*!

CHRISTINE: (*Sliding lower in her seat.*) No.

LEWIS: (*Singing.*)

THROUGH THE PERILOUS FIGHT,

VOICE: Stop requested.

LEWIS: *(Singing boldly and proud.)*

O'ER THE RAMPARTS WE WATCHED,
WERE SO GALLANTLY STREAMING?

LEWIS: Come on – stand up and sing! EVERYONE!

LEWIS: *(Singing.)*

AND THE ROCKETS' RED GLARE,
THE BOMBS BURSTING IN AIR,

*LEWIS encourages her, and CHRISTINE guiltily stands and begins to sing softly. LEWIS is beaming. (*Everyone else on the bus stands and sings with them. CHRISTINE is amazed by this.)*

VOICE: Stop requested.

CHRISTINE AND LEWIS: *(Singing together.)*

GAVE PROOF THROUGH THE NIGHT
THAT OUR FLAG WAS STILL THERE.

VOICE: *(Interjected.)* Stop requested.

LEWIS: *(Enthusiastically.)* That's right! We're singin' on the bus,
Christine.

VOICE: *(Interjected.)* Stop requested.

CHRISTINE AND LEWIS: *(Both louder and prouder still.)*

O SAY, DOES THAT STAR-SPANGLED BANNER YET WAVE...

VOICE: *(Interjected.)* Stop requested.

CHRISTINE AND LEWIS: *(Even louder.)*

O'ER THE LAND OF THE FREE...

VOICE: *(Interjected.)* Stop requested.

LEWIS: (*Big announcement to all.*) We are free – the bus is not free.
But we are free!

CHRISTINE AND LEWIS: (*Big huge finish.*)
AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE!

VOICE: (*Loud.*) Stop requested.

LEWIS: (*Triumphant.*) **Request denied!** Let's keep goin', *Christine*.
Keep movin'. Keep singin'.

CHRISTINE: It's my stop... Lewis. Downtown.

LEWIS: (*Still happy and beaming.*) Downtown. Here's your stop. I
know. Yeah, I know. It's your stop. Thanks for lettin' me sit with
you. We sat... *together*. The next time I see you, I'll know that
you're *Christine*. I will. **My friend, Christine...** yeah . . .

CHRISTINE: (*Starting to leave.*) Bye, Lewis.

LEWIS: I know you. You're *Christine!*

CHRISTINE exits the bus.

LEWIS: (*Remains standing as she leaves.*) My friend, *Christine*. (*To
VOICE.*) Yeah, I know.

*LEWIS sings softly to himself – still standing and slightly waving to
CHRISTINE.*

LEWIS: (*Singing to himself.*)
O'ER THE LAND OF THE FREE...
AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE...

VOICE: Stop requested.

THE END