

**Payton** (0:16)  
December 7, 2020

**Payton** (0:22)

In the velvet chair, you sit among a crowd of other people together in the dark. The chatter has died down. The shuffling of last-minute seat-taking, the flurrying rustle of programs, the final shushes all decay into hopeful silence. The darkness is waiting. All expectation. Waiting. The moment continues. Wow, this is a long one. Gradually you recognize your mind beginning to race. How long has this darkness lasted? Has it been more than a minute? More than two? Who is late? Patron? Performer? Technician? A mechanical failure somewhere? What are they waiting for? Who is in charge here? Is this a choice? Some experimental toying with audience expectations? Is it a biological approach to spectacle, in that the sudden, coming brightness of the stage lighting will create a bigger-than-usual impact on our tender pupils, dilated with so much dark? But this is now too long, isn't it? Even for that. How long is too long? Your eyes don't seem to be adjusting. No shadows or silhouettes flicker indistinctly around you. Can you even see your hand in front of your face? Doubtful. You can imagine that you see it, but you know where it is. You perceive it bodily at the end of your arm, but it is invisible. A creator of a faint breeze as you flail it in front of your nose. Can they do this? Where are the exit signs? This has got to be in contravention of all the fire codes ever written. Someone will complain. Someone will pay. But now it is darkness. And very—strangely—quiet. Is everyone listening as you are? Straining for the first creak, whisper, or shuffle from the stage? What is happening? When will it happen? What is next? Is there a next?