

STAYING IN LANES

Phil Lewis

Drama

(Suitable for Drama Festivals)

Approximately 60 minutes duration.

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STAYING IN LANES

The play explores the modern day icons of mobile communications, fast food, transitory companionship, human relationships and sexual attraction. The issues of congested roads, the reliance on quick journey times, the inconvenience of road maintenance, the stresses of motoring, etc. are familiar to us all. In extreme situations, who knows how we will individually react?

CAST

D.J.	Recorded
David	(50+)
Taylor	(Female) (30+)
Rebecca	(20+)
Richard	(30+)
Cal	(Late 20s)
Donna	(Late 30s)

The action of this play takes place in a traffic jam caused by road works, on the M25. The play starts mid-afternoon on Friday and ends in the early hours of Saturday morning.

STAYING IN LANES

Scene 1

SUGGESTED SET

THE SET IS OPEN AND THE ACTION IS FOCUSED ON THE MAIN STAGE. THERE ARE THREE STATIONERY CARS, EACH DEPICTED BY TWO SEATS IN THE FRONT ROW AND THREE BEHIND. THE SEATS ALL FACE THE AUDIENCE. EACH CAR IS SEPARATED BY A FEW FEET, WHILE ON THE FLOOR ARE STRIPS OF WHITE DOTTED LINES INDICATING THE TRAFFIC LANES. THESE LINES HAVE EXAGGERATED PERSPECTIVE TO AID THE PERCEPTION OF DISTANCE. THE CARS ARE DESIGNATED STAGE LEFT, CENTRE AND RIGHT.

AS THE PLAY OPENS THE TOM ROBINSON TRACK MOTORWAY SIGNS' IS PLAYING IN THE BLACKOUT. THE MUSIC TURNS INTO A RADIO DJ ANNOUNCEMENT.

DJ (RECORDED VOICE, SINGING ALONG WITH THE FADING OUT TRACK).....two, four, six, eight, never too late.....Tom Robinson there, with Motorway Signs. Speaking of which, (PERSONAL JINGLE) we have a traffic report just come in.

THE LIGHTS COME UP ON THE STAGE. IN THE CENTER CAR SITS RICHARD, ALONE. IN THE RIGHT CAR IS DAVID, SITTING IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING AT HIS WATCH, AND TAYLOR SITTING QUIETLY BESIDE HIM. THE CAR STAGE LEFT CONTAINS DONNA IN THE DRIVING SEAT, APPARENTLY SINGING, ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT HEAR HER YET. NEXT TO HER IS CAL, HALF ASLEEP AND BEHIND THEM REBECCA READING IN THE CENTRAL, REAR SEAT.

DJ There is a ten-mile traffic hold up on the clockwise side of the M25. Between junctions 18 and 20, due to a combination of road works and bridge repairs. So avoid that if you can. For those of you sitting there listening to Radio Rock.....this one's for you.....(THE KINK'S 'SO TIRED, TIRED OF WAITING' BEGINS TO PLAY).

AFTER A FEW BARS RICHARD MIMES SWITCHING OFF THE RADIO AND THE MUSIC ABRUPTLY STOPS. HE GETS OUT AND WALKS TO THE FRONT OF THE CAR, LOOKING INTO THE DISTANCE. HE IS ANXIOUS.

REBECCA SEES RICHARD GETTING OUT OF THE CAR AND SHE LEANS FORWARD TO WATCH HIM. DONNA IS SINGING ALONG TO HER RADIO, UNAWARE OF HER SURROUNDINGS. RICHARD LOOKS BACK IN ANGUISH AND SHRUGS HIS SHOULDERS AT THE LINE OF CARS. TAYLOR SMILES WEAKLY BACK AT HIM. REBECCA MAKES A

SMALL HAND GESTURE OF HELLO. RICHARD MOVES TO WAIT BY HIS CAR AND LEANS ON THE BONNET.

A CURRENT POP TUNE SWELLS UP AS DONNA MIMES RE-TUNING THE RADIO STATION.

Cal I was listening to that.

Donna I wasn't. Where's Capital?

Rebecca (QUIETLY, WHILE INTENTLY WATCHING RICHARD) Ninety-five point six. On FM, Donna! FM!

Donna Oh, yeah. (ANOTHER POP TUNE CAN NOW BE HEARD.)

Rebecca I wonder what he's anxious about?

Cal (LOOKING UP) Who?

REBECCA DOES NOT ANSWER BUT SITS BACK IN THE SEAT, STILL WATCHING. CAL FOCUSES ON RICHARD AND THEN LOOKS BACK AT REBECCA IN PUZZLEMENT. SHE SHAKES HER HEAD AND PICKS UP A MAGAZINE AND BEGINS TO READ. DONNA STARTS TO SING ALONG WITH THE MUSIC. CAL REACHES FORWARD AND REDUCES THE VOLUME. THE RECORD PLAYS GENTLY IN THE BACKGROUND AS THE LIGHTS LOWER ON LEFT CAR.

Scene 2

THE LIGHTS BRIGHTEN ON THE RIGHT CAR, AS TAYLOR PICKS UP HER MOBILE AND MOVES OUT OF THE CAR. SHE MOVES AWAY FROM THE LINE OF CARS AND TRIES TO CASUALLY MAKE A PRIVATE CALL.

Taylor Mike. Hi. In the car. No. Stuck in a bloody traffic jam. No, really. Where do you think I'd.....? Look, I'll call you back.

SHE PRESSES THE END BUTTON AND ANGRILY TAPS THE PHONE AGAINST HER TEETH IN QUIET THOUGHT. DAVID WATCHES HER FROM THE CAR.

IN CAR LEFT, REBECCA HAS LEANT FORWARD SO SHE CAN SEE TAYLOR. IN A SUDDEN BURST OF DESPERATION, DONNA GETS OUT OF THE CAR AND LOOKS AROUND FOR SOMEWHERE TO USE AS A TOILET. REBECCA CASUALLY HANDS HER A HANDFUL OF TISSUES AND POINTS OFF LEFT. DONNA GRABS THE TISSUES AND RUSHES OFF WITHOUT A GLANCE.

TAYLOR AND RICHARD WATCH HER RUN OFF. REBECCA SLOWLY GETS OUT OF THE CAR AND MOVES TO WHERE SHE CAN SEE ALL THE ACTION, WITHOUT BEING TOO OBVIOUS. SHE STANDS QUIETLY WATCHING THE INTERPLAY OF THE CHARACTERS.

BOTH RICHARD AND TAYLOR ARE, AT FIRST, HESITANT TO START A CONVERSATION.

Richard I just don't believe this! (POINTS AHEAD TO THE TRAFFIC JAM.)

Taylor It happens all the time these days. We're late for a meeting. Today of all days! Motorways are supposed to speed up your journey, not slow it down. It's all our fault, I suppose.

Richard How do you mean?

Taylor We come to rely on getting from A to B in a fast and predictable time. Where in fact, it only needs a few traffic cones to totally screw up your journey from London to Birmingham.

Richard You're right. My wife's due any minute and I'm stuck here! Christ almighty.....!

Taylor (AFTER AN EMBARRASSING PAUSE) Your first?

Richard Yes....I so desperately wanted to.....be there. Now this. What is the problem?

Taylor The radio said something about a collapsed bridge structure. We'll be here for hours, I reckon. Try to relax as best as you can. You can't do anything, so relax.

Richard Easy for you to say.

(SHE SMILES AND HANDS HIM HER MOBILE PHONE.)

Taylor Give the hospital a ring.

SHE WALKS BACK TO HER CAR. RICHARD SMILES IN GRATITUDE AND QUICKLY DIALS A NUMBER. HE PACES AROUND THE CAR WHILE HE TALKS TO THE HOSPITAL. THE LIGHTS GO DOWN ON CAR CENTER.

Scene 3

TAYLOR LEANS IN TO TALK TO DAVID.

David What was that all about?

Taylor His wife's having a baby and he wanted to be there. Poor sod.

David Never mind him. (LOOKS AT HIS WATCH) If we miss this meeting we're well and truly stuffed, I can tell you.

Taylor Then you better get brace yourself. We're not going to make it in time, David. No way.

David Get Carlos on the phone. Let's see what we can do from here, then.

Taylor (SHE LOOKS ACROSS TO RICHARD WHO IS STILL TALKING) Sure. Why waste time, eh?

WITH A FIXED STARE AT DAVID SHE WALKS SLOWLY TOWARDS RICHARD WITH A SMILE. AS HE SEES HER APPROACH, HE REALISES HIS TIME IS UP AND SIGNS OFF. HE HANDS THE PHONE BACK TO HER.

Richard Thanks. Thanks very much. Very kind of you.

Taylor Useful things aren't they? (SHE CARESSES HER PHONE) They can keep you in touch, or keep you apart. How is she? Your wife?

Richard She's started. They're still saying any minute, but they've been saying that for ages.

Taylor It'll be all right. Don't worry. We need this right now, but give them a call again later. You can give them this number so they can let you know. All right?

Richard Thanks. Yes. Thanks, I will.

TAYLOR SMILES AND DIALS A NUMBER AS SHE WALKS BACK TO THE CAR. SHE SPEAKS SILENTLY FOR A FEW MOMENTS THEN HANDS THE PHONE TO DAVID WHO MIMES HIS CONVERSATION. TAYLOR WATCHES THE PACING RICHARD WITH A WISTFUL LOOK ON HER FACE.

THE LIGHTS REDUCE ON RIGHT CAR AS DONNA WANDERS BACK FROM THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, LOOKING RELIEVED. SHE GETS BACK INTO HER CAR.

FADE BRIEFLY TO BLACKOUT.

Scene 4

THE LIGHTS INCREASE ON LEFT CAR. DONNA AND CAL ARE SOON DRINKING FROM CANS AND BOTH ARE SINGING ALONG TO THE MUSIC. CAL LOOKS AROUND FOR REBECCA AND GIVES UP TRYING TO SEE HER. DONNA TURNS UP THE RADIO AND WE HEAR A TOP TEN SONG AND THEIR ATTEMPTS TO SING IN TUNE.

REBECCA MOVES FORWARD TO TALK TO RICHARD AND THE RADIO SOUND REDUCES. THE GIRLS MIME THEIR SINGING.

Rebecca Hi.

Richard (STILL HESITANT TO MAKE CONVERSATION). Hello. What a waste of time, eh?

Rebecca Yes. (LOOKING AT HER WATCH) Nearly two hours now. It'll be ages yet. In a hurry?

Richard Yes. My wife's due to have our baby. I really should be there.
(HE PEERS INTO THE DISTANCE HOPING FOR TRAFFIC MOVEMENT.)

Rebecca It must go on for miles.

Richard Ten. They said ten miles on the radio and something about a bridge collapsing. That was a while ago, probably twenty miles now. Oh dear.

Rebecca Can't be helped. Do you have anything to drink, or eat in your car?

Richard No. I'm sorry.

Rebecca It's okay. We have plenty. We've been on a picnic. Well, any outing with Donna turns out to be a picnic. I'll get you something.

Richard Very kind of you.

Rebecca Rebecca.

Richard Richard Marins.

Rebecca Would you like to see if they have anything to share too? (SHE MOTIONS TOWARDS RIGHT CAR.)

Richard Sure. Good idea.

REBECCA MOVES BACK TO HER CAR AND THE MUSIC VOLUME INCREASES. SHE SITS IN THE BACK SEAT. THERE SHE SORTS OUT SOME FOOD WHILE THE OTHER TWO GIRLS CONTINUE TO SING THEIR SONG.

RICHARD TENTATIVELY MOVES OVER TO TAYLOR AND CONVERSES SILENTLY. WE LISTEN TO THE GIRLS FINISH THEIR SONG.

Donna What're you doing?

Rebecca Looking for something to eat and drink.

Donna There's plenty there.

Rebecca Not for me. To share.

Cal Share with whom?

Rebecca The other stranded waifs, Cal.

Cal Like.....a party, you mean?

Rebecca (EASING OUT OF THE CAR). If you like.

Cal: The last thing I feel like right now, is a party! (SHE BLOWS HER NOSE INTO A TISSUE.)

FADE BRIEFLY TO BLACKOUT.

Scene 5

LIGHTS DIM ON CAR LEFT AND RISE ON CAR RIGHT. DAVID HAS LEFT THE CAR IN EXASPERATION AND WANDERS AROUND HIS CAR TALKING ON THE MOBILE PHONE. SLOWLY HE IS GETTING ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED.

RICHARD SITS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT OF CAR RIGHT AND TALKS TO TAYLOR. TAYLOR KEEPS A WATCHFUL EYE ON DAVID AS THEY TALK.

Richard Your boss? (SHE NODS.) Get on okay?

SHE GIVES HIM A HARD STARE AND GETS OUT OF THE CAR. RICHARD IS PUZZLED BY HER ACTION AND BECOMES EMBARRASSED. HE GETS OUT OF THE CAR AND WATCHES AS TAYLOR MOVES TO DAVID AND STARTS QUIETLY TALKING TO HIM.

REBECCA MOVES OVER TO RICHARD WITH HER ARMS LOADED WITH CANS OF SOFT DRINKS AND LIGHT SNACKS.

Rebecca Courtesy of Donna. Any joy there?

Richard (SHAKING HIS HEAD IN PUZZLEMENT.) I think I managed to upset her and I don't know what I did!

Rebecca What did you say to her?

Richard All I said was....is that your boss?...do you get on with him?

Rebecca Perhaps a little too personal? Wrong conversational move. We're, all here against our will, but being a communicative species we try to have some kind of rapport with each other.

Richard I was only making conversation.....

Rebecca We'll all split up when the traffic moves and never see each other again. In the meantime, we can't just let silence hang in the air, can we? We must make some attempt at conversation. That's just human, isn't it?

Richard I suppose so.

Rebecca I know so. It may be that she's not in the mood for a chat! She looks a little stressed. Have a drink. She's coming back now.

TAYLOR WALKS TO RICHARD AND SMILES AT REBECCA.

Taylor Try the hospital again. The mobile number's on the case there. Get them to call you when anything happens. David needs the phone in few minutes. Make the most of it now.

Richard Thanks.

RICHARD MOVES AWAY TO HIS CAR TO MAKE THE CALL.

Rebecca Hello. I'm Rebecca. Would you like a drink?

Taylor Thanks. I'd love one. I'm parched. We were supposed to stop for lunch, but.....thanks.

Rebecca And your name?

Taylor Oh, Taylor.

Rebecca Mrs. Taylor?

Taylor Just, 'Taylor'. That's what everyone knows me as.

Rebecca How unusual! That's Richard (POINTING) and the two bimbos in the car are Donna and Cal. We're just coming back from shopping. Window shopping in my case. Food shopping in Donna's case. Pleased to meet you.

Taylor Same here, Rebecca.

Rebecca Does.....David?.....want a drink?

Taylor I suspect so.

Rebecca I'll take one to him. You try to keep our 'dad to be' calm here.

WITH A GRIN REBECCA MOVES TO DAVID AND OFFERS HIM A CAN AND BAG OF CRISPS. WITH A SMILE DAVID ACCEPTS THE CAN AND WAVES OFF THE CRISPS. TAYLOR PATIENTLY WAITS FOR HER PHONE TO BE RETURNED.