The Detour

The Detour — Short Christian Playlet (15 min)

WHAT

A family of four breaks down on the way to a wedding. Phone is dead. Wallet is in the wedding venue. Wedding starts in an hour. Three respectable people pass them on the highway shoulder — a youth pastor late to a leadership meeting, a churchgoer with a fish bumper sticker, a Christian podcaster recording a segment about helping others. Each finds a reason to keep driving. The fourth car is a guy named Sam who works graveyard at a gas station. He has never been to church. He fixes the car. He drives the family. He refuses their money.

THEME

Luke 10:25-37 has not aged. Christian life is measured in inches of asphalt, not Instagram reels.

WHO

DAD — Forties. Tie loosened. Dress shoes. Trying very hard to keep it together for the kids.

MOM — Forties. In a wedding dress for her sister's wedding. Calmer than dad. Mostly.

LILY — Twelve. Sees everything. Reports everything.

BENNY — Eight. Bored. Hungry. Hot.

PASTOR ROSS — Mid-thirties. Youth pastor. On bluetooth in his car. In a hurry.

MRS. PIKE — Sixty. Drives a sedan with a fish bumper sticker. Talks to herself.

MAREK — Late twenties. Christian podcaster. Records on the highway.

SAM — Late forties. Stained shirt. Tow truck driver and gas station worker. Direct. Funny in a tired way.

HOW (STYLE / TONE)

Two playing areas. Stage left: the broken-down minivan, hood up, hazard lights flashing (a real lamp on a tripod). Stage right: a rotating chair representing the inside of each passing car. Lighting shifts between the two — bright and hot on the family, cool and blue on the drivers. The drivers each speak partly to themselves and partly to a hands-free voice. The family hears nothing of what the drivers say. The audience hears everything. By the final scene the only light is on the family, riding silently in the back of Sam's truck as the wedding music swells.

PROPS

- A minivan facade — at minimum a hood, a windshield frame, a flashing hazard lamp
- Four chairs (the family's seats)

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- A rotating swivel chair (the passing drivers)
- A bouquet of flowers (in Mom's lap)
- A USB-charging brick that does nothing
- Pastor Ross's bluetooth earpiece
- Mrs. Pike's coffee thermos and a tract on the dashboard
- Marek's podcast microphone and a ring light
- Sam's flashlight and a small toolkit

TIME

15 minutes

Scene 1 — The Wedding Hour

(Lights up on the family in their minivan, parked on a highway shoulder. The hood is up. The hazard lamp on the dashboard flashes amber. MOM is in a wedding-guest dress with a small bouquet in her lap. LILY is on her phone. BENNY is asleep with his mouth open.)

DAD (head out the window)

Okay. Okay. We are fine. We are fine, this is — somebody will stop. The wedding is in fifty-three minutes. Somebody will stop.

MOM

Honey. Your phone.

DAD

Dead. Yours?

MOM

Three percent. I just texted Sarah we are in trouble. The text is sending. The text is — okay it is dead now.

LILY

My phone has zero bars. We are in a Bermuda triangle of cell coverage. This is going to be on the news.

BENNY (waking)

Are we there.

MOM

Not yet, baby.

BENNY

Are we anywhere.

DAD

Benny. We are on a highway shoulder. We are technically somewhere.

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Scene 2 — Pastor Ross

(Lights shift. PASTOR ROSS appears in the swivel chair, bluetooth in his ear, gripping an invisible steering wheel. Cool blue light.)

ROSS (into bluetooth)

Yeah, no, Marcia, I am fifteen minutes out. I just need to — there is a car on the shoulder up ahead, looks like a family. Hold on.

(He squints at the family. Lily waves. Dad waves both arms over his head.)

ROSS (slowing internally)

Shoot. Looks like — yeah, looks like trouble. Hood up. Wedding clothes. Ugh.

ROSS (into bluetooth)

Marcia. I am — I see it. I should — I am the youth pastor, I should — yeah, no, I — Marcia, the leadership meeting is in twenty and Pastor Eli said if I am late one more time he is putting Brendan in charge of summer camp. Brendan.

(He drives past. Lights stay on him for one beat after he is gone.)

ROSS (quieter, to himself)

Somebody else will stop. The next car. Definitely the next car.

(Lights snap back to the family. Dad lowers his arms.)

DAD

Did you see — that car? I think that was a youth pastor. Christian fish on the back. He looked right at me.

MOM (carefully)

He probably had a meeting.

DAD

Mm.

Scene 3 — Mrs. Pike

(Swivel chair. MRS. PIKE appears, coffee thermos in one hand, talking to herself the way drivers do. Cool blue light.)

MRS. PIKE

Lord, look at that family. Standing on the shoulder. In wedding clothes. Bless their hearts.

(She slows. The family waves. She waves back, sympathetically.)

MRS. PIKE

Lord, you protect them. You send your angels round about them. You get them where they are going.

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(She drives past, smiling.)

MRS. PIKE
I will pray for them through the next exit. I will. I am praying right now. Lord, comfort that family. Surround them with your peace. I will not even put on the radio till I am past the next mile marker.

(Lights snap to family.)

LILY
She had a Jesus fish. And a tract on her dashboard. And she just kept driving.

MOM
Lily.

LILY
I am just saying.

BENNY
Mom. I am thirsty.

Scene 4 — The Phone, Briefly

MOM
Honey, give me your phone — let me try one more —

DAD
It is at zero. There is nothing left.

LILY
I am going to walk to the next exit.

MOM
You are absolutely not.

LILY
Mom. I have been on a highway shoulder in Texas in July for thirty minutes. The next person who stops is going to be a serial killer.

DAD
Lily, do not say that around your brother.

BENNY (perking up)
What is a serial killer.

MOM
A breakfast cereal. Get back in your seat.

BENNY (sitting back)
Mom is a liar.

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Scene 5 — Marek the Podcaster

(Swivel chair. MAREK appears with a podcast microphone clipped to his collar and a ring light strapped to his dashboard. He is mid-recording.)

MAREK (into mic)

Welcome back to The Better Path, the podcast for Christian men who refuse to settle for ordinary discipleship. Today's episode: the cost of obedience. So I am driving, right, and the very thing I am recording about — radical obedience to the call — is happening on the road in front of me.

(He sees the family. He slows. He drives past, but slowly enough to film through the window.)

MAREK (into mic, swelling)

Listeners — I just passed a family. Stranded on the shoulder. Wedding attire. The kind of moment a man like me, a man like you, has to make a decision about. And I am — I am going to keep driving.

MAREK (more passionate)

Because I want you to feel what I am feeling right now. The conviction. The weight. I want this whole episode to be about the moments we miss. Because if I had stopped, listeners — if I had stopped — there would be no episode about stopping.

MAREK (closing tag)

This episode is brought to you by Hallowed Mattress. Use code BETTER for fifteen percent off.

(He drives on. Lights snap back to family. Dad rests his forehead on the steering wheel.)

DAD (muffled)

He filmed us.

MOM

I know, honey.

DAD

He filmed us and kept driving.

Scene 6 — Sam Pulls Over

(A different sound — a rattling diesel engine. SAM pulls onto the shoulder. He climbs out of his truck (offstage), walks into the family's playing area with a flashlight in one hand and a small toolkit in the other. Stained shirt. Tired eyes. Real.)

SAM

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Hey. Y'all alright? Hood up never means alright.

DAD (almost crying)

Sir. Hi. We are — the engine just died. Phones are dead. We have a wedding in twenty-six minutes about eight miles up the road.

SAM

Eight miles. Okay. Let me look at her.

(He steps to the front of the van, peers in. Clicks his flashlight. Tinkers. Mutters.)

SAM

Battery cable is shot. Loose terminal. Easy. I got a clamp in the truck.

MOM

Are you serious? Just — that is it?

SAM

Could be that. Could be more. Let me get the clamp and we will see if she turns over.

(He walks offstage. Family stares at each other.)

LILY (quietly)

He did not even ask if we were lost.

DAD

Lily.

LILY

He just stopped.

Scene 7 — The Fix

(Sam returns. He works under the hood. The hazard lamp clicks off. After a moment, the engine turns over — a recorded sound effect — and runs.)

SAM

There she is.

DAD (relieved)

Sir. I do not have my wallet — it is at the venue — but if you give me your number we will —

SAM

No.

DAD

I — please. Let me at least —

SAM

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I work the graveyard at the Shell off exit forty-two. I drive a tow truck on weekends because gas station does not pay for my mama's meds. I do not need your money. I need you to make it to the wedding.

MOM (softly)

Sir, can I ask your name.

SAM

Sam.

MOM

Sam, do you go to a church around here.

SAM (almost laughing)

Ma'am, I have not been inside a church in twenty-five years. Last time I went, the pastor told me my hair was too long. So I left and never went back.

DAD (quietly)

Sam. I am sorry. About that pastor.

SAM

Ah. It was a long time ago. The funny thing is, I still pray. I never stopped praying. I just stopped showing up where they wanted me to. My mama says God lives at the gas station with me. I think she is probably right.

LILY

Sam. Why did you pull over.

SAM (thinking about it)

Honest answer? Because I saw a little boy asleep in the back of a van and your daddy waving his arms like he was drowning. And I thought, who watches a man drown and keeps driving.

DAD (very quietly)

Apparently three other people, in the last hour.

SAM (a tired smile)

Yeah. I have seen a lot of those people. They mostly drive nicer cars than mine.

BENNY (sitting up)

Sam. Are you a hero.

SAM

Buddy. I am a guy with a wrench. Do not make me a hero. Heroes have to keep being heroes. I am just trying to get you to the wedding.

Scene 8 — The Last Mile

SAM

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Tell you what. The cable might give again. Let me follow you the eight miles. Just in case.

DAD

Sam — that is — you do not have to —

SAM

I know.

MOM

Thank you.

(Sam nods. He walks back to his truck. The family climbs into the van. Headlights go on. They drive. Sam's headlights are visible behind them.)

BENNY

Mom. Is Sam our friend now.

MOM

Yes, baby. Sam is our friend now.

LILY (looking back at Sam's truck)

Dad. That guy is the most Christian thing I have seen all year.

DAD

Lily — do not — do not say it like that. The other three were trying.

LILY

Were they.

DAD (after a beat)

I do not know. I do not know what they were trying. I know what they did. I know what Sam did.

MOM (gently)

Maybe that is the only thing the parable was ever about. The doing. The not-driving-past.

BENNY

What parable.

MOM

An old story your mom heard a long time ago. Somebody hurt on the side of a road. Three people walked past. One person stopped. The one who stopped was the one nobody expected.

BENNY (sleepy)

Sam was the one nobody expected. The one who was not even at church. The one with the wrench and the sick mama and the long hair.

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DAD (very quietly)

Yeah, buddy. Sam was the one nobody expected.

(Dad does not answer for a moment after that. He drives. The wedding processional music begins to swell from offstage.)

Final Moment — The Tail Lights

(The family arrives at the venue (offstage door). They climb out. Mom and Lily and Benny disappear into the music and light. Dad stays a beat at the door. He turns and looks back at Sam's tail lights pulling away.)

DAD (very quietly)

That was the most Christian thing I have seen all year. And the man does not even know it. And he was not trying to be.

(He waits a moment longer. Then he lifts his hand once, in the direction Sam went. Sam, miles away by now, does not see it. Dad lowers his hand. He turns. He goes inside. The wedding music swells. Lights down on the highway. The hazard lamp from scene one flashes once in the dark, then dies. End.)

END

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