

STATE ROAD 4

By Shawn Deal

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A Dramatic Monologue

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SYNOPSIS: Life can change in just a blink of an eye. And that change may come at the oddest moment. In this case, the world changed on a dark night while driving down State Road 4.

TIME: Present

SETTING: Along the side of a road called State Road 4... or in the middle of it.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 either)

NARRATOR (m/f)A college aged person.

PRODUCTION NOTES: This can be done very simply: bare stage, no costuming and no props.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES: The use of a chair or a couple of chairs to simulate the front seat of the car could be used. The actor could then go back and forth, using the chair as the car as needed.

NARRATOR: Are you at all familiar with State Road 4?

You're probably not. It's not very well known or very well used.

It goes west of here through lots of rural and timber land. It's really just a connection point between the coastal communities of Seaview and Ocean Beach.

I imagine that when it was first constructed that it was a valuable and busy roadway. But now, it's the slowest connection point. The road is used mostly by log truckers coming off the timber lands, a few locals who live in the area, and just people out looking for a leisurely drive.

You could drive up I-5 and get to either beach quicker than you can taking State Road 4. I'm sure that's what most people do. Yet they are truly missing the most picturesque drive there is.

For the most part, trees hug each side of the road, providing a view of lush green. The road goes up and down hills, and is constantly twisting and turning. You're never going faster than thirty to forty-five around the curves, which is why most people avoid the road, when you can at times hit seventy on I-5 and get there so much faster. You also don't want to drive State Road 4 if you get car sick at all. Because there's just so many curves and hills which can easily make one's stomach queasy.

Otherwise, it is a great drive. My favorite drive, even now, though I no longer drive.

Autumn is the best time to go for a drive. The explosion of colors, all shades of yellows, oranges, and reds, as the leaves change and begin to fall, comes right out of a Van Gogh painting.

The leaves can make the road a little bit slick sometimes, so you have to slow down, especially around the curves. Sometimes the leaves can cover the entire road. So, at certain times of the year, it can be a rather challenging route to drive.

I have a special fondness for this road, as it's the road my dad taught me to drive on.

Those were great times with my father, just driving, listening to him tell me to take this turn slowly, take the next one wide, speed up now, gradually depress the brake for the next turn, and so on.

As I got better, his comments became more about the wildlife. Occasionally, we would see a white-tail deer or an elk, but mostly we saw birds. So many different kinds of birds. He ended up buying one of those native bird guidebooks to help him identify all the different ones we were seeing.

The summer my dad taught me to drive was one of my favorites. I learned to drive, we learned about birds, and my mom stayed home and worried. She couldn't ride with us in the car. It just drove her crazy with anxiety.

Mom was convinced that I would crash into every single tree that I possibly could crash into. The one and only time she went driving with me, she constantly yelled: look out! slow down! You're going to hit... fill in whatever object I might have been close to. Hence, from that moment on, it became Dad's responsibility to teach me to drive. Mom just let us go and always urged extreme caution every time I drove.

I had to call her anytime I drove somewhere just to prove I didn't crash, and I'm not sprawled out dead in a ditch somewhere.

My mom worries. It's a good thing, I guess, no matter how annoying it is. My dad would laugh it off when she wasn't around. In retrospect, I should have learned more from the cautious nature my mom greatly exhibited.

The last time I drove State Road 4 was when I came home from college for winter break. I really should have just gotten on I-5, saved myself the forty-five minutes and busted my butt home. Yet,

I missed that drive. I was hoping to drive home more leisurely and try to unwind from what turned out to be a really grueling test week.

My last test had been that very day. It went three hours without a break and left me completely brain-numb. I just wanted to take it easy and refocus myself before I got home to my parents.

This was going to be a great winter break and Christmas, and I simply wanted to start it off well by being in a good mindset as soon as I walked through my front door and saw my folks.

I had no idea that one split-second decision would make it the worst Christmas ever.

The trip back from college was one of the first times I was driving back by myself rather than my father coming to get me, or me taking the train home. My grandparents had gifted an old car of theirs over the summer.

I looked forward to driving State Road 4. I was hoping to catch the changing of the leaves or even the sight of barren trees as winter came through the area. It hadn't quite gotten really cold yet, so I thought there was a chance to still see some Halloween colors in the trees. But being as mind numb as I was, I kind of forgot, in my addled post-test state, how early it got dark these nights.

I knew that for the past couple of weeks, I was walking back to my dorm from my last classes in the dark. Just for some reason, I failed to put it together that for my trip home, I would end up driving the whole road in the dark and see absolutely nothing.

At least I avoided all the traffic from going on I-5. I had the road practically to myself.

There's a stretch of State Road 4 that's completely straight. It's about four to five miles in length. And almost in the exact middle is a bridge that crosses a pretty big river that is slowly making its way to the Pacific Ocean.

Because State Road 4 is all twists and turns, ups and downs, there's very few places you can pass another car. So, this stretch provides practically the safest location to do that. For about two miles before you get to the bridge, and about two miles afterward, it's all yellow-dotted lines. The only place you can't pass is just before, on, and just after the bridge. There's a slight uphill tilt onto the bridge that prevents you from seeing the traffic on the other side until you're about mid-bridge.

So, I was on that particular stretch, going just the speed limit. I wasn't in a hurry and it was dark. I was still trying to unwind from my lengthy exam. I spotted the headlights behind me in the rearview mirror. They were those new LED kind and the brights were on. I was a good mile or more ahead of the car and was closing in on the bridge. So, I didn't even glance back at the rearview mirror, thinking the car wouldn't be an issue until after I crossed.

When I looked back in the mirror, the lights practically blinded me and I had to flip the mirror up. The car was close and he should have already turned off the brights. The car also looked to be swerving a bit within the lane.

Immediately, I thought drunk or high. I should have been like my mom, in that moment, and pulled way over to let the car speed by me. Hopefully, it wouldn't swerve over and hit me, but it would have given it the most room to pass.

I didn't though.

I did the exact opposite. I sped up. I figured I was so close to the bridge and the no pass zone, that I would simply scoot over the bridge, and the car would have the next two miles to blow right by me.

It was one of those split-second decisions you make in the moment, especially driving. I hardly gave any real thought to it. It was much more instinctive. I suddenly made the decision and sped up.

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