

An Introduction

The experience of *The Car Plays* is this:

You and your companion are escorted by “car hops” into the parking lot and to your row of five parked cars. You then take your seats inside one of the parked cars and you might notice two other people in the car with you. Suddenly, your car door closes and the drama, or comedy, unfolds in front of you. Ten minutes later the doors open, you are ushered into a new car, and a new play begins. In the course of just one hour, five evocative stories are revealed.

The Car Plays was conceived by Paul Stein and received its first productions by Moving Arts in 2006 and 2007 in the parking lot of the Steve Allen Theatre in Hollywood. In 2009, Moving Arts remounted *The Car Plays* for four days at Woodbury College in Burbank. RADAR LA — an international theatre festival presented in downtown Los Angeles by REDCAT in collaboration with The Public Theater’s Under the Radar Festival (New York) and Center Theatre Group and in conjunction with Theatre Communications Group’s national conference — commissioned *The Car Plays: L.A. Stories in 2011*.

In January 2012, Segerstrom Center for the Arts presented *The Car Plays* as part of their inaugural Off-Center Festival. Following this, *The Car Plays: San Diego* was presented in 2012, 2013 and 2015 as part of La Jolla Playhouse’s WoW (Without Walls) Program. Most recently, *The Car Plays* made a sold-out return to the Segerstrom Center and its Off-Center Festival in January 2018.

Since 2006, there have been nearly one hundred *Car Play* world premieres of 10-minute plays, written by dozens of daring playwrights, directed by scores of renowned directors, performed by hundreds of accomplished actors and experienced by the most adventurous audiences.

I hope these nine plays provide just a fraction of the exhilaration *The Car Plays* provide.

TERRA FIRMA

The interior of a mid-priced sedan that has plenty of miles on it.

At the start of the play, the car is empty. The two audience members are seated in the backseat; on the seat between them are a few pamphlets and printouts with details on reverse mortgages and Lewy Body Dementia.

After a moment, the front passenger door opens and MARTIN, 70ish, sits with the assistance of MONICA, 60ish. Both are dressed as if for a formal and rather serious appointment.

MONICA: You just take it easy. There's no hurry.

MARTIN: Wait. What are you doing?

MONICA: Helping you into the car. That's it, Martin. Watch your hands.

MONICA gently closes the passenger door and then as swiftly as she's able walks around the front of the car, opens the driver's door, and sits.

She starts to put the key into the ignition.

MONICA: I didn't get your seat belt.

MARTIN: My what? No.

MONICA: Here, give me the buckle and I'll fasten you in.

MARTIN: No!

MONICA: Your seat belt, dear. It's on your right. Just reach for it there and hand it to me.

MARTIN: Stop this, Monica. Get away from me.

MONICA looks at him a moment, then opens the driver's door and walks around the front of the car to the passenger door. But before she reaches the door handle, MARTIN locks the door.

MONICA tries the handle a few times, then stands there looking at him through the window. With a grin, MARTIN slowly reaches for the seat belt with his left hand, pulls it around and snaps it in place.

MONICA watches this, unamused, then walks back around the front of the car, sits in the driver's seat, and closes the door. She then buckles her own seat belt.

A long moment.

MONICA: You think this is funny.

MARTIN: Funny? No. Ludicrous, perhaps. *Farcical.*

MONICA: ... please ...

MARTIN: Monica, I will *not* be treated like a child.

MONICA: I know ... that's not what I'm—

MARTIN: —And if I happen to *disagree* with you or, incredibly, have a will of my *own*, that doesn't mean I'm suffering an “episode.”

MONICA: You're right. I was too quick to—

MARTIN: —My opinion still matters.

MONICA: I never said it didn't.

MARTIN: But you *hinted*. Didn't you? To the doctor. When I brought up the idea of—

MONICA: —We've been all through that before, is all I meant.

MARTIN: But you used the Lewy Body *diagnosis*, the possible *dementia*—

MONICA: –That’s all I meant. That we had discussed it before. Old territory.

MARTIN: You knew that he ... the, uh ... the ... uh ...

MONICA: Doctor?

MARTIN: I’LL GET IT! Yes, the *doctor*! Doctor Aaron P. Williams. Neurologist. You *knew* that Dr. Williams would see it as a symptom.

MONICA: I never even *considered*–

MARTIN: –Of *course* you considered. Of *course* you did.

A moment of respite.

MONICA: I don’t want to fight with you. (*an attempt*) Having a plan, Martin, would make things easier.

MARTIN: We don’t need a plan. We just need to sell.

MONICA: A plan for what to do. When things ... progress.

MARTIN: Selling the Skyview property takes care of that problem.

MONICA: You know we can’t do that.

MARTIN: We can. We, you, make a phone call. It’s a fair offer. No one is going to give us more for the drive-in. Give *you* more.

MONICA: I understand we need the money.

MARTIN: *You* need the money. Let go–

MONICA: –But we can’t.

MARTIN (*now visibly uncomfortable*): You have to! I’m telling you to–

MONICA: –You don’t *understand*, Martin! They will *dig*! And when they do–

MARTIN: –You’ve tied me down. (*struggling against the seat belt*) Why have you tied me down? Let me go!

MONICA (*understanding*): I haven’t tied you down, my darling. It’s a seat belt.

At the sound of her voice, MARTIN looks at MONICA, still panicking but now also terrified.

MARTIN: *WHAT?!* What are you saying?

MONICA (*reaching out to him*): It’s okay, Martin. You’re safe. It’s just Lewy acting up. We hate him, don’t we?

MARTIN (*desperate to comprehend*): A seat belt?

MONICA unbuckles her seat belt and shows him.

MONICA: Yes. We’re in the car at the medical center. We went and saw your doctor. Now we’re just sitting here, talking.

MARTIN (*calming*): Talking.

MONICA: Yes.

MARTIN: Talking. About what?

MONICA: Nothing important.

MARTIN: Ronnie? And the money?

MONICA: No. (*she thinks*) What money?

MARTIN: His ... you know ... the money that’s left.

MONICA: His inheritance? I don’t care about that.

MARTIN: He brought it up to me–

MONICA: –I know. He shouldn’t have done that. It’s none of his business.

MARTIN: He *is* our son.

Silence.

MARTIN: We were just talking. The girl?

MONICA: What?

MARTIN: Talking about the girl?

MONICA: No. You must *never* talk about her.

MARTIN: I don't. I would never.

Silence.

MONICA: Sometimes ... sometimes you do.

MARTIN: Never.

MONICA: Yes.

MARTIN: When?

MONICA: To the doctor. Today.

MARTIN: No. You're lying. I would remember. (*a long pause*)
What did I say?

MONICA: You said, "... and there's the girl. Under the screen."

MARTIN: What? No.

MONICA: Yes. The girl under the screen.

MARTIN: That's all?

MONICA: Today.

MARTIN: I've said more? Are you telling me I've—

MONICA: —Yes. Other times. But no one has asked any questions. So far.

MARTIN: Because they think I'm crazy.

MONICA: No. Not that. It's Lewy talking.

Silence.

MARTIN: What if I say more? Without knowing. If I'm not able to keep quiet.

MONICA: You can't.

MARTIN: I know, but what if I do? And I say it was *you*.

They sit in silence.

MARTIN'S hand begins to shake with tremors.

A moment, then MONICA puts her hand on his. After a while, the tremors subside.

MARTIN looks at her and she smiles.

MONICA: Hi, there.

MARTIN (*looking around*): Are we here? To see Doctor Williams?

MONICA: No. No more doctors.

MARTIN: Really?

MONICA: No more.

MARTIN (*thinks*): I've been thinking about the drive-in.

MONICA: I know.

MARTIN: Our first date. Right?

MONICA: It was. I can't remember the picture.

MARTIN: Trading Places. With Risky Business.

MONICA (*surprised*): You might be right.

MARTIN: Did you ever think, back then, you could one day own the place? And that would be our life? (*reflecting*) It wasn't a *bad* life.

MONICA: It was a *great* life.

MARTIN: It was. Can we go home?

MONICA: Sure.

MARTIN: And call Ronnie. Invite him to dinner.

MONICA: I'll see if he doesn't already have other plans. He probably does.

MARTIN: And we can talk. Just the three of us.

MONICA (*unsure*): That could be nice.

MARTIN: About the Skyview. And what to do.

MONICA: No, Ronnie's not a part of—

MARTIN (*he looks at MONICA*): —Maybe he can dig her up. Hire a crew.

MONICA: Martin, you know that's not possible. Ronnie doesn't ... why would you want ...

MARTIN slowly turns and looks ahead, out the front window of the car, lost in an unknown world.

MONICA: Martin, sweetheart, come back. Stay with me.

Several seconds before MARTIN speaks again, and when he does it's with a new clarity we haven't seen.

MARTIN: Deeper, deeper. Olivia. You buried her. Under the screen. So I can't get to her.

MONICA: Martin? (*no response*) Martin, you mustn't say those things. You can never say those things. (*still nothing*) Come back to me, my love.

MARTIN continues to stare ahead as MONICA leans over and envelopes him in her arms. She rests the side of her head against the back of his, so we see her in profile.

She breathes in the smell of his soap ... his after shave ... him.

MONICA (*softly*): I don't want to do this. (*pause*) Please don't make me do this.

END OF PLAY