

# The Last Toll

Tragicomedy · 2-character play · 2 either · 14 min · Beginner

It is the last night for the booth on lane 7: by morning, unmanned gantries will take its place. No car has come through for hours, yet Dominique is patiently training the new recruit sent out for the night, procedure by procedure, from the good evening to the change placed in the driver's hand. Noa listens, takes notes, and keeps glancing at the toolbox on the ground.

*A motorway toll booth, lane 7, on its last night before closing, from a quarter past five to six in the morning.*

## Casting

DOMINIQUE (No gender marker, Senior) around sixty, thirty-one years in the booth on lane 7.

NOA (No gender marker, Young adult) twenty-something, in an orange hi-vis vest, on site since four in the morning with a toolbox.

## SCENE 1: PROCEDURE NINETEEN

*(Night. A toll booth: a sliding window, a stool, a cash drawer, a log book on the ledge, a green arrow lit up and, above the window, a plate: 7. On the ground, a toolbox. Dominique, inside the booth, holds a fat binder open. Noa, standing beside it, notebook in hand, watches the road.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Procedure nineteen. The four drivers.

**NOA**

It's a quarter past five.

**DOMINIQUE**

The four drivers don't keep hours. There are the ones who look at you. The ones who don't. The ones who sing. And the ones who cry.

**NOA**

The ones who cry?

**DOMINIQUE**

About once a week. Sunday nights, mostly.

**NOA**

And what do you do?

**DOMINIQUE**

You hand over the ticket very slowly.

**NOA**

That's it?

**DOMINIQUE**

Very, very slowly. It gives them time to finish. Write that down.

*(Noa writes.)*

**NOA**

"Slowly."

**DOMINIQUE**

With "very" twice.

**NOA**

"Very, very slowly." And the ones who sing?

**DOMINIQUE**

You don't cut them off. You wait for the end of the chorus, and then,

good evening.

**NOA**

And what if there's no end?

**DOMINIQUE**

There's always an end.

**NOA**

And in the booth, which one are we allowed to be?

**DOMINIQUE**

None of them. In the booth, you are the booth.

**NOA**

And when you feel like crying?

**DOMINIQUE**

You sing.

*(Dominique and Noa look at the road. Nothing.)*

**NOA**

When was the last car?

*(Dominique opens the log book.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Nine forty-seven p.m. A white van. It wasn't looking.

**NOA**

That's almost eight hours ago.

**DOMINIQUE**

Seven and a half. They all take the new lane, over there. The one with no booth. The gantries take their picture and they pay from home, in their pyjamas.

**NOA**

That's handy.

**DOMINIQUE**

It's very handy. Nobody says good evening to them.

**NOA**

At least the gantries never get the change wrong.

**DOMINIQUE**

Exactly. I don't trust anyone who never gets anything wrong.

**NOA**

So why is lane 7 still open?

**DOMINIQUE**

Until six. For the ones who'd rather.

**NOA**

Rather what?

**DOMINIQUE**

Talk to someone.

*(A pause.)*

**NOA**

Do we really have to do all forty, tonight?

**DOMINIQUE**

We've done eighteen. You're lucky, it's a quiet night.

**NOA**

It's an empty night.

**DOMINIQUE**

Quiet. Procedure three: we never say "empty". It hurts the cars' feelings.

**NOA**

I was told this would take an hour.

**DOMINIQUE**

Told by who?

**NOA**

The schedule.

**DOMINIQUE**

The schedule has never once set foot in a booth.

**NOA**

Dominique. There's something I need to tell you.

**DOMINIQUE**

Procedure two: questions at the end.

**NOA**

It's not a question.

**DOMINIQUE**

Then it goes at the very, very end.

*(Noa looks at the toolbox.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

You brought your tools, good. Everything jams in here. The window, the drawer, the barrier. You have to know where to hit.

**NOA**

I know where to hit.

**DOMINIQUE**

Already? They taught you well.

**NOA**

They taught me fast.

**DOMINIQUE**

Right. Exercise. You take the booth, I'll be the car.

*(Dominique steps out of the booth, walks a few paces onto the road and grips an invisible steering wheel. Noa goes in and sits on the stool.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Vroom.

**NOA**

Do I have to make the noise?

**DOMINIQUE**

I make the noise. You do the booth. Vroom.

*(Dominique drives up, slows down.)*

**NOA**

Good evening.

**DOMINIQUE**

Too soon! I'm still rolling. You wait for a full stop. People hate being talked to while they're moving.

**NOA**

And at five in the morning, we still say good evening?

**DOMINIQUE**

Procedure five: good evening until six. After that, good morning.

*(Dominique backs up, comes back, brakes, winds down an invisible*

*window.)*

**NOA**

Good evening.

**DOMINIQUE**

Good evening. Now I'm doing the ones who cry.

**NOA**

Oh.

**DOMINIQUE**

My mother sold the house. With the dog still in it.

**NOA**

The dog?

**DOMINIQUE**

We don't ask questions. We hand over the ticket.

*(Noa holds out an invisible ticket, very slowly.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Slower.

**NOA**

I can't go any slower. I've stopped moving.

**DOMINIQUE**

Then it's perfect.

*(Dominique takes the ticket, sniffs.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Thank you.

**NOA**

Safe journey.

**DOMINIQUE**

Very good. The "safe journey" is the hardest part. You have to mean it.

**NOA**

I meant it.

**DOMINIQUE**

I know. You can hear it. Another one. Vroom.

*(Dominique backs up, comes back, brakes, and belts out a tune with no*

*words. Noa waits. Dominique keeps singing.)*

**NOA**

That's a long chorus.

**DOMINIQUE**

That's a verse. The chorus is coming.

*(Dominique sings on. Noa's phone buzzes. Noa doesn't move.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Procedure twenty-three: no phones in the booth.

**NOA**

It's work.

**DOMINIQUE**

In here, work is the booth. Take it outside.

*(Noa steps out of the booth and moves off. Dominique goes back in.)*

## **SCENE 2: ONE SCREW PER PROCEDURE**

**NOA**

Yes, boss. No, not yet. Because there's still someone inside. Yes, inside. I know, six o'clock. The toolbox is here, yes. No, I haven't said anything. Okay. Okay.

*(Noa puts the phone away. In the booth, Dominique turns a page of the binder.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two: done while you were on the phone. Twenty-three, you've already had. Procedure twenty-four. The barrier that won't go up.

**NOA**

Dominique.

**DOMINIQUE**

You never force it. You tap it twice, here, with the flat of your hand.

**NOA**

I'm not here to learn the job.

**DOMINIQUE**

Nobody's ever here to learn. They learn anyway.

**NOA**

I'm here to take the booth apart. The window, the barrier, the arrow, all of it. A lorry's coming to collect it at six. After that, there's meant to be nothing left but the road.

*(A pause.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

I know.

**NOA**

The lane 7 operator had been informed?

**DOMINIQUE**

Procedure one.

**NOA**

You knew, Dominique?

**DOMINIQUE**

An orange vest, a toolbox, at four in the morning, on the last night. They haven't sent me back-up in eleven years. Tonight, they send me a screwdriver.

**NOA**

Why didn't you say anything?

**DOMINIQUE**

And you, why didn't you say anything?

**NOA**

You'd already opened the binder.

**DOMINIQUE**

I've opened it every night for thirty-one years. Nobody has ever read it.

*(Dominique lays a hand flat on the binder.)*

**NOA**

It's no use anymore.

**DOMINIQUE**

Good evening is no use either. We say it anyway.

**NOA**

This week I've taken down eleven booths. There was never anyone in them. Once, a thermos on the ledge, still warm. This is the first time there's been someone here.

**DOMINIQUE**

And what difference does that make?

**NOA**

It slows things down.

*(A pause.)*

**NOA**

I need the booth empty at six.

**DOMINIQUE**

I need someone here until six.

*(A pause. Noa opens the toolbox and takes out a screwdriver.)*

**NOA**

One screw per procedure.

**DOMINIQUE**

Sorry?

**NOA**

You give me a procedure, I unscrew a part. At six, we're done, you and me.

**DOMINIQUE**

There are seventeen left.

**NOA**

There are a lot of screws.

*(Dominique looks at the screwdriver, then holds out a hand. Dominique and Noa shake on it.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Twenty-four. The barrier that won't go up.

*(Noa taps the barrier twice with the flat of a hand. It goes up. Noa unscrews the barrier arm and lays it on the ground.)*

**NOA**

Your trick works.

**DOMINIQUE**

Thirty-one years it's worked. Twenty-five: the driver who asks the way. You point with your whole hand, never with one finger. A finger scolds. A hand walks them there.

*(Noa unscrews the sliding window and leans it against the booth.)*

**NOA**

Twenty-six. The change, I already know: always into the hand, never on the ledge. A coin put down is a coin thrown.

**DOMINIQUE**

Who told you that?

**NOA**

You did. Around half past four. You said we'd come back to it.

*(Noa unscrews the cash drawer and opens it.)*

**NOA**

It's empty.

**DOMINIQUE**

Quiet.

**NOA**

It's quiet. Twenty-seven.

**DOMINIQUE**

The driver who doesn't have the change. You don't say "no big deal". You say "it happens".

**NOA**

Why?

**DOMINIQUE**

"No big deal" means it was a big deal. "It happens" means it's happened to everyone.

*(Noa makes a note in the notebook.)*

**NOA**

Twenty-eight.

**DOMINIQUE**

Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty: animals. The dog that barks, the cat that sleeps, the hen.

**NOA**

A hen?

**DOMINIQUE**

Just the one, in thirty-one years. In the back of a red car. She was staring at me.

*(Noa unscrews the green arrow. It goes out. Dominique checks the time and shuts the binder.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

You can read the rest.

**NOA**

No. One at a time. That was the deal.

**DOMINIQUE**

It's a quarter to six.

**NOA**

Then we go fast. But all of it.

*(Noa takes the binder out of Dominique's hands and reads.)*

**NOA**

Thirty-one. Rain. "You put your arm out anyway."

**DOMINIQUE**

Even if you get wet.

**NOA**

Thirty-two. Christmas. "You say good evening, not merry Christmas. Some people don't have a Christmas."

**DOMINIQUE**

And those ones always come through around eleven at night.

**NOA**

Thirty-three. People who honk. "You treat it like a hello."

*(Noa unscrews the stool and sets it down on the road.)*

**NOA**

Thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-seven... Night. Fog. Snow. Newlyweds. Thirty-eight: strikes. "You stay in the booth, but you read."

**DOMINIQUE**

I've read a lot.

**NOA**

Thirty-nine. This one's written in pencil.

**DOMINIQUE**

I wrote it tonight, before you got here.

**NOA**

"The last night. No crying in the booth. You wait till you're in the car park."

*(A pause. All that is left of the booth is the frame, and the number 7 plate.)*

**NOA**

What do I unscrew for thirty-nine?

**DOMINIQUE**

Nothing. That one's for me.

### **SCENE 3: FORTY**

**NOA**

Forty.

**DOMINIQUE**

Read it.

**NOA**

"The car that doesn't come."

**DOMINIQUE**

It's the longest one. I've been doing it since nine forty-seven.

**NOA**

And what do you do?

**DOMINIQUE**

You wait. You keep your manners. And you don't take it personally.

**NOA**

It's hard, not taking it personally.

**DOMINIQUE**

That's why it comes last.

**NOA**

Is this the end? Then I have a question. Procedure two.

**DOMINIQUE**

Go on.

**NOA**

What are you doing tomorrow?

**DOMINIQUE**

Tomorrow I take the motorway. Through the new lane. To see what it feels like, going through without talking to anyone.

**NOA**

And then?

**DOMINIQUE**

Then I turn round and go through again. That'll get me two photos.

**NOA**

Do you want me to say good evening to you, under the gantry?

**DOMINIQUE**

You won't be there. You'll be on lane 8, with your screwdriver.

*(Dominique and Noa wait, side by side, in the empty frame of the booth. In the distance, two headlights.)*

**NOA**

Dominique.

**DOMINIQUE**

I see it.

**NOA**

It's going to take the new lane.

**DOMINIQUE**

It's indicating.

**NOA**

It's coming here? But there's no booth anymore!

**DOMINIQUE**

There's someone inside. Go on.

**NOA**

Me?

**DOMINIQUE**

You know all forty. My first night, I knew three.

*(Noa stands where the window used to be. An engine slows. The headlights fall on Noa. A radio, and someone singing over it.)*

**NOA**

The ones who sing.

**DOMINIQUE**

Wait for the chorus.

*(The song stops. So does the engine. Noa waits one more second.)*

**NOA**

Good evening.

*(Noa holds out a hand, takes some coins, counts them.)*

**NOA**

Two euros thirty. Ten cents short. It happens. No, don't go looking. Yes, it's the last night. Forty kilometres? Just to come through here? The gantries? Right next door. From six o'clock, it's only them. Yes. So would we.

*(Noa holds out an invisible ticket, very, very slowly.)*

**NOA**

Safe journey.

*(The engine pulls away. The headlights fade into the distance. A pause.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

You meant it.

**NOA**

I meant it.

**DOMINIQUE**

Log it.

*(Noa writes in the log book.)*

**NOA**

Five fifty-eight. A grey car. It was singing.

**DOMINIQUE**

I'd never seen that one before.

*(In the distance, a beep. Above the new lane, a light comes on.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Six o'clock.

*(Dominique puts on a coat. Noa picks up the screwdriver and looks at the number 7 plate.)*

**NOA**

There's still the number.

**DOMINIQUE**

Leave it for the lorry.

**NOA**

The lorry takes everything that's in the booth. Not what's already gone.

*(Noa unscrews the plate and hands it to Dominique, who tucks it under one arm. Noa holds out the binder as well.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Keep it.

**NOA**

What for? There's no booth anymore.

**DOMINIQUE**

There's a procedure missing.

**NOA**

Forty-one?

**DOMINIQUE**

The one that comes after. I don't know it.

*(Dominique walks a few paces down the road, then turns round.)*

**DOMINIQUE**

Good morning, Noa.

**NOA**

Good morning, Dominique.

*(Dominique leaves on foot, the 7 under one arm. Noa stays in the empty frame. Day breaks. On the new lane, a car goes by without stopping. Noa raises a hand.)*

**NOA**

Good morning.

*(Another car goes by.)*

**NOA**

Safe journey.

*(Noa opens the binder at the last page and writes.)*

**NOA**

Forty-one. "You say good morning anyway."

*(A car goes by. Noa raises a hand. Blackout.)*

**What you can do with it**

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