

Jammed

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“What about a good old sing-song?” shouted some impossibly jolly twit from the rear of the car.

Worse still this highly depressing suggestion was greeted by the rest of the passengers with enthusiastic shouts of ‘hurrah!’ and ‘what a great idea, let’s all sing in harmony!’

“That’ll be a first,” I grumbled darkly and was promptly poked in the back of the head.

My wife’s idea of a good old sing-song, really is a round of old songs, namely of the cockney music hall variety so within seconds our car was rocking to the 1909 Harry Castling classic ‘Let’s all go down the strand’.

A bit of wishful thinking since at that precise hour we weren’t going anywhere.

“Oh! What a happy land. That’s the place for fun and noise!” belted out my wife, “all among the girls and boys. So...let’s all go down to the Strand!”

“Have a banana!” everyone chorused, including myself in a flat monotone mutter as I stared out of the window through the miserable curtain of rain at the stationery car next to us. Three small crazed children in the back appeared to be throttling one another while their parents sat like zombies in the front.

“It’s quite possible those children have killed their parents,” I said as someone drummed on my head with a pair of bananas.

We were now only an edelweiss away from a Sound of Music medley and from there we were just a Tony Award from the entire Rodgers & Hammerstein back catalogue. We had run out of reading material after the first hour, not that I could read much since I was meant to be driving the car, or at least pretending to drive the car. For a time we played I-Spy and it was a credit to our powers of observation that we got so much out of the interior of one car and its occupants. We then acquainted ourselves with the people in the next car and got to know their profiles in some detail. There was great excitement if their lane moved first and a new set of profile people arrived, even greater excitement if we moved more than two metres at one time, then we either caught up with our old pals or we had to make new friends all over again.

Eventually there was a short burst of general wailing and chest beating followed by a slightly disturbing twenty minutes or so during which everyone indulged in an individual panic attack.

These took various forms but all ended in the same way with the panicker being attacked by the person nearest to them and shaken into mute submission. We decided a group panic attack was definitely something we could look forward to, a sort of massive reward treat that dangled teasingly somewhere at the end of our collective tether.

But first there was a 'Doh, a deer' a female flipping deer to contend with in harmony of course, so much so that no one sang the actual melody line. This produced a bout of laughter that reached a pitch of hysteria that could quite easily have erupted from the car and raced wildly into the wet fields snarling and drooling until it vanished into the veil of rain.

This was the point in the traffic jam when we saw our fate stretching before us uphill for at least another three miles into the distance and we fell silent with a sort of bitter respect for our captors.

"You have to hand it to them," mused my wife, "they've made a proper job of it."

Three miles back when we drove blithely into the traffic jam we thought it was an accident because we saw flashing blue lights up ahead and as we slowed to a crawl we braced ourselves for the possible scene of carnage. Thankfully it failed to materialize like the police car which we assumed had been airlifted to a better world not really that far away.

When you say something like, "must be roadworks," you don't imagine for one second that you'll take an hour and a half to cover the next three miles and that a time will come when you will contemplate running away screaming and leaving your car and its occupants behind forever but it certainly crossed my mind several times, particularly as my bladder began to reach bursting point.

Almost unbelievably for the first time in history I was the only person in our car that was desperate for the toilet. Normally everyone needs the loo everywhere we go, in fact every journey we make is basically just a series of shorter journeys between toilets and the first thing anyone says when we arrive anywhere is, 'where's the loo?'

"How can I be the only person who needs the toilet?" I demanded.

"Give me another half hour and I'm sure I could whip something up!" replied a voice from the back.

It was a generous offer but there was no point in tormenting myself any longer so I pulled in, switched my hazard lights on, jumped from the car, ran round the back and launched myself into a dense pine wood which turned out to be on a steep and slippery slope. Some kind of wild thorny hedging broke my fall in a spiky embrace, which was just as well because there seemed to be a roaring river at the bottom of the hill.

At least in the wood I was sheltered from the rain although standing up was tricky until I found a nice wobbly thorny branch to cling onto. In this mud splattered torn and tattered state I was beginning to wonder if it was worth it. So was my bladder, which had apparently changed its mind. I had to think about something else to get it back on track. Singing 'Roll out the Barrel' eventually did the trick.

Getting back up the hill turned out to be the most excitement I'd had all week. I made it at the third scramble and emerged panting, my face camouflaged with wet earth like an escaped POW.

Back in the car the entertainment committee had broken out the Oklahoma! hit 'I'm just a girl who cain't say no!

"Don't worry," shouted my wife, "only six more old musicals and we'll get onto Les Miserables."

Sometimes its hard to tell if my wife is joking.