Crossing Lanes

A Short Play by

Margaret O'Donnell

Run Time: 10 minutes

Margaret O'Donnell
margaretplaywright@outlook.com

Characters:

Frank, age 40s, male
Pam, age 40s, female
Rod, age 40s, male

Note to director: / signifies an interruption by the next speaker.

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Setting:

A busy 25-yard lap pool with six divided lanes, at the noon swim: the lanes are marked easy, medium, and fast. The rules require 'circle swim': keeping to the right both when going up the lane and when coming back. In a medium lane, swimmers stay out of each other's way: they politely wait at the wall for faster swimmers to pass, and tread water to avoid running into a slower swimmer. They know one another; they are regular noon swimmers. Five swimmers in a lane are possible if all pay attention to each other.

Rod enters; he's new to the pool. He spends some time on deck getting himself outfitted with long fins, hand paddles, and a scuba mask and mouth tube. He has compression sleeves on his knees. All of his equipment is black. He lowers himself into the water, without noticing that a swimmer is standing ready to push off. He begins to swim as soon as he's in the water. He swims up and then down the lane and pushes off each time without lifting his head from the water or stopping. He commits the very grave offenses of running over slower swimmers as if they weren't there, and not letting faster swimmers go ahead of him. He slaps the water hard on each stroke, and his kicks create wakes that rock the other swimmers.

Several swimmers give up, get out of the lane huffily, go to another lane or go early to the hot tub. Frank and Pam confer in the medium lane about what to do.

PAM
Can you believe that man! He's a rolling tank. Who is he?

FRANK
Never seen him before.

PAM
Well, I'm going to say something. Here he comes.

Pam waves her hand in the water before Rod's face as he comes down the lane. Rod doesn't stop but pushes off the wall and swims up the lane.

PAM
Well, I never! I'm going to get right in front of him on his way back, so he has to stop. What an incredible lack of courtesy!

FRANK
I don't know, Pam. Maybe he's half blind or something. Take it easy. Benefit of the doubt, you know.

PAM

Yeah, right.

Pam swims a few strokes up the lane then switches to go down the lane, positioning herself to intersect with Rod as he's coming down. Rod swims over her, then pushes off the wall and swims up the lane. Pam comes up gasping. She swims to the wall. Frank is still there.

PAM

Damn! Did you see that? That's not half blind, Frank! He pushed me down and swam over me! Frank, stop him!

FRANK

Nothing to be done. He's in a world of his own. Look, the easy lane's only got two people now. Let's go to the easy lane.

PAM

And let Tank here have this whole lane to himself? No! If you're not gonna do anything, I'm…I'm gonna tell the guard!

FRANK

Let it go, Pam. The guards won't interfere. Remember last year when that guy kicked the new guard, you know, the one who was trying to tell him the rules? There's no way they're gonna get involved.

PAM

Fine! I'll take him on by myself. You go ahead and run off.

Frank ducks under the ropes and swims to the easy lane.

PAM

(*calling after him*) Thanks anyway, Frank! (*to herself*) Coward.

Pam hauls out of the water and onto the deck. She grabs a couple of kick boards from a bin, jumps back in, and stands solidly against the wall, holding the boards in front of herself like shields. With this, Rod can't push off against the wall on his next trip down the lane. Impact! Rod comes up sputtering.