

Cab
by Madeleine Dougherty

I've been driving a cab since I was 19 years old, two weeks after getting my driver's license. No one really made a fuss. After all, my bad driving was basically indistinguishable from everyone else's. The job wasn't that bad. Minimum wage, horrid hours, bad customers, and worse, even fatal, job conditions. The older drivers got above minimum wage and they owned their own cabs. I suppose the company paid them more to keep them with the company, but it just allowed them to buy out quicker. It's a nice thing to own your own car, but that luxury fades quickly when you're cleaning up a backseat saturated in puke, spilt alcohol, and other bodily fluids. It's a disgusting job and I have to do it.

I was somewhere near the Rockefeller center just enjoying my AC while watching the people sweat bullets running back from lunch when a fare jumped into the back. It was a business man dressed in a nice suit. I didn't think he was a lawyer. He had no briefcase. Maybe a higher-up, a manager or something. I asked him where to. He said drive. I asked him where to. He looked up at me in the rearview mirror.

“Drive.”

“Ok. You got it.” I threw up my hands and started the meter. I figured I'd drive straight and take a right when I had to turn unless the fare said different.

It was awhile before I noticed something strange. He had been looking down at something in his lap. I thought it was a phone, but he shifted and I saw it was a gun.

“No. No guns. There are no guns allowed in my cab.” I pulled over to the side of the road and sat at idle. I glared at him in the rearview mirror. “Get out of my cab.”

He didn't move. He just sat for a moment looking at his weapon, then pulled out a yellow handkerchief and began cleaning it. He meticulously pulled apart every piece of the gun and

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wiped it clean, even the hollow point bullets. It was a wonder he didn't lose one of those little pieces in the black hole that is the grimy floor of my cab. I couldn't help thinking this guy was a little psycho.

He didn't speak and I didn't move. Finally, I heard the sharp click of the magazine snapping into place. I prayed that he would leave. *Dear Lord, please get this psycho out of my car. I don't want to die today. My wife is making lasagna and it's my daughter's fifth-grade play this weekend. She's playing a prune. It's a health-food type thing. Please Lord, let me see my baby play a prune.*

"Turn around." Damn. You don't listen when my mother-in-law comes and you ain't listening now.

I turned around in my seat. He was sitting there, staring at his gun. He was holding it lightly in both hands as if it were precious, yet, worryingly, as if he were weighing his options. I hoped the option he chose was advantageous to me and my bodily health, but I couldn't help noticing that the barrel was pointed at me.

"I won't charge you for the ride," I said.

"What's your name?"

"George Harrison Lorenzo. No relation."

"To whom?" Was this man an idiot of something?

"George Harrison? The Beatle? My mother loved The Beatles."

"Right, right."

Now that we'd had this friendly conversation, I'd calmed down enough to look away from the 9mm glock. Nice gun. It left a nice little entry and made the back of your head look like

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a bomb had gone off. At least with me facing him, he had been polite enough to let my mother have an open casket at the viewing.

My knee began popping up and down as soon as I had stopped the car. A bad habit, I know, for a driver to have. Don't want to have an accident because I tapped the brake. This man didn't have any bad habits like me. He was calm and quiet and scary as hell, but you wouldn't know it looking at him. He wore a nice suit of black, soft-looking fabric with a dark gray tie. He was thin and small, didn't look like he had many muscles, but what do I know? That suit had hid a gun. Could've hidden a lot more things. He was a nice enough looking man: blonde hair, gaunt face. I suppose the ladies would have called him chiseled or distinguished. He looked up at me. A heavy plastic partition separates the front and back seats. It's supposed to keep everyone safe. I didn't feel safe. He had blue eyes. Navy blue. They were dark and deep and blank. I shivered and turned away.

"Please," I said. I don't quite know what I was asking, but it got a reaction out of him. He moved. I didn't look in the mirror, but glanced to the side. The gun had disappeared, and he put something in the cash box. He looked at me once more, then left.

I got out of there so fast; I almost clipped several cars. I could hardly stand stopping. I thought he was going to jump back in at every red light. I raced back to the garage, went home, and laid down for the rest of the day. Everyone asked me what was wrong from my wife to the boys at the poker game that night. I didn't know what to say. I was so out of it; I lost 200 dollars to the boys.

The next day I cleaned the cab. It was cleaner than it had ever been, including the day it came off the line. I found \$27.58 in loose change, and finally got that mystery smell out of the

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trunk. I found in the cash box \$1000 on what had only been a \$20 fare. Joe, the Boss, gagged on the cleaning supply fumes when he came to tell me the police were there to talk to me.

They told me they were asking all the drivers if they had seen a suspect in the on-going investigation on the deaths of several foreign ambassadors. They said a witness who saw him get into a cab. They showed me a picture of my man. I denied knowing him. They searched my cab and asked why I had cleaned it.

“I take pride in my cab. I always keep it clean.” Joe snorted behind me. The police wrapped up their questioning and left. I prayed that that man would not bother me again, in-person or otherwise. The police had asked if I knew where he was. I think they were suspicious of me or something. I thanked the Lord I couldn't give an answer. The day after that was today. Sadly, I know where that man is now. He's sitting in the back seat of my cab.

“Thank you for your help yesterday, Mr. Lorenzo, and the day before. You'll be paid the same today. Drive.”