The Mish

by TimChambers

So begins your new career in the car service business. In some ways you enjoy it, too. Sitting alone in the cab each day, totally your own boss; you get a surge of excitement inside thinking about the money you'll make in a way that requires so little work. Clearing two fifty or more a night isn't such a bad day's pay, and since it's all in cash, you can easily fudge the reporting of it. All you have to do is drive, and you don't mind doing that. The people make it interesting; characters the like of which you've never known before. They're showing you a side of life that's always been outside your ken, and a part of yourself that's a total stranger.

~ Need a car on the waterfront.

~ This is 91, I'm on Western now.

The GPS flashes Western and Spring, where a slender young man with curly blond hair waves you to a stop.

The fare gets in behind you and drops a fifty on the front seat.

~ Take me out to Alki beach. I'm on a mish.

~ What's a mish?

~ I just got off a fishing boat. I gotta make a score.

You turn on to the ViaDuct and head south past the shipping terminals on your way to West Seattle.

~ I'm on a mish. I'm on a mish.

You eye your fare through the rearview mirror.

~ Ever work the fishing boats? he says.

~ Can't say I have.

~ Don't. It ain't worth it.

~ Oh?

~ Only thing that's good about it is getting your money all at once after you've been out for weeks.

And throwing it all away, you're thinking, trying to impress a taxi driver.

~ That doesn't sound so bad, you say.

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~ Overtime is pretty good, but once you total the hours up, it don't pay more than minimum wage.

~ Can't be having that.

~ Lotta crazies, too. Getting into fights and shit.

~ Don't like the sound of that, neither.

The conversation dies.

~ Ever drive across across the country, you say?

~ Never done that.

~ Sure is one helluva trip.

~ I'm on a mish. I'm on a mish.

You turn off the viaduct and head north towards Alki point, where the view of the downtown office towers is one of the best in Seattle. Then west towards the beach.

~ I'm on a mish. I'm on a mish.

~ Here's the beach, you say, ~ where do you want me to drop you?

~ Down at the far end. Take a left at Seven Eleven. I'm on a mish. I'm on a mish.

You make the turn.

~ Stop right here.

He drops another fifty on the seat and you're not too proud to take it either.

~ Why don't you come inside. I gotta make some calls.

So you follow him in, wondering what he has in mind.

~ I'm on a mish. I'm on a mish.

The house is a cozy three room cottage that once had a view of the water, perhaps, but now looks out on some low rise apartments and the 7/11's garbage dumpster. He offers you the window seat then punches a number into his phone.

~ This is Ray, Jerry Mack sends his regards... Where can I find you... I'll be there in a heartbeat... By taxi... Okay, I understand.

~ Let's go. I'm on a mish. I'm on a mish.

He guides you to a well established neighborhood of red brick ranch and split level houses high above the beach.

~ You'll have to wait here, Ray says. ~ They see the car, it's a deal breaker.

He drops another fifty in the seat. You feel like he's buying your complicity, but you take the money anyway, because it's all the same to you.

The fare returns about twenty minutes later.

~ Done deal, take me home.

~ Back at the cottage he drops another twenty dollars in the seat.

~ Thanks a lot. Have a wonderful night.

~ And thank you too, sir. Have fun.

You slip the last bill in your pocket, thinking it's just your first call of the night and you have already have your nut and your gas, a couple of meals and your next night's flop.

~ Car needed in West Seattle.

~ This is 91, I'm in West Seattle.

The GPS gives the address and you're on your way to another fare.

This one wants to go downtown, and you're thankful you don't have to deadhead back as it might give you more time to reflect on how you're not so much different from Ray.