

The Second Chance

Sannie Tang

I'm a taxi driver. It's not the best job in the world, but when you don't have any certificate or diploma or whatever, you gotta admit this job is quite a way to make a living. I'm not saying I hate this job, I like driving a lot. It is way better than sitting in a dull office all day and facing those stupid walls.

Janice, my girl, always complains that I should find a real job and "settle down". Obviously she does not consider taxi driving as a decent job. Every time we talk about this, we end up exploding into major arguments. I mean, what's wrong with this job? I'm not breaking the law or anything, and I do make money out of it! The only reason she hates my job is that she can't show the boyfriend off in front of her shallow girlfriends. She loves reporting how well her girlfriends' boyfriends are doing. "*Sally's boyfriend got promoted last week, and so did his salary.*" for example; or "*Jacky's office has a marvelous harbor view.*" I think you get the picture. What the hell does that have to do with me anyway? She just loves to use this kind of crap to remind me how hopeless and futureless my job is.

"*You won't be successful and rich if you stick to this job,*" she keeps saying. Hey, what is the definition of successful anyway? As for money, who wants to be poor? I wouldn't mind being a millionaire, just that even if I do change my job, the chance of me becoming a millionaire is

still slim. So, why bother? I only want to save enough money to travel around the world. That's all I want. Janice laughed at my idea when I told her. She said the joke is funny. Then when I told her it's not a joke, she brought back the 'driving taxis is hopeless' issue. "*You have plenty of money to waste? Why don't you save it for our marriage? You want to travel? Save it for the honeymoon!*" Women. I rested my case. So my world travel plan is still hanging there in a way. It'll happen someday, I think. There's plenty of time.

One good thing about being a taxi driver is, you can take full control of your own job, and you are your own boss. Janice always complains how her boss this and that, yet she keeps forcing me to find a job in an office! Does that make any sense to you? I hate people when they do that. It's so hypocritical.

There are two types of customers that I really hate though. First is the boozier type. You have no idea how many drunken idiots I can see per night during my night shifts. I mean, how smart are they to torture themselves by spending a fortune on some liquid? Well, they volunteer to do that, which is none of my concern. But when they enter my car, the hell it's my business! You'll never know when they are ready to vomit on your car! I don't think I need to describe to you how unpleasant it is. Apart from that, you

might not be able to get paid by those idiots either, cuz they've spent their very last dollar on their booze. Boy I wish I could reject this kind of customer, but they know their customers' rights most of the time. Damn it.

The second is the nagging type. I just can't understand these people. They get on the car, I drive them to where they want and they pay me. As simple as that. But no, they want you to talk to them, as if it's included in the taxi fare. Can't they see that I have to drive? What's wrong with them? Are they so desperate to talk to someone? There are even rules that you can't talk to bus drivers when they drive. I think the taxi company should adopt the same rule too. By the way, the things that they say aren't particularly interesting. To be honest, they are unbelievably boring most of the time. I pretend that I can't hear them, nod, smile, or just ignore them, but they just don't get it. Isn't that obvious enough that I don't want to talk? Do I have to say "shut up" to stop their bullshit?

There was one exception though. It was a couple of days ago, nearly midnight. It was about time to end the day's hard work, and I was heading to a pub called *Leo's* in Sai Kung where I would normally meet my driver friends for a late dinner and drinks. Then this old guy came out of nowhere and stopped my car. If

only I could've put out the sign a few seconds earlier, I wouldn't've needed to drive him. Well, there's nothing to lose with one extra customer before ending the day, I thought, so I let him get in the car.

This guy had to be sixty something, or older, I don't know. He had a walking stick with him. His hair was silver grey, and he had these dark eyes that made me feel like he could see through people. By the way he dressed, probably he came from a middle class family. He had a faint smile on his face, and he was kinda pale.

"Where to?" I asked. I hoped I could still be in time to *Leo's* after driving him.

"*Yuen Long.*" he replied. Great. No way I'm going to make it to meet my friends. I'll just grab something to eat on my way back home.

"I'm sorry if I've ruined your plans," he suddenly said. I was stunned to hear that, I mean, it was like he could read my mind. Very freaky.

"What do you mean?" I pretended I wasn't surprised.

"I notice that you are about to end your shift, and this isn't exactly a short trip."

"Well, it's okay. I get paid." I smiled at him.

"Thank you, young man." What a nice guy. *"You like to drive? Is this what you want to do?"* he continued. What does that have to do with you, I thought. Well, maybe he's lonely. Old men usually are lonely.

"Just making a living." I swear, if he hadn't been that old and that polite, I would just've ignored him.

"You must have dreams. Dreams that you haven't fulfilled?" he went on.

"Well, I would like to travel around the world." I figured if I didn't answer him, he wouldn't give up.

"Very nice. When will that be?" How am I supposed to answer this question? How odd to ask a stranger something like that!

"Someday, maybe." And this was the best answer I could think of.

"What if there is no tomorrow?" he asked. *"The future is not always there for you. You'll never know when will it stop coming to your life. Get hold of the time that you have, that is now!"* Great, a Socrates in my car. How inspirational! What have I done to deserve this? How much longer do I need to listen to this stupid crap?

Thanks God, miracles do happen. The old man closed his eyes after he said that, and he was silent from then on. I was thankful that I didn't need to go on talking to him. God

knows when I would've lost my patience.

Finally we arrived at Yuen Long. It was only a bit over midnight, I thought maybe if I stepped on it, I could still make it to Leo's. The old guy paid me, and then he said something really weird to me:

"Young man, don't go to the place where you intended to go now. Go straight home. I've given you a second chance, and please do make use of it. Don't waste the opportunity to fulfill your dreams."

I had no idea what he was talking about, and I was trying to understand what he said to me. Hey, I didn't tell him I was going to Leo's! When I finally looked up, he was already gone! I wondered whether he vanished or whether it had taken me too long to think about his words. Anyway, I lost track of him, and because this was kinda creepy, I did go straight home.

The whole night I was still thinking about the words that he said, and I still didn't have a clue. I started to think it was some kind of a joke. So I let go of it and went to sleep. Then the next morning, there were so many phone calls, and I finally couldn't stand it and picked up the receiver.

"Thank God you're still alive!" It was George, my buddy, who is also a taxi driver.

"Of course I'm alive, you idiot. Something's wrong in your head? It's seven in the morning, and you know I had my night shift last night! Damn it! Go screw somebody else!" I had every right to be cranky.

"Gosh don't you know there was a huge fire at Leo's? I was so worried that you might be there. There are 3 deaths, and many in critical conditions. Boy you really need to buy Mark Six. Thank God you didn't go last night..."

George went on, but I couldn't hear the rest. It suddenly became clear to me. If I hadn't been driving that old man, I would be the one who was lying in the hospital, possibly in the morgue right now. *"What if there is no tomorrow?"* the old man's words kept floating into my mind. If I had really died in the fire, I would've died without really living my life. At least I hadn't done the thing I really wanted to do - to see the world. Now I felt as if I was gaining another chance, a new life.

I wanted to tell Janice about this revelation of mine, so I phoned her immediately. But not only did she not share my happiness, she used this as an excuse to ask me to quit my job.

"This indicates that you should switch your job. I could ask Paul to introduce you to his company. He is the Assistant Manager now, and he's making \$40 000 per month. Look how smart he is! If you quit your job a lot earlier, you

might have been earning a lot better than him ..." she went on whining. I suddenly felt very tired, tired of her telling me how useless I am, which I'm not.

I don't know where I suddenly got the courage from, but I said *"why don't you marry Paul then"* to her, and that was the last time I spoke to her. I don't feel sorry for her at all, not a bit. Actually I feel good about breaking up with her.

So now, I'm on the plane to Cairo. It's going to be my first stop on my journey to the rest of the world. I'm feeling good, in the way that I've never experienced before. Even if today is the last day of my life, I can tell you proudly that I have lived my life the way I want to. I've lived the way my heart tells me to. You might ask, what about the old man? I went back to the place where I drove him, but there was nothing there but graves. Don't ask me, I don't know what had happened, and I don't want to know. Some things are better left unanswered. If you have the chance to meet him, please say thank you to him on my behalf, and tell him I'm enjoying my life now.