

Quick Payback

“Drat. What a pillock I’ve been to leave this late with the setting sun right in my face. I should’ve left much earlier,” thought Alex as he held up one hand in a vain endeavour to add some substance to the totally inadequate sun visor of his old skiddonk.

Driving with one hand, especially when you are blinded by the sun, is not conducive to a quiet life. Suddenly, the noise of rubber on gravel drummed into his consciousness and he hit the brakes.

“You alright?”

Alex looked out the driver’s window into a bemused face.

“Yes,” he said. Did I nearly kill you?”

“You made a pretty good attempt,” the stranger smiled.

“Damn, I’m sorry. It’s this ruddy sun.”

“No problem.”

He continued apologizing.

“No problem,” the stranger said again, “but could I ask a favour?”

“Sure,” Alex replied.

“I’ve got to get to Yeoville and I’m afraid I’ve no money. Are you going anywhere near there?”

“Sure, it’s close to my route. Hop in,” Alex said, reaching for the passenger door handle.

The stranger settled in.

“Thanks. I’m Mike,” he said, holding out a huge paw.”

“Pleased to meet you, I’m Alex.”

Alex pulled back into the road, squinting.

Mike leant over the back seat to retrieve Alex’s document folder.

“Here,” he said, “Let me hold this up to keep the sun out of your eyes.”

“Thanks, that helps.”

As the road began to twist and turn, not only did the sun move from side to side, but the tall pines lining the road turned the evening light into some brain-befuddling demon, making concentration even more difficult.

“How do you feed yourself,” asked the stranger.

“What?” retorted a startled Alex, trying to concentrate in the flickering light.

“I mean, how do you earn your living?”

Alex could sense Mike’s grin.

“Oh. I tinker with ham radios. Install them. Tune them. In fact, I’m just on my way to sort out a problem with a bloke in Chrisville. What do you do?”

“Well, nothing at present,” said Mike, “In fact, I’ve just been released from jail.”

Suddenly dry mouthed, Alex clutched the steering wheel and stammered, “Wh-wh-what were you in for?”

“Nothing serious,” laughed Mike, “I’m just a pickpocket.”

“Oh Lord,” Alex cringed inside. All the cash from his previous job was in the document folder.

Involuntarily he squeezed hard on the accelerator.

“Hey, slow down,” laughed Mike, “You’ll kill us both. Besides I’m not liable to steal from a Good Samaritan – it’s just not cricket.”

Alex suddenly felt such a fool as he sighed and took his foot off the accelerator.

Too late.

Standing ahead in the road was a traffic cop, flagging him down.

The "Good evening, Sir," came in those polite, measured tones that make traffic officers sound so bloody infuriatingly superior. "In a bit of a hurry then, Sir?"

"Good evening officer. You see . . ." Alex began and then trailed off with an, "Oh forget it."

"I'm afraid that you have exceeded the speed limit by quite a bit, Sir."

Alex got out the car, followed by Mike.

They watched the officer note the licence details before asking Alex, "Can I have your particulars please, Sir?"

It was a sombre Alex that pulled off after that rude awakening.

"Hell," he thought, "Now I've really blown this afternoon's earnings. So much for being a Good bloody Samaritan."

They drove in silence to the Yeoville address Mike had given him.

"Thanks a lot," said Mike, as he opened the passenger door, "Sorry I scared you into that little debacle with the cop. You know, you're the first bloke to show me some kindness in a long time, so here's a small present for you," he said and, in the gathering gloom, he handed Alex a small rectangular object.

Dumbfounded, Alex stared at the traffic officer's ticket book.