

The Taxi Driver.

By J.M. Stephens

The phone rang, jolting Ted from his slumber. He squinted at the alarm clock. “For fuck’s sake,” he grumbled. “It’s 2.30 in the morning.”

He reached for the phone and saw Jill’s name displayed. The image of Jill suddenly flashed in his mind’s eye, not the Jill of two years previous, but of the young Jill he met as a sixteen-year-old: 5’ 8” with shoulder length blonde hair. She was a little chubby, her standout features being her large breasts, more-than-ample butt, and her roundish, unblemished, pretty teenage face.

1

Ted watched Jill board the school bus and stumble down the aisle as the bus accelerated from the curb. She looked around and saw there were no empty seats.

A voice called from somewhere on the bus.

“Hey, Jelly Arse, what’s shakin’? Besides your arse?”

Pockets of laughter erupted around the bus.

Jill ignored it, remained standing, and held the strap above her head.

Ted rose to his feet and moved to the aisle, taking hold of an overhead strap.

“There’s a seat here,” he said.

“It’s ok,” she said. “You don’t have to.”

“Yeah,” said the kid that Ted had been sitting with, “the seat’s not big enough, anyway.”

Ted reached down and grabbed the kid by the shirt, popping a couple of buttons, and pulled him up, bringing his face close.. A hush came over the bus.

“Well, it looks like you might want to give up *your* seat, then,” said Ted in his gravelly voice.

Ted could be very intimidating, and the student didn’t utter a sound as Ted placed him in the aisle and sat down in the window seat.

Ted beckoned Jill to sit next to him.

Jill shuffled into the seat. “You didn’t have to do that for me,” she said.

“Yes,” said Ted, “I did.”

They sat in silence the whole trip but kept discreetly sneaking glances at one another.

They arrived at school and headed in opposite directions toward their respective classes.

Jill was about thirty metres away when Ted turned and ran after her. He touched her arm and she turned to him.

“I’m Ted,” he said. “Would you like to meet up for a milkshake after school or something?”

Surprised, Jill hesitated. “Yeah, sure,” she said.

“Great,” said Ted. “Meet you here this afternoon?”

With wide, dreamy eyes, Jill nodded.

Ted watched as Jill resumed her walk to class, her curves accentuated by her tight school dress, her long blonde hair, and her butt jiggling with each step. He found her attractive in her own way. She had a unique beauty about her.

A relationship formed that morning. It was born of mutual loneliness, but it was a relationship, nonetheless.

2

They married at eighteen. It was a happy marriage, at least in Ted’s eyes, but Jill’s ever-increasing libido left her unfulfilled. After eight years, she succumbed to the temptation of an affair.

“We need to establish some rules,” said Tommy, as he slipped the key into the lock of room 22 at the Shady Tree Motel. “No dinner dates, no movies, no feelings, no complications. We go home to our partners afterwards. It’s the only way this will work, Jill. Are you ok with that?”

Jill lowered her eyes and nodded. Tommy fixed his eyes on Jill until her eyes met his.

“Yes,” she said. “I’m ok with it.”

Tommy smiled, turned the key, and led her through the door into their sex-charged, 4-times-a-week, no-strings affair. Jill complemented sex with Tommy during the day with more sex at night with Ted. She had an insatiable itch that needed to be scratched.

Five months into the affair, the “rules” were broken.

Jill heard the rumble of Tommy's Mustang even before it turned into High Street. Dressed in a low-cut blouse and tight skirt to showcase her assets, she eagerly jumped in as she had done so many times before.

"Hey, Babe," said Tommy, smiling. "You're looking hot, as always."

"Hi, Tommy," she smiled back.

They pulled away from the kerb and headed in the direction of the Shady Tree Motel.

"Tommy?"

"Yep?"

"Let's do something different today. Let's just go to lunch and a coffee."

Tommy's head spun to Jill, his eyes wide with shock. A second later, he screeched to a stop at the side of the road.

"What?" he asked.

"Let's just do lunch today, Tommy."

"I don't understand," he replied. "Why would we do that?"

"We've been seeing each other four or five times a week for a while now," she said.

"And?"

"I just thought there might be something more than—"

"More than what, Jill? More than fucking what?"

Jill said nothing, immediately realising her mistake.

Tommy glared at her, silently demanding an answer.

"Nothing, Tommy. I'm sorry. Let's just go to the motel and—"

"We can't, Jill. We can't... ever again. You've ruined everything. We agreed: no strings, no feelings, just sex, and then we go home to our partners. Do you remember agreeing to that?"

"Yes, but—"

"But fucking nothing. I have a wife at home who I love more than anything. I have three kids. I'm not risking my family for anything, Jill. I don't have feelings for you, ok? You're a lot of fun, but that's all. You give me the only thing that my wife can't. If you have feelings for me, then I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, but you knew the rules."

“Tommy...”

“Go home to your husband, Jill. Please don’t contact me again.”

He leaned across and pushed open Jill’s door. No more was said between them. The Mustang roared off down the street, leaving Jill standing on the sidewalk. Tears filled her eyes as she watched the Mustang turn the corner and disappear, and she knew that she would never see Tommy again.

Jill embarked on a journey of self-destruction. Daytime rendezvous with random strangers she met online progressed to sex sessions with two, sometimes three, men at once in an attempt to erase the memory of Tommy. Over time, she became complacent and invited men into her marital home.

On a Tuesday morning in August, Ted received a call from the depot to pick up a fare about five minutes from his current location. The passenger was waiting outside an apartment block in South Brunswick when Ted pulled up.

“How ya doin’?” asked Ted as the passenger climbed into the back seat of the taxi.

“I’m doin’ great,” he replied. “Got me a hot date... a blind date.”

“Well, good luck with that,” said Ted. “I hear some of those don’t turn out so well. Some of them women are so butt ugly that you wish you were blind yourself. Hey, not that I can talk. I got a face only a mother could love. When I was born, the doctor didn’t know which end to spank!”

“Looks aren’t important,” the fare replied. “Not with this one, anyway. Met her online. Haven’t seen her face, but, what a body! Bazookas like this,” he said, cupping his hands as if holding watermelons. “There won’t be much talking going on with this one, if you know what I mean.”

His lack of respect offended Ted. “So where are we going?”

“Wilmington South. 762 Crowson Boulevard,” the man replied.

Ted froze. His heart sank into his stomach. Wordlessly, Ted delivered the man to his house and sat in his cab for five minutes, fuming and shaking. He entered the house and crept to the bedroom. There was his wife, in his bed, with two men. He tripped in the hallway as he fled the house. His last memory of Jill was of her begging him to stay and pleading for his help. He drove off without looking back.

With both Tommy and Ted gone, Jill's life became a blurred existence of sexual self-destruction, antidepressants, and alcohol abuse. Lack of money became a big problem.

Steve, one of her regular lovers, rose from her bed after a three hour marathon. Jill laid back on her pillow, exhausted, but satisfied, and watched Steve as he dressed.

"Can I ask a favour, Steve?"

"Yeah, sure," he replied as he buckled his belt.

"It's a bit embarrassing, really," she said.

"Don't be embarrassed, just ask."

"Well, things have been a bit tight around here lately, and I was wondering...if it's at all possible...if you could help out. Just a little to help me get by."

Steve took a few seconds to process her request. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yeah, sure" he said. "How much do you need?"

"Well... could you spare \$50?"

"\$50? Is that all? Yeah, no problem."

Jill was relieved. She wondered why she had been so afraid to ask.

"Oh, thank you!! Thank you so much!!"

"Hey, no problem," Steve replied as he placed a \$50 note on the bedside table. "Do you want me to help out every week?"

"Oh, that would be great. It will help me out so much," Jill replied with a huge smile. "I felt so embarrassed about asking you."

"Don't be," he said. "You know, I used to pay for hookers before I found free sex on the net. You're the hottest fuck in town, Jill, and even at \$50, you're still cheaper than any hooker." He leaned in and kissed her cheek. "See you next week?"

The door closed behind him and Jill was alone. *Did he just call me a hooker? Worse still, did he say I'm the cheapest in town? Is this what my life has become? Is this all I am?*

She looked down at the naked body that countless men used as their playground before they went home to dinner with their wives and kids. At what point had she gone from sexy housewife to paid whore? "I'm a hooker," she said aloud. "I'm the cheapest whore in town."

Jill jumped up, ran to the bathroom, and vomited before she made it to the pedestal.

4

Memories of Jill still invaded Ted's thoughts, although the image of her in bed with two men had faded. He missed her and wished he could go back and handle things differently, but he was resigned to the fact that his marriage was irretrievable. He signed up to an internet dating site and, after many failed attempts at meeting someone, he secured a date with "Samantha" after changing his job description on his profile from "taxi driver" to "airline pilot."

Ted arrived early at JJ's Restaurant to make sure he had beaten Samantha. As an airline pilot, he couldn't show up in his old Nissan Cedric at a place like JJ's, so he parked down the street.

After about ten minutes, a taxi pulled up and a woman stepped out. Ted recognised her immediately, although she looked a little older and heavier than her profile photo. She had black hair, cut in a bob. She wore large, silver hoop earrings and a silver heart-shaped pendant. The wide gap in her low, exposed cleavage suggested that her breasts would sag substantially without the support of her bra. She wore black lipstick to match her hair. Long false eyelashes completed the look of desperation. Her knee-length, body-hugging, sky blue dress showed the outline of her large panties and Ted assumed she didn't realize how obvious they would show.

"Samantha?"

"Ted?"

"Yes," said Ted. "Nice to meet you at last. You're much prettier than your profile picture."

"Why thank you," she replied, taking in his short, muscular build and wingnut ears. "You're quite the looker too!"

Samantha held her arm out for Ted to lead her inside.

"Table for two, sir?" asked the girl on the door.

"I've made a reservation," said Ted. "Ted Irving?"

She ran her finger down the reservation list. “Ah yes, here you are. This way, please.” She led them to a table near the window.

A waiter appeared out of nowhere. “Would Sir and Madam like a drink? Wine, perhaps?”

Ted looked at Samantha.

“Yes, wine please,” she said. “You pick one, Ted.”

Ted didn’t know wine from horse piss. “Your best red,” he said with an air of confidence.

The waiter hesitated. “Yes, sir,” he said. “Excellent choice, sir,” He rolled his eyes as he headed toward the cellar.

“I’ve never been here,” said Samantha. “I’ve heard the food is to die for.”

“I come here all the time,” lied Ted.

“So,” she said, “how long have you been a pilot?”

“Been driving about 10 years now,” answered Ted.

“Driving?”

“What?”

“Driving. You said driving.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“You did.”

“Sorry, I meant I’ve been flying for 10 years. I must be a little tired. I just got in this afternoon from Singapore.”

“That’s ok,” she replied, narrowing her eyes.

The waiter returned with the wine. He poured a sip into Ted’s glass.

“You can fill it up,” said Ted without tasting it.

“Of course, sir.”

He filled the glass to the brim, then half-filled Samantha’s.

Ted sipped his wine throughout the evening, not actually finishing his first glass. He was not a wine drinker. Samantha, on the other hand, drank the rest of the bottle before dessert.

“Have you met many women through the dating site?” asked Samantha.

“You’re the first,” replied Ted, “and I have to say, I was really struck by your looks and your profile. I didn’t look any further.”

“Oh, you’re embarrassing me now,” she said. “So tell me, what’s it like being a pilot?”

“It has its ups and downs,” joked Ted. He surprised himself at his clever response.

Like a B-grade actress, Samantha looked to the ceiling and laughed heartily.

“I bet you have a lot of stories to tell” she said with an inebriated smile.

“Are you kidding? I got stories that’ll make your hair stand on end.”

“Tell me one,” she said, leaning forward in anticipation.

Ted thought for a few seconds.

“Hijackers,” he said.

Samantha’s eyes opened wide. “Hijackers? You’re kidding!”

“I kid you not,” replied Ted, matter-of-factly. “Abu Dhabi. April 2018. We’d reached fifty thousand feet when a Middle Eastern voice came over the intercom, informing us that the plane is now being commanded by the SLM.”

“SLM?” queried Samantha.

“Syrian Liberation Movement.”

“Syrian Liberation Movement? Never heard of them.”

“An obscure group of terrorists.” said Ted.

“Oh my God! What happened?”

“He said if we didn’t open the cockpit door they would start shooting passengers.”

“What did you do?” asked Samantha, her wide eyes fixed on Ted’s.

“What else could I do? I unlocked the cockpit door. I wasn’t going to let any harm come to my passengers. I was the captain, after all.”

“What happened then?”

“I looked up at the rear-view mirror and—”

“Do airliners have rear view mirrors?” Samantha interrupted.

Oops, thought Ted. Do they have a rear-view mirror?

“Yes, of course they do, for just this reason. So the pilot can see who is entering the cockpit without taking his eyes off the road.”

“The road?” queried Samantha. “What do you mean, ‘road?’”

Oops, thought Ted again. *Get a hold of yourself, Ted. Don't fuck this up.*

“That’s just a bit of pilot’s slang. We call the view ahead ‘the road.’”

“Fascinating,” said Samantha.

Thank god, thought Ted, *that she’s had a few glasses.*

“Anyway,” he continued, “I waited until they were just entering the cockpit. I suddenly put the 747 into a vertical nosedive, sending the two terrorists sprawling into the plane’s dashboard. I learned a bit of boxing in my younger days, and I knocked the pair of them unconscious before they knew what was happening.”

“Wow, a real life hero,” said Samantha, dreamily looking into Ted’s eyes.

The more wine that Samantha consumed, the more fascinated she became with Ted’s exciting life, and Ted’s stories grew wilder. He almost had himself convinced.

“Well, it’s been a lovely evening, Ted,” she said, gazing at Ted through inebriated eyes.

Ted called for the bill. He was a little shocked at the \$349 price tag for the bottle of red, but he hoped that he didn’t let it show.

“It was really nice to meet you, Samantha. We should do it again sometime.”

“Aren’t you going to invite me to your place?” she asked. “For a coffee?”

Ted knew what “coffee” meant. Being “old school,” the thought of having sex on the first date never occurred to him. He realised he had a lot to learn about modern dating, but he couldn’t take her to his dump of an apartment.

“Err, my house is being renovated at the moment,” he said. “I’m staying with friends when I’m in town. How about your place?”

“Fine with me,” she replied. “Let’s go.”

Ted led Samantha to a taxi from a rival company. The last thing he wanted was for his cover to be blown by a driver who knew him.

During the trip to Samantha's, she pulled her phone out of her bag. She put her arm around Ted and leaned her head toward his.

"Smile," she said, and took a photo of them both. She was on her social media account. Ted watched as she typed a message. He could easily read it in the darkness of the taxi.

"taking my pilot back to my place after a night at JJ's. wish me luck."

She clicked on "Tag all friends."

The taxi pulled up outside a small, but well maintained, house. Ted paid the cabbie \$23. He did a quick calculation of how much the evening had cost: \$349 for the wine, \$290 for the entrée, main and dessert, and \$23 for the cab. Factor in another \$23 to get him back to his car and the total was roughly just under seven hundred dollars.

Being an airline pilot doesn't come cheap, thought Ted.

"My son is with my mother for the night," Samantha informed him as she fumbled with the key. She took Ted's hand and led him straight to her bedroom. Samantha planted her wet lips on Ted's and her tongue explored his mouth. Ted began to think the money for the wine was well worth it. Samantha sat on the bed and fumbled with Ted's belt, then pulled down his zipper and reached in.

"Oh, my goodness," she said. Ted let out an involuntary gasp at the sensation of a woman's soft hand after months of frustration.

"Quick," she said, "get your clothes off!"

Ted didn't need to be asked twice. He pulled his trousers down to his ankles, in his haste forgetting that he was still wearing shoes.

Samantha was already naked, except for her stilettos. She sat on the edge of the bed, desperate and hungry, her eyes fixed on Ted's manhood. Ted hopped around on one leg, trying to pull his trousers over his shoes, when his car keys, wallet, and some coins fell out of his pocket. His wallet landed on the floor, open. Samantha spotted it out of the corner of her eye. She picked up Ted's wallet and looked at the license inside.

"Taxi license?"

Ted froze.

"You're a fucking taxi driver?"

“I can explain,” he said.

Samantha looked from Ted, back to the license, back to Ted, and back to the license. “You’re kidding me, aren’t you? Please tell me this is a joke.”

“Forget about that,” he said, “We were getting on so well. Let’s not let it spoil the evening.”

Samantha exploded and threw the wallet at Ted. She took off a shoe and threw it, hitting Ted in the forehead.

“Get out!” she screamed. “Get out of my fucking house!”

Ted half-pulled up his trousers and picked up his scattered belongings. Samantha removed her other stiletto and began hitting him with it. He stumbled as he tried to pull up his trousers with one hand, his other hand clutching his belongings.

“Out! Out! Out! Out!” she screamed in rhythm with every blow, hitting Ted on the shoulders, back, and head as he fled the house.

“Arsehole!” she shouted as Ted made his way down the path to the street. The slamming of the door echoed in the night.

Ted felt blood trickling down his forehead and wiped it with his fingers before it could run into his eye. He walked for about ten minutes, hailed an approaching cab, returned to his car, and drove home to make urgent love to his hand—and to contemplate a life of solitude.

5

Three months later, and two years after walking out on Jill, Ted looked with apprehension at Jill’s name on his phone’s caller ID. He pressed the screen to answer.

“Jill?”

Ted could hear only crying on the line.

“Jill?” he repeated. “Are you there?”

“Ted?”

A flood of emotion washed over him.

“Jill...what’s wrong? Are you ok?”

“No.”

The crying continued.

“I’ve really messed up, haven’t I, Ted?”

Ted listened, unsure how to respond.

“Ted, I want you to know that I never wanted to hurt you. I don’t know why I did the things I did. I just feel so messed up, you know?”

“Yeah,” said Ted. “I know the feeling.”

“I wish I could make things right, but I can’t. It’s too late. Too much has happened. Too much has passed,” she continued. “Anyway, Ted, I just wanted to hear your voice before I leave, and to say that I’m sorry.”

“Before you leave?” said Ted. “Where are you going?”

Jill didn’t answer.

”Jill? Where are you going? Talk to me.”

“My life’s a complete fuckup, Ted. You’re the only one who ever cared about me, and I cheated on you. I really fucked you over, didn’t I? Funny thing is, I didn’t realise that I loved you until you’d gone.”

“I shouldn’t have left, Jill. I’m partly to blame. It was a terrible sight, seeing you that day with those guys, but you obviously had problems. You begged me to help you and I just walked away. I wish I’d stayed.”

“Oh, Ted. How could it be your fault? You did nothing wrong. It was all me.”

“I let you down, Jill. You were my wife. You’re still my wife.”

Ted heard only sobbing on the line.

“Where are you, Jill? I’ll come and get you.”

The sobbing got louder.

“Jill, I want you to come home. I’ve wanted you to come home for so long. I want you back. We can work it out. We can find help.”

“I can’t. I’ve done things, Ted. I’ve done a lot of things I’m not proud of, a lot of terrible things, disgusting things, with a lot of men.”

“I’ve done things that I’m not proud of either, Jill.”

“You’re not listening. Listen to me, Ted. I’ve been with a lot of men. A. Lot. Of. Men. I didn’t even ask their names.”

“I don’t care, Jill. I don’t care about yesterday. I want you here with me, today, now, tomorrow—please tell me where you are. I love you. Let me bring you home.”

“I can’t.”

“If you do this, you’ll be fucking me over again, for good, this time. Do you really want that? To deny us both of a chance of fixing things? Tell me where you are. I’ll come for you.”

Ted could hear Jill’s heavy breathing. She sniffled.

“Wilmington West Bridge.”

“Don’t move. I’m on my way.”

“Ok”.

The Wilmington West Bridge was twenty minutes away. Ted threw on some trousers and a shirt and headed out the front door. The old engine of the Nissan Cedric cranked over slowly, refusing to play the game at the early hour.

“Come on, fuck you,” growled Ted as he turned the key again, pumping the throttle.

The engine stuttered then burst into life, spewing out a cloud of blue smoke that formed a low cloud in the cool night air. Ted reversed out of the driveway, and with a squeal of the tyres on the tarmac, gunned it towards the motorway, the old engine coughing now and then in protest. He had to get there before Jill could change her mind and do something stupid.

He took the on-ramp to the motorway. There wasn’t another car in sight at that early hour of the morning and the old car was vibrating and groaning as it reached speeds of up to 80 MPH, faster than it had ever travelled in its long life.

Up ahead, the bridge came into view. The seemingly thousands of lights illuminated the outline of the huge steel suspension bridge and it sparkled like an enormous Christmas tree.

Wilmington West Bridge was a long one: over half a kilometre. Ted drove at a crawl, scanning left and right, praying that he’d arrived in time. Then he spotted her. Jill was on the wrong side of the railing looking toward the horizon. Ted pulled over and jumped out of the car.

“Jill!” he called.

Jill didn't acknowledge him. She continued to stare at the horizon. She was dressed in a grey bath robe that rode up her thighs, exposing her legs to the night air. The robe hung off her right shoulder, revealing just a glimpse of her braless breast. The light breeze ruffled her unkempt hair.

"I'm here, Jill," he said as he sat down beside her on the precarious ledge and looked down at the dark water a hundred feet below.

Without looking at Ted, Jill leaned into him, rested her head on his shoulder, and put her arm in his, holding his hand.

Ted looked at Jill. Even in the subdued lighting of the city, he could see the fatigue in her red eyes and her tear stained cheeks.

"How did you get here?" he asked.

Jill shrugged. "I don't know."

They sat in silence for a minute or two.

"I really fucked up, didn't I, Ted?"

"We all fuck up," Ted replied.

"I don't know why you even care," she said.

"Sometimes we don't know what we have until we don't have it," said Ted. "Sometimes we throw away things that seem unimportant to us and then spend the rest of our lives trying to find it again. I'm just as guilty of that."

Jill squeezed his hand. Minutes passed. The only sound was the faint slapping of the water against the bridge's pylons.

"I want you back, Jill. I want you to come home with me," said Ted.

Jill began crying. "How can I, Ted? How can I, after everything I've done?"

"Forget all that. We can't change the past; we can only learn from our mistakes, and I've made plenty of those lately, I can tell you. I've done things that I'm ashamed of and I have no right to pass judgment on you."

"You're such a good man, Ted. I don't believe you could do anything you'd be ashamed of."

"I didn't believe it, either," he said, looking down, "until I actually did it."

Jill looked at Ted. She could see the remorse on his face. “Do you really think we have a chance? Would you really be able to forgive me?”

“You’re my wife, Jill. Whatever your reasons were for the things you did, it wasn’t all your fault. It was just as much mine. I knew something must have been wrong, but I didn’t care at the time. You just seemed so insatiable and I only thought about my own pleasure and needs. I’m the one who should be asking forgiveness.”

Jill put her arms around Ted’s waist and squeezed him tightly, kissed his cheek, and then nuzzled into his neck as Ted put his arm around her shoulders.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it? The city? The lights?” she said.

“Beautiful,” he replied.

“Do you remember what they called us in high school, Ted? Wingnut and Jelly-Arse Jill? It all seems so long ago, like another lifetime.”

Ted laughed. “Yeah, well, I think with names like that, surely we belong together.”

“I felt so safe with you back then,” she said. “You were my hero, you know? And here you are...my hero again.”

They sat there, talking as they had never talked before: about nothing, about everything, about their dreams. They joked and they cried. They gazed at the lights of the city and at the small boats rocking in the water until the rays of the sun appeared, reaching skyward from the eastern horizon. For the first time since they met in high school, they were discovering each other. They finally connected, emotionally and spiritually. The cold damp mist settled on their shoulders and Jill’s exposed legs began to shiver. Ted stood, held out his hand for Jill, and helped her to her feet.

“Come on, let’s go home.”