

The Shortest Distance

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

A patrol car idles behind a sedan parked by a walkway to the front door. Hedges line the blacktop.

OFFICER HOBBS, 29, in uniform, stands at the window, talks to the driver, LONNIE, 41, who wears a sport shirt.

OFFICER HOBBS
You blow the horn, Lon?

LONNIE
It didn't seem right. I got nothing else. 'Til my wife gets home.

The officer glances at an older car parked farther on.

OFFICER HOBBS
He couldn't drive himself?

LONNIE
Might be too grieved.

The officer steps back from the sedan. A sign on the door panel reads: Lonnie's Cab & Transportation Service.

OFFICER HOBBS
I'll go talk to him.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT ENTRANCE - DAY

Hobbs rings the doorbell. He waits on the walkway, flanked by evergreen bushes. The deadbolt unlocks, the door opens.

CLIFTON TISHEL, 77, steps out. He wears a dark suit, white shirt and tie, large glasses.

OFFICER HOBBS
Mr. Tishel?

TISHEL
That's right.

OFFICER HOBBS
Sir, you reported a suspicious individual in your driveway?

Tishel points.

TISHEL
Right there!

OFFICER HOBBS
Yes, sir, I questioned the gentleman. It's a taxi. The funeral home sent it on your behalf?

TISHEL
That's the taxi?

He rises on tip-toes for a better look.

OFFICER HOBBS
Yes. You called the funeral home, is that correct?

TISHEL
I couldn't find my car keys.

He shakes his head.

TISHEL
I feel about two inches tall.

EXT. TWO-LANE ROAD - DAY

The taxi passes through a residential area.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Tishel sits on the passenger side.

TISHEL
I've never ridden in a cab.
(pauses)
Should I have gotten in the back?

LONNIE
Hey, it don't matter. This ain't the city. I don't even have a meter. Cell and notepad's all.

He stops at an intersection, proceeds.

LONNIE
What time is the service?

TISHEL
Later. I'm going early. Before my two kids get there.

LONNIE

I got you. Time by yourself.

Tishel utters three quiet sobs, clears his throat.

TISHEL

It hits me every now and then.

LONNIE

Yes, sir.

TISHEL

I heard a noise in the kitchen this morning. I just assumed it was Becky. Then I remembered.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - STREET - DAY

Lonnie stops at a red light.

TISHEL

My boy says she was a true angel.

LONNIE

I hear that.

TISHEL

He's mad with me because of the open casket.

(in a mocking voice)

"She was a very private person, Dad. She would hate that."

Lonnie checks his cell, frowns.

TISHEL

Do you mind going up the Bypass a while? I'm not quite ready yet.

LONNIE

Yes, sir, okay.

He writes on his notepad. The light changes.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

The taxi passes houses, farmland.

INT. TAXI - DAY

Tishel cleans his glasses on his tie.

TISHEL

I'm not even sure why she married me. I was just a dumb cluck who had to quit school in the ninth grade.

LONNIE

No shame in that.

TISHEL

I worked hard, though. I accomplished some things

LONNIE

That's right.

TISHEL

Becky told me once she liked me because I was so naive. I don't know what she meant by that.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The taxi sits, motor off. A vapor light glows.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

Lonnie swigs a soft drink, opens his phone.

LONNIE

I should call my wife.

TISHEL

I was in North Africa. Tunisia.

Lonnie snaps the phone shut.

LONNIE

No bars. Damn.

TISHEL

One night they told eleven of us we were taking a boat to Anzio.

LONNIE

Yes, sir--

TISHEL

I was packed, ready to go. At the last minute they told me I was an alternate. Wasn't going.

LONNIE

Mr. Tishel--

TISHEL

Next morning we heard the boat got hit. All ten men killed.

From behind, red lights flash.

LONNIE

Uh-oh.

TISHEL

People don't realize.

Hobbs appears at the window with a flashlight.

OFFICER HOBBS

Lon, everything all right? Your wife couldn't get you on the phone. The funeral home called me, too.

LONNIE

Yes, sir. Mr. Tishel, he--

OFFICER HOBBS

Everything all right, Mr. Tishel?

TISHEL

Oh, yes.

OFFICER HOBBS

They say they can't delay the service much longer.

TISHEL

(to Lonnie)

I'd like to be taken back home, if you don't mind.

EXT. TISHEL HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The taxi idles, headlights on.

INT. TAXI - NIGHT

Lonnie writes on his notepad. Tishel takes out a wallet.

TISHEL

When I got off the ship in Norfolk,
she didn't hug me or kiss me or
anything. I'd been overseas all
that time. She was like that.

LONNIE

I picked you up at--

Tishel waves two bills at Lonnie.

TISHEL

I want you to have this. You've
been so kind to me. Please.

Lonnie hesitates, takes the money. Tishel gets out.

TISHEL

I hope I didn't get you in any
trouble tonight.

LONNIE

No, sir, not a bit, thank you.

Tishel shuts the car door, waves, heads up the walk.

Lonnie stares a moment at the two one-dollar bills. He takes
a deep breath, backs out.

FADE OUT.