

The Elf and the Carmaker

A play by David Stea, based in part on a short story by Dagoberto Gilb

Setting: in/around an auto workshop in Phoenix, Arizona; chair represents driver's seat of car

Characters: Bill Harris, driving his car

Ben Vargas, AAA driver

Al Garcia, proprietor of Al's Auto Repairs

Taxi driver

SCENE ONE

[lights up] *Bill* is seated in the driver's seat of his car, entering Phoenix, when [**noise** of worn-out wheel bearing giving way] his car grinds to a screeching halt.

Bill. Damn! Well lucky I've made it to Phoenix! Better call AAA [takes out cel phone and dials]

[pause]

Ben. Lucky you got me in at a light time of day. So where d'yuh wanna take it?

Bill. You know a good mechanic? You know, not too much, not so cheap you worry the guy's stupid.

Ben. I know a good station. Got a mechanic named Al there. Maybe the best I've ever seen. At least he used to be there, last I heard.

Bill. I don't trust AAA stations, if you get my drift. They know they've gotcha.

Ben. Don't know any other place. I do know that time I was there this station would get ya in and out, and that they'd do it right. Don't get any money for saying that, or taking you there either. Of course, I haven't been there or seen him in a long time.

Bill. Is that a money-back guarantee? Never mind, take me to your leader. I gotta get it done.

Ben. Almost guaranteed. You'll get it done and Al the Elf'll do it right. He'll find whatever's wrong and tell you what's about to go wrong, too.

Bill. Sounds heroic enough to me.

Ben [laughs].

[lights down]

SCENE TWO.

Setting: Al's workshop: "Carmakers"

[lights up]

Al. Why don'tcha have a seat in the waiting room, and I'll be with you.

Bill. No problem... but the difficulty is a wheel bearing.

Al. I welcome your active interest, but please wait in the waiting room. See that sign over there? Says that only employees are allowed in the work area.

Bill [moves off, sits down and opens a newspaper.]

[Pause]

Al [comes into waiting area where Bill is reading]. It's only the wheel bearing, so you were lucky. I checked the one on the other side and you've had that one done recently. I'll have to press it on. Here's. [hands Bill a piece of paper]

Bill [signing the form] Sounds reasonable. How long will it take?

Al. Can't say.

Bill. I mean an estimate. More or less how long is what I mean.

Al. Can't say.

Bill. Just so I can make some plans if I have to.

Al. Can't say, sir. Everything takes time. Here's the problem. The clutch was put in backwards. There were rocks in the bell housing, too. Some bolts sheared off, probably because whoever

did the clutch -- it wasn't too old, but it's ruined -- put in the saddle, which holds up the transmission, wrong and it's been twisted because of the angle. Got it?

Bill. I think so.

Al. But if y'all have to go out, you can leave me a phone number or something on account if you prefer.

Bill. OK, I will. Going out for dinner. Here's the restaurant's phone number. See you in a bit.

[*Bill* goes outside, hails a taxi] [lights down; pause]

SCENE THREE

[lights up]

[*Bill* hails taxi]

Bill. Take me to a Al's garage, his workshop.

Taxi driver. Wherezat?

Bill. Al's service station. Also called Carmakers". Car repairs, all that.

Taxi driver. Heard of it, quite a bit, yes sir, but haven't been there in a long time.

Bill. I was just there today.

Taxi driver. You may have been there but not Al. He disappeared more than a year ago.

Bill. Can't be.

Taxi driver. After working on a car, Al always took it out for a test drive. One day he took the car he was working on out as usual. The car returned but Al never did. Since then, guys like you have claimed to see Al, but other station attendees swear he's been gone. Cars taken to Al were ready within hours, always left just outside Al's station where yours'll be when we arrive.

Bill. That's quite a story.

Taxi driver. And not all of it, by a long shot. Every once in a while, someone claims to have had a fleeting glimpse of Al, in a grocery or drugstore, or wherever. Some of these witnesses have formed a group, call themselves "the Elves". But you're the first person to claim that Al's actually worked on his car!

Bill. The Elves. And the carmaker. Sounds vaguely familiar.

Taxi driver; They meet periodically at swap meets, where they rent a table and sell photographs of Al... like this one [takes a photo from his pocket]

Bill. But this is a photo of Al with a dog... good picture, though. His dog? May I have it?

Taxi driver. Sure. Yes, it used to be the workshop dog. Al of the elves sell these photos. Another group also sells them. But their interest is the dog. They're animal worshippers.

Bill. In LA where I'm from there are all kinds of strange people. Groups worship all kinds of beings: dogs, cats, condors, parrots.

Taxi driver. Show them this photo, then. No charge by the way.

Bill. I will. Thanks! They may make Al into a prophet of one of their religions. Think of it!

Taxi driver. I'm thinking of it. When d'ya go home?

Bill. Tomorrow morning if all goes well.

Taxi driver. Anyway, we've arrived. That your car in front of the shop?

Bill. Sure is. Thanks. [gives him a bill] Here...keep the change.

[pause, gets into his car] Did I say I don't like Phoenix. I don't. Too little history, too many ghosts. {sound of car starting}

THE END

