

The Last Stop

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by
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Abstract

My novella is set in the taxi industry. Its main characters are a wealthy taxi owner, a poor taxi driver from another African country, and the taxi driver's girlfriend. The story is partly a ghost story and partly crime fiction, it combines gritty realism with magical elements. It shows what happens between people in times of taxi violence. As the plot develops, the driver finds out that his boss is sleeping with his girlfriend. In revenge, the boss bribes some policemen to arrest the driver and beat him, and he dies in the police cells. But it turns out that the detective investigating the driver's death is not quite impartial, nor is he of this world only.

1.

Macko woke. It was already light outside. He always woke up very early so that he could arrive at the taxi rank and register his taxi for the day's trips. He noticed that Rose was still snoring. He knew when Rose woke up, she would wake him. He picked up his cellphone and pressed its buttons. He stared at the screen and made his eyes small. Its light struck his retina. He took it, and placed it aside. It was cold and he pulled the blankets up and covered his head. He fell asleep.

Macko woke again. Abruptly this time. The voice next to him saying, "In the name of Jesus! In the name of Jesus! In the name of Jesus!" It was the voice of Rose. At first Macko thought he was just dreaming. He blinked. The words continued, more insistent: "In the name of Jesus! In the name of Jesus! In the name of Jesus!" Macko sat bolt upright. He was scared. Questions flooded his mind. Before he could ask them there was a "Bang!" on the window of the bedroom. Macko and Rose turned the heads at the same time. They stared at the dark window pane. The room was silent again. Macko felt a shudder rise up from his stomach. His hands shook. He stared at the corrugated iron roof.

"I dreamt a giant thing that I couldn't really see well was entering the house. It came in and stirred at the water in the bucket. As I approached it, it lifted the bucket to sprinkle me with that water that suddenly seemed to boil," Rose said with teary eyes.

Macko shook his head not knowing how to answer.

Rose continued, "When I started crying it flew to the window and disappeared." Macko pressed his hands together to stop them shaking. He didn't want Rose to know he was afraid. As soon as he felt calmer he pulled Rose towards him under the blankets. They lay holding each other tight. Only their breath was heard, there was no talk.

Macko's breathing was slow and loud. He was getting sleepy. Rose looked at him, and touched his face, "Babe, wake up!"

Macko jumped at the touch of her hand. He blinked with reddish eyes. "I am awake!" Macko answered, getting out of bed. He stood on the cold floor in his Scotch boxer leopard skin print vest. His machine was erect, making it obvious that he wanted to get a taste of Rose's pretty pink vagina.

“It is nearly eight o’clock. Don’t take long at the funeral. Remember the road to Vereeniging is very long and it’s you who is taking the first load tomorrow.” That was a serious Rose, ignoring Macko’s big machine.

“Yes, I know. You, you like to tell me the things that I already know,” Macko said briskly, barely concealing the annoyance in his voice. As he was about to leave the bedroom he saw the water in the bucket moving. Small ripples ran along the surface as if it had been stirred. Macko stopped and stared into the bucket. “Does this mean there was something stirring the water in this room?” Macko asked himself as he walked through to the kitchen. His head suddenly felt cloudy, as if it was also being stirred. He knocked into the counter in the kitchen, his balance momentarily lost. He was not feeling himself at all.

“Please, don’t break my things!” said Rose from the bedroom. “May you tell me, why are you supposed to attend that child’s funeral?”

Macko gripped the counter and stood breathing for a second before he answered. “That poor child was knocked down by a taxi when taxis were fighting near Sasolburg, because of the taxis violence, and it’s me who called the police to that incident. I should attend her funeral,” Macko said. He filled the kettle. While waiting for it to boil, he headed outside. The morning air hit him. He was still only wearing his Scotch boxer shorts and leopard skin vest and he flinched against the cold. Moving quickly, he checked if his taxi was still in the good condition he’d left it in the night before. He stretched his body under the early morning sun’s weak rays. Getting no warmth, he returned to the kitchen. He poured the boiling water in the washing basin, then mixed in the cold water. He washed in the kitchen where it was warmer than other rooms. The sun’s rays streamed through the window. They warmed the kitchen first, before the bedroom, and other room. He started with his ace. Then on to the stomach and the back. He then washed his bald head. Then the waist and on to the feet. He quickly dried himself and got out of the basin. Smearred his body with body lotion. He shivered, his skin pricking like the skin of a chicken. He went to the door and threw the water outside, then went to the bedroom, put down the basin and dressed hurriedly. He made himself a soft porridge that he emptied into a bowl and went outside. He unlocked his taxi, took a seat and started the ignition. He drank his soft porridge. The taxi got warm. He then returned to the house, dropping the dish in the sink. In the bedroom he found Rose sleeping. He shook his head, “This was the person telling me to wake up, look at her!” He put on his hat. He left the bedroom, pulled the front door shut and was out of the house. He started the taxi and set off. In his rearview mirror he saw a small puppy chasing after him, barking. He

hit the road, the puppy in tow until finally it tired near the corner. He watch the puppy walk back only to set off again after another car.

On the side of the road, passengers tried to stop Macko but he just passed them. He was not stopping at the stop signs either.

“If I can at least arrive before they go to the grave,” Macko was speaking aloud. At the curve in the road Macko saw the funeral procession leaving the Church yard, to the cemetery. He immediately joined the line of mourners heading to the graveside. Like the other cars and taxi’s in the procession, he flicked on his parking lights. Finally they arrived at the cemetery.

“With so many people its hard to believe it is the funeral of a child, and equally hard to believe it is during the week,” Macko said to himself as he is slowed his taxi. He joined the other mourners getting out of their cars. Old men took the coffin out of the hearse. There was weeping among the women. They walked slowly to the grave and gathered around it. The pastor started the service with a prayer. There was a hymn. The family was asked to pour the soil in the grave then other mourners were given an opportunity to do so. Men showed themselves. Women went back. Weak men also went back. Those who wore white suits and light clothes also went back. Macko also went back. He was stopped by a figure. A man. His face was cast in shadow despite the sunlight. Macko blinked, trying to make out his features. For a moment he thought it might be one of the drivers from a rival taxi association and he felt his body tense, his eyes casting around. The other mourners were half way across the cemetery, walking in small clusters, occasionally a figure alone, lost in grief. It was just Macko and the man. He had no choice. He stepped forward to get a better view of his face, saw it twist – not so much a grimace as a wavering – and then rush into focus. It was the detective investigating the boy’s death. Macko had talked to him briefly at the scene. Now he smiled even though he didn’t particularly want to talk to the man – he had his routes to get to.

“Sir!” said the detective, offering his hand to greet Macko.

“Good morning, sir,” Macko replied quietly. He reached out his hand in response, gripped the detective’s outstretched hand then pulled back immediately, surprised by how cold it was, cold and limp, almost lifeless. “I’m sorry...” he started to say. He didn’t want the man to think he was rude or uncooperative. He couldn’t say what had come over him. Maybe it was tiredness or the stress of the funeral? The detective seemed unfazed. He spoke in a clear, urgent voice that seemed somehow familiar to Macko – more familiar than it should be considering the brevity of their first meeting. He asked Macko to wait for him. There were a few things he needed to take care of but it was important that they spoke before Macko left.

“I need to ask you some questions as you said you saw everything,” he said, grabbing hold of Macko’s arm as if to stress the importance. “I won’t be long. Please wait for me.” With that he turned and walked, following the path the other mourners had taken towards the car park.

Macko stood and watched him go. He blinked against the glare, lifted his hand to shield his eyes from the sun. When he looked again the man had vanished. He tried to find him. Cast his eyes around the cemetery. Walked a few steps forward to get a better view of the parking area and looked from face to face. He watched the last of the mourners pay their respects to the parents of the dead boy then climb into their vehicles. The detective was nowhere to be seen. Had he really seen him? wondered Macko. He stood a while until the last car left. Now he was alone in the cemetery except for a few lone mourners who had come to pay respects to their dead. He paced up and down waiting. He remembered the detective’s words, the urgency in his voice. He folded his arms and rocked on his heels. Ten minutes passed and then fifteen. He was going to be late. He paced some more in agitation. He was about to leave when he thought he heard something. The sound seemed to come from somewhere below him. He stopped and looked down. He stared at the fresh sand on the grave. After some time it seemed to Macko that the soil had begun to rise and fall slowly. First he thought it was just his eyes. He rubbed them quickly. He was probably suffering from a lack of sleep. The soil was still falling, faster now. He looked around at the scattering of mourners around distant graves. Could anyone else see what he was seeing? He tried to shout, to get their attention. He opened his mouth but nothing came out. He couldn’t move, couldn’t cry out, couldn’t take air into his lungs. He was frozen like that for what seemed like forever. Finally he felt a hot trickle down his leg. It was piss. He had pissed himself. The realisation knocked him out of his stupor. He stepped back, stumbling on the dry dirt. Started to run then tripped, struggling to keep his footing. Something had blocked him. He stopped, haltingly looked down and saw two shoes. He lifted up his head to see the man’s face but the legs didn’t seem to end. All he saw were dusty shoes and then long, unending brown trousers.

He didn’t wait any longer. He spun around and started to run. He could see his taxi in the distance. He ran blindly. The scattering of other visitors in the cemetery lifted their heads from the graves as he passed. He didn’t stop. He reached his taxi, throwing himself against the door. Finally safe behind the wheel, he breathed. He was out of harm's way in his taxi. Everything was fine, familiar. He turned the key in the ignition, shifted the gear from neutral to first, and pressed the accelerator. The handbrake was down but the car didn’t move. It made no sense. And he pressed the accelerator harder. The wheels spun and black clouds of

smoke erupted from the exhaust. Macko looked out the window. He now had the attention of everyone at the cemetery. At the main gate at the edge of the compound, the guard started towards him. He tried again. Again nothing. He was about to give up, when his taxi lurched forward. He accelerated, breathed deeply and shook his head. Maybe he had imagined it?

Macko heard a sound – something moving. He looked through the rearview mirror. There was no one. He looked forward and then back again. He shivered when he saw a moving shadow. It suddenly disappeared.

People flooded the sidewalk, waiting for a taxi. It was dense with the heat of them, clustered in large groups but speaking in quiet voices. Among them was a middle aged lady. Elegant, formally dressed as if for church or a funeral. Her makeup was perfect. She took a small portable mirror out of her purse and looked at herself. Those around her paid no attention. They touched her as they passed on but didn't feel her. Didn't see her. As Macko approached in his taxi, his eyes were on her.

As he drew nearer, she stepped forward, pushed to the front, raised her hand, hid the thumb, showing only four fingers to indicate her destination. There were only three seats left. She took the last space at the back, leaving two seats behind the driver's seat. She pushed her way down the narrow passage, head slightly bent. Smoothed her skirt and sat down. The stop had interrupted the flow of the conversation. People were laughing aloud when the taxi door opened but now they were silent. They waited for the driver to pull off again before they continued their conversations.

"I am telling you, I am very tired. That kid's funeral in the morning was very terrible for me. I think that kid is after me," said Macko.

The passengers clicked their tongues in sympathy.

The taxi stopped to drop a man at his destination. It picked up an old man. Macko, waited for him to get comfortable. He kept glancing in the rearview mirror.

"Mama, where are you going?" he asked the middle aged lady.

She didn't reply.

"Mama! Where are you going?" he said again.

As she was about to answer him, moving her lips, another passenger waved him down from the sidewalk. Once he had stopped, he looked into the mirror again. His eyes were directly on the lady.

“Please, your destination.”

“I am going to the Post Office, my child,” the old man replied.

“I am not talking to you.” There was irritation in his voice.

“Are you asking me, grootman? I am going to Shoprite.” A passenger at the back answered.

“I am also not talking to you!” he said. He was looking in the mirror again. The beautiful middle aged lady had vanished. He blinked and the taxi pitched to the left. The passengers let out a cry in unison. They clicked their tongues.

“My grootman, who are you speaking with?”

The old woman clapped hands once and said, “Did they bewitch you, you child?” Macko righted the wheel. He shifted in his seat. He set off again, quicker this time despite the protests. He dropped the passengers at their different stops. He weaved through the traffic, jumping lanes. He dropped the final two passengers at their destinations. The taxi was empty. He sat awhile, hands still on the wheel. He breathed deeply.

After counting his money, he set off again, staring ahead through the windscreen. Suddenly there was someone right in front of him - the woman he had previously seen in his taxi. She stepped forward and raised her hand exactly as before, the same gesture, showing only four fingers to indicate her destination, the same destination. Macko blinked. He stared at her. Something was wrong. Something was happening. It was the same woman, her face was the same, her bright eyes and tight lips, but her body was transforming. Macko was staring at a man. Shit, it was a police man. His jaw dropped. His foot slid with it, the taxi revved forward. Macko’s eyes grew wide, his mouth limp. He turned the steering wheel just in time and the tyres skidded on the tar. The taxi lurched towards the sidewalk. He tried to hit the brakes but the momentum thrust him forward, onto the gearshift. The taxi slid, slamming before flipping up and slamming down again, metal on tar, a loud bang and then silence.

Slowly the door opened and Macko got out. He was sweating, his eyes dazed but he wasn’t injured, not even a scratch. He dusted himself off, turned back to his taxi, a pile of mangled metal. A crowd had started to gather. The smell of smoke and the sounds of sirens, louder and louder. The police man vanished. There was a young girl. She pushed her way to the front. She said his name softly and looked right in his eyes. Their eyes met and a young girl whispered the words, “You must go home, to the country of your forefathers. Otherwise you are going to die.”

The young girl also vanished. Macko was alone, holding his head.

2.

Macko was driving so slowly he was holding up the traffic behind him. There was a black Jeep directly on his tail-lights. The driver was obviously in a hurry. He had already overtaken the seven-car deep backlog that had built up behind Macko. Still, Macko held his ground, refusing to make way for the jeep. The oncoming traffic was heavy and finally its driver had no choice but to decrease speed. He flashed his lights, but Macko deliberately ignored the signal. He watched in the rearview mirror as the jeep swerved out of its lane, before being forced back by the oncoming traffic. The driver was taking chances. The road was narrow and filled this sharp turns and curves. Macko pulled his eyes away from the mirror and focused them back on the side of the road, scanning for passengers and hooting loudly to attract commuters. The oncoming traffic had started to thin and behind him the jeep again tried to overtake.

“All the taxi drivers are the devils. They won’t change at all!” The jeep driver shouted through his open window, as he sped past Macko. He had almost passed when another taxi appeared from around a bend in the oncoming lane. Its driver, seeing the jeep, started to brake then eased off, obviously realising he was travelling too fast. Instead of braking, he loosened the throttle, put his foot flat down on the accelerator, hit his hooter and flicked his lights at the oncoming jeep. As the taxi sped towards it, Macko could see the faces of the commuters through the window, church mothers frozen in their Sunday attire, mouths moving, probably in prayer, others with their hands on their heads, faces locked in silent screams.

“See, see those with the luxury cars. They think they are better than us, the taxi drivers,” Macko said to noJeep one. He didn’t bother to decrease his speed for the Jeep to return to its correct lane. Behind Macko, a mother travelling with her two children closed her eyes and clasped onto her children’s arms as if that might somehow protect them. The children struggled free and continued with their games on the seat, unaware of any danger. At the last minute the taxi in the opposite lane decreased his speed and swerved slightly onto the shoulder of the road to give the Jeep the space it needed. It flew past with only seconds to spare.

“But my brother you are driving shit for us,” said the mother, her face flushed red with fear.

Macko's frowning face showed that he was about to respond with shit in his mouth, but then he glanced in the rear mirror and saw the mother's face, the flush of fear and hurt in her eyes and how she held onto her children very tightly. Macko slowly calmed down. "Please forgive me, mama." He started to explain the difficulties he faced, the numbers the owner of his taxi demanded.

"Please don't make us to suffer just because the owner of your taxi treats you badly," said the woman. "We don't have anything to do with what is between you. We are not guilty at all," the mother had started to cry and then seeing their mother crying, the children began to cry too. The sounds of soft sobbing filled the taxi and Macko scratched his head.

"Eish," he nodded, seeing that the woman spoke the truth.

"Now, see how the windows of this car are cracked. We are not safe at all!" the mother said while trying to comfort her children.

Macko didn't say anything. He shook his head, pushing away the soft "kiri kiri kiri," sound that came from somewhere below the wheel. He accelerated and pumped the hooter to look for more passengers.

Just like the other taxis on the road, Macko was riding his hooter hard. He was really pumping it. It was always quiet on the roads at this time of month. Passengers didn't have money for taxi fare. The taxis drove empty, especially on Thursdays when most people chose to walk, regardless of the distance. They were saving what little money they had left for the essentials – things like bread, sugar, tea.

"Don't you want to ride?" Macko shouted at a young sister. The girl wore a neatly ironed jean skirt, with a blue flowered blouse, formal shoes, with a handbag on her shoulder. Her hair was short, but dyed a maroon colour. Her light skin matched the dye. From her outfit Macko was certain she was going to town.

The sister shook her head.

"I know you are going to town. You can only pay me a half of your fare. Only five?" "Brother, please leave me alone!" This was a sister with rudeness. She focussed her eyes forward, continued to walk towards the road that led to town.

Every person has their own challenges, thought Macko.

"Ag sies, I was just helping you out. I know you girls. By the time that you arrive in town you will have dirt on your feet. There's no one who is going to look at you."

But the sister waved her hand and continued with her walking.

“I was just trying to help her, mother,” Macko said, glancing back at the woman who was still clutching her children. She answered him with a black look and Macko sighed then increased the volume on his CD player. Traditional Gospel music blared from the speakers.

Despite the volume of the music, the whistle was still audible. It was a sharp sound that broke through the gospel’s melody and made Macko jump. He hit brakes and the taxi dragged to a stop, scraping along the tar and sending up clouds of dark smoke from the front tyres. The car behind him skidded to a halt. Glancing back into his rear-view mirror, Macko saw the occupants of the truck were an old couple. He watched the driver take off his eye glasses and open his door. He was shouting, “Hey, you! Is it your mother who gave you the driving lessons? You almost killed us.”

The old woman followed him out, “Please let him go, my husband. Let us go. God will deal with him!”

Macko stared at the old people, uncertain how to respond. He put his elbow on the open window of his taxi and leaned out. Despite the hour, everything suddenly looked very bright to Macko and he blinked against the glare. His head had started to pound, a strange, hollow “kutu kutu! Kutu kutu!” like the rhythmic beats of traditional drums. He did not know what was happening. He tried to open his eyes wide like a dizzy person. “Kutu kutu! Kutu kutu!”

“Pull a move like that again and you will hate the day you were born!” said the old man, making a snapping gesture with his hand as if it held a sjambok. The old woman grabbed at her husband, snaring him by his trousers and pulling him back to their vehicle. They got in their pickup truck. The old man was swearing all the way. Not all the words of the old man reached Macko’s ears, but Macko could tell by the tone that they were fighting words. He noted the rust that covered the old corrugated iron on the back of the truck. Behind them other drivers were pressing their hooters, filling the air with a din that swallowed up the man’s voice. A few taxi drivers had their hands out of their taxis, waving them at the old man.

“Fok maan! This is not your road!”

“You, old man, you are trouble. Please stop driving, you are going to kill us,” shouted another driver with his head out the window of his taxi.

The old man threw up his hand at them. He started the ignition of his truck. The motor sputtered then lurched and died. It took a few attempts before the engine took. Finally it started. It pulled off, turned at the corner with a trail of smoke billowing behind it. Black smoke obscured the view for a moment. By the time it evaporated the truck was gone.

“Hey, my broer. An old man gave you hard time,” said Dodo, a taxi marshal at the local taxi rank, while getting into the taxi.

“Hey, my broer, today is not my day. I am telling you the truth!” Macko was shaking his head.

Dodo laughed, “What is wrong, my dog?”

“I thought you were a passenger, or you are going to pay me today?” Macko looked Dodo right in the eyes.

“Before your day gets worse, please leave me right here, I will take another taxi,” said the mother with the children.

“Please wait, my sister. We are already at the town!” Macko said, changing gears.

The mother just kept quiet.

“So, my broer, why is this taxi so bad like this? The windows are cracked. The doors are bent, and are opening hard. The lights on the right side are broken. What is going on?” Dodo asked Macko.

“You really know that I don’t drive local, right?”

“Yes, I am surprised! What is the problem?”

“Yesterday I took the passengers to Vereeniging. Things were very bad there. Many men, and drivers died. Yes, I even don’t want to remember that tragedy. It doesn’t want to leave my head.”

“My dog! What was going on?”

“Nxa!” His eyes were teary.

“Eish, eish, sorry my dog,” Dodo said, holding his gaze then looking down and away. “My broer, Tabola and his friends won’t reach an agreement with the Gauteng Taxi Association. Gauteng taxis come here to Free State carrying passengers, so why shouldn’t they return with a load of the passengers, just like our taxis.”

“This issue is going to kill many people. Yes, I also ask myself, why we on this side go to Gauteng loaded with passengers and still return loaded with passengers, but Gauteng taxis should return empty. Your boss, Mr Tabola is just so stubborn and full of pride,” Dodo shook his head and clapped hands. “Wait, wait, there is a passenger.”

Macko turned to the pavement and saw a bald man, busy with his phone. He hit his hooter to make sure that the man was indeed looking for a taxi. The man glanced at Macko then turned his head and kept walking.

“No, this man doesn’t want to ride with us,” said Macko, taking his hand off the hooter.

Dodo followed Macko's eyes, looked at the man and shook his head, "He's coming, look."

"This person is not willing to go with us."

Dodo also looked at him, "He stopped the car. He is coming, just wait and see."

"You know passengers are so annoying sometimes!" Macko said while tap-tapping with his feet, rising the dust had that gathered there. Dodo quietly opened the window. The man they were waiting for opened the door and got inside. He did not greet anyone. He closed the door of the taxi. All they heard was a disturbing sound, "Qhuuuu!" There was dust. Everyone froze. They kept their eyes closed for a little time. They opened them slowly. Two children cried a lot. The door lock was loose. "This thing does not work," exclaimed the passenger.

"Ag man!" said Dodo. He was already out of the taxi, helping the passenger with the door. Dodo pressed the door, took a screwdriver from his pocket, bent some of the wire and the door managed to lock. He closed it and hopped into the taxi.

Macko didn't say anything. "Kutu kutu! Kutu kutu!" His head was again filled with the rhythmic pounding of a traditional doctor's beats. After a few minutes the drumming against his skull subsided. He turned back very slow. "My sir, what is written next to you?"

That man looked around confused. Finally his eyes settled on a small sign pasted against the metal of the taxi's interior.

"Here?" He pointed. "It is written, 'Notice: Close the door nicely when you enter or leave this taxi. Don't slam the door. Don't be angry at the door. Please, dear passenger.'"

"When you enter the taxi, sir, your eyes should fall directly on this notice because it's right opposite the door, isn't that correct?" asked Macko.

"Yes, it's true, my good sir. It is my mistake, please forgive me," the passenger talked calmly.

"And still, you choose to finish off my taxi even though you can see its current condition?"

"Sir, if you want to leave this taxi, tell me in a polite manner." The anger started mounting from the passenger. "There are many taxis to ride! I am not begging you at all."

Macko wanted to tell the passenger to get out. But when he looked at the money he had made that day he hesitated. He kept quiet. He didn't respond to the man.

After a moment Dodo asked, "So my dog, do you think this feud between long distance taxis will end?"

“I really don’t think so. If Tabola continues to not care about other people’s lives, I will also be dead soon. I almost died yesterday. If you saw that fight, you would understand what I mean. They poured petrol over my taxi, wanting to burn it, while I was inside. Just think!”

The paved streets indicated that they had arrived in town. Macko checked the time on his phone. It was around twenty-four minutes past eleven. It was the time to make money for those who know how to. White men wearing suits and ties holding their suitcases were heading towards the bank. Six comrades wearing their ANC T-shirts with their berets were coming from the municipal offices. Macko drove without paying much attention to his surrounds. He glanced at the beggars fighting for rotten food in the dustbins and waved away the streets kids smoking glue from the pints of milk who asked him for money at the robots. Hobos were also taking advantage of the many robots in the town of Masapong. Further along the street hawkers scattered their products. Police tried to remove them but they kept increasing in numbers. Macko continued, passing women carrying Checkers groceries bags on their way to the taxi rank.

“May you please drop me at the Itshokolele taxi?” said the mother.

“There is tight traffic on that side. We can’t go that side. I am dropping you here,” Macko replied, not waiting for a response from her.

“Taxis are devils!” muttered the mother, gathering up her possessions.

“You should buy your own car!” Macko said, while counting out her change.

The women exited with her children following behind her.

Macko and Dodo were alone in the taxi.

“I am going to Tabola’s office. He should stop this feud between us and the Gauteng Taxi Association,” Macko’s voice was suddenly serious.

“Are you really serious?” Dodo stared at Macko then shook his head. “Count me out. I’m not going there with you. I’m afraid of your boss. Just looking at him puts fear in me.”

“I am serious, man. I am going there right now.”

“Macko,” Dodo lowered his voice, looked his friend straight in the eye. “I advise you to not go there. What you are doing is really dangerous. Or have you forgotten how many people he has killed? They won’t arrest him. He has contacts in the police.”

As always the rank was busy. Taxis making ups and downs. The new and the old ones. Right there some of the taxi rank officials were pushing some old taxi, fully loaded with passengers, to give it a start. Women were selling mealies to the passengers. Braaied and cooked mealies. A young man stood next to them screaming, “R10 two socks!” Taxi

marshals were shouting to call the passengers to their right taxis. At the corner there was a queue of people waiting for the chesa nyama – open fire braaied meat. All kinds of music played from the different taxis. People thronged through the lanes, waving the smoke from the taxis away from their faces.

Further along but still in the rank, there was one quiet place. On the door of the brick built building was written ‘Chairman: Mr M Tabola’. No one played near that office. Even the hawkers kept their distance from the place.

“He knows we are afraid of him and takes advantage of that! I’ve had enough. I am going to him,” Macko opened his door.

“Rather go see him when you are calm. Wait for morning. Please, my dog,” Dodo climbed out the taxi after him, stopped directly in front of him and then bent his legs and folded his hands like a praying person. His Rasta hair coiled on his shoulder.

“It’s not like when he is paying my salary he can do everything he want about me. There he is, going to his office,” Macko pushed past Dodo, and set off towards the office.

“Macko! Please stop that!” Dodo was left on the pavement, staring after him. He stood for a moment then closed Macko’s taxi door and went off to do his work.

Macko entered Tabola’s offices without knocking. Tabola sat at his desk, a plate full of meat and another one with porridge in front of him, a bottle of Coke next to him. He didn’t lift up his head to look at his guest.

“Who are you, not respecting me like this?” he asked, his mouth full of meat.

Macko kept quiet. He sat and watched the man stuff down a fatty mouthful.

“I am asking you who are you?” Tabola said again, while chewing. “What do you want?”

Macko looked at him. As the silence grew he felt the fear take hold of his body. His legs felt weak and beads of sweat burst on his forehead.

Tabola suddenly hit the table, sending the food flying to the ground. He stood up abruptly. He was a big man, taller than Macko whom he now towered over. “I said what do you want?”

“Yesterday I almost died because of you,” Macko spoke slowly.

“It was better for you to die. We wouldn’t recognize that you are dead. You are not important!” Tabola said the words loud enough for anyone in the vicinity to hear.

“Please, stop this feud of taxi owners between us and Gauteng.”

“Who are you to tell me this?” Tabola asked, his face contorting into a frown.

“People are dying because of you. People died because of you. You must start building a peace with other people,” Macko’s eyes were full of tears.

“Get out before I put a bullet in your head!”

“Okay, that is what you trust?”

Tabola took out his gun. He pointed at Macko’s neck. “If you try to disrespect me like this again, I am going to kill you!

He held Macko by the scruff of his shirt collar, pulling him to the door, “Qhuu!”

A small crowd had gathered outside the office, attracted by the commotion inside. They stood whispering amongst themselves, asking what was happening in the office. Dodo stood on the periphery, shaking his head from time to time.

“It is me who is putting food on your table, for you and that slut of yours. If you don’t want to work, just say it!” Tabola knocked Macko on the head. He opened the door and threw Macko outside. The crowd cleared a space and Macko fell down on the concrete, catching himself with his hands. A sudden silence descended on the taxi rank. Even the full taxis waiting to go held still, the drivers watching from their windows. Macko felt heat rising behind his eyes. The traditional drums in Macko’s head returned. They were louder than ever. They filled the whole space, locking Macko in his own world. He covered his ears. He stood slowly, then lurched towards the door where Tabola stood. The other taxi drivers stepped forward, grabbed his arms and pulled him back.

“I told you, my dog,” said Dodo, leaning in and talking softly into his ear.

Tabola scanned the faces in the crowd. He lifted his gun. Shot two bullets up into the sky. Bullet shells bounced off the concrete and echoed. People ran.

3.

Again, Macko wiped the sweat from his forehead. “Ouch, it is very hot,” he said, changing gears, and braking as he approached the hump in the road next to the Tshibollo Senior Secondary School, then accelerating again. He reminded himself he needed to lodge a complaint about the state of the road to the relevant department. But not today. Today all Macko wanted was to get home. He shifted up to third gear then glanced in the rearview mirror to see how many people he still had left to drop off. Three. Two adults and a child who was crying softly to himself. The child caught his eye, staring back at him in the rearview mirror in a way that unnerved Macko. He forced his focus back to the road.

Changed gears, but somehow forgot to press the clutch pedal. The taxi lurched, jolting back and forward. The ignition died. Everything grinding to a stop. He immediately looked behind him. “That baby belongs to whom?” None of the passengers answered. They stared at Macko in surprise. Fine. He let it be. Laughed to ease his discomfort, then looked forward. Behind him he could make out snatches of conversation.

“I respect the foreigners ... sometimes they may make you wonder a lot. Where does this guy see a baby here?”

Macko knew the speaker without needing to look. He recognized the voice followed by a hand clap, then a soft whistle. Mantsha. Everyone in the taxi industry knew the man. “Oh wow, is Macko a foreigner?” A female voice. She was whispering. “He does not show at all, he is very fluent speaking Sesotho, more than us. But yes, if you listen carefully you can tell by his accent that he is not one of us. He is a foreigner,” said Nnini. Another one of Macko's regulars, she was an employee in the sewing industry. Everyone joked. Nnini could sew a piece of clothing while someone was wearing it.

“Please stop gossiping!” said Mantsha. “But we must tell him when he drives a nonsense!”

Macko returned his eyes to the road, started the ignition. It took first time and the engine purred back into action. He glanced back once in the rearview mirror but the child he was sure he had seen was gone. He shook his head vigorously to try to shake out the crying sound that still haunted his ears. He forced his eyes back to the road. After a few blocks the cry in his head totally disappeared. He felt a wash of relief. But it did nothing to cool him. He felt hotter than before. His ears still burned with pieces of the passengers’ conversations. He looked for the water bottle next to his feet but found nothing. He eased his foot off the accelerator and reached down, feeling under the seat. Still nothing. He swallowed his saliva. Wiped his face with his T-shirt. He looked at the dark sweat stain on the shirt, thought of sucking on it, but stopped himself before it touched his mouth.

“Please leave me at short right” said Mantsha. He spoke with his big voice as always.

“Mr Mantsha please be careful out there. This area is well known for the gang called Dihase. They are very notorious and dangerous these days,” Macko said, while counting out loose change for him.

“Ha,” Mantsha snorted, “I was a gangster before them. I can break their knees!” Saying this, he closed the taxi door with all his strength. Mantsha with tough hands capable of panel beating Maluti buses. Even his body said it, short, but well built, with muscles that now rippled in the sun outside. “Go well!”

Macko changed gears, “Mom, where are you going at this time of the day?” he glanced back at the woman.

“After passing the Phekolong Hospital,” Nnini said, pointing with her finger, like they were already near Phekolong Hospital, then waving. “Hei, stop the taxi, there are people wanting a lift!”

“No, during the day, they wave me past, choosing better taxis. It is only now because it is late and there are fewer choices they want me. Let them leave me alone. I am already knocking off. I am just taking you home,” Macko replied, then accelerated. “Do you mind if I smoke?”

“Not at all, you may smoke. My late husband was a great smoker. If Tabola is the one who is taking us home, he doesn’t us ask for our permission.”

Macko lit his cigarette. He pulled on it for a long time, releasing the smoke slowly, like he didn’t want to let it go.

The traffic had thinned and it was getting dark. He began to count the money he had made for the day while he drove. He divided it into three parts. The money for the boss. His own money. The money for the girlfriend he stayed with.

Outside, a group of people raised their hands, trying to stop him, but he just flicked his headlights to show he was done for the day.

“May I please stop at the café and buy some soft drink?” Macko said. Already braking, not caring if he got the permission or not. He pulled up at the side of the road and opened his door then stopped. The café was already closed. “Fuck! What am I going to do with this bloody thirst?”

“Eish, I am really sorry about this, sir.”

“Keep quiet with your pity!” Macko rubbed his head. “I went to Katlehong and fetched water in the morning. There should be some left at home. But I failed to get soft drinks.”

“No! Our bloody government. Just listen, we are fetching water very far from the other towns, but they say we have the better service deliveries.”

“If you could just remember where I should drop you, that would be a great help.” Macko glanced at Nnini through the rearview mirror. He wiped his face again, lifted the handbrake and accelerated. Swallowed saliva several times.

When they arrived at Phekolong Hospital, Macko stopped before Nnini gave him the signal.

“Please go a bit further. You know it is not safe anymore,” Nnini asked.

“You see now. This is what I really don’t want!” Macko turned to the left side of the hospital, then continued to go forward. He was travelling slowly, his window down. His headlights suddenly illuminated a pair of eyes and Macko jumped slightly in his seat. A cat. He stopped the taxi, peering into the dark. “I helped you ‘till here. Go well!”

Nnini paid her fare and left the taxi without saying a word.

Macko waved her off but didn't pull away. He flicked the flicks onto bright and watched the cat. The animal was still staring at Macko and he stared back for a few seconds, hypnotized by the yellow glow. Then he turned quickly, increased the volume on the taxi’s sound system. House music blasted over the speakers. The bass sounded in his stomach and he opened the windows for everyone to hear. He focused on the beats, trying to push the cat out of his mind. Finally he pulled off, pushing down on the accelerator so hard he even scared himself. The road filled with dust that shimmered in the dark. Other cars gave way. Macko overtook those that didn't. He drove like something was pushing him forward. The taxi shook. A red blur in the dark.

Macko arrived home exhausted. He went inside, wiping the sweat off his forehead and calling out his girlfriend’s name. Rose didn't even greet him. She started immediately, complaining about the back door, the handle. Macko sighed, followed her to the door and tried the handle. The door swung free on its hinges, inviting housebreakers. Macko wiped the sweat of his palms on his pants as he walked back to the taxi to fetch his tools. He tried to work on the handle then gave up, deciding he would have to take the whole thing down and install it from scratch. He unscrewed the hinges, swung the heavy wood down onto the ground. Using a screwdriver, he bored into the wood and made new holes for the handle.

Rose stood watching him. Macko glanced up at her while he worked. Her hair was a mess, ruffled up like the feathers of a chicken. Her lipstick slightly smudged. She was wearing a miniskirt. Macko looked at her and felt his penis push against his trousers. He dropped the tools and stood, taking a step towards her. Rose stepped back but he followed her, stepping in close, gently cupping his hands around her arse. She giggled softly and he could see her eyes flare but she pushed him back, straightening her skirt, running her hands through her unruly hair. “Finish and work first and then wash.” Her voice was curt, it cut Macko off from her as she turned and walked away.

After about an hour Macko had done fixing the door. He tested it several times, opening it and closing it like he was welcoming a stream of invisible guests. It had grown dark outside. Through the open door Macko could see clouds forming. The air was heavy. The smell of rain filled his lungs, offering some relief. He collected his tools and walked back

to the taxi, remembering to collect the money he had left earlier, well aware that Rose would expect her share. He returned to the house. Shutting and locking the door against the weather, pleased at his handy work. Then he went straight to the fridge. Shit, nothing drinkable. He slammed it closed, went to the water buckets. Nothing. He held one up, dropped it so it clanged across the floor.

“Rose! Rose! Where are you?” He walked through the house. How was it possible all the water he had collected from Katlehong that morning was gone? “Rose,” he called again. He returned to the kitchen, this time noticed that the water bottle he usually kept filled in the fridge was under the table. He reached for it, held it first to feel if it was cold, then lifted it higher and froze. The bottle was light, empty. He held it to his lips anyway, drained the last sip. His eyes became teary. Leave it, he told himself. He threw the bottle down and walked to the bedroom where Rose was waiting.

Rose’s smile told Macko that she was ready for him. He smiled back and she slowly moved toward him. Their bodies touched, an intimate hug. Macko closed his eyes. Rose’s naked body was warm to him. Rose slowly loosened three buttons of Macko’s T-shirt, then he helped her by taking the T-shirt off. Rose’s hands were on the belt, taking off Macko’s blue jeans. They breathed heavily on each other.

They came very close to one another and felt each other’s touch. They kissed. A sweet smelling perfume rose from Rose and Macko started caressing her, stroking her hair, allowing it to pass through his fingers and kissing her on the forehead, down to the neck, and the shoulders, moving slowly as if they had all the time to do this. Rose started moaning softly as she felt these wonderful touches. Macko then touched her nipples very tenderly, then sucked them. Rose’s moaning grew louder. Macko then went up and gave her a peck on the lips and she moved closer to him. He heard her voice inside of him saying, “Go on.” His boxers were down. He moved closer to her and put his arms strongly around her, kissing her slowly, sucking her lips like a lollipop. His body reacted, feeling the warmth and smoothness of his girlfriend’s skin. He touched her wet vagina. The penis was up and hard. He came closer to her and kissed her hard until she started making the ‘ahh ahh’ sounds, moaning. He then lifted her one leg up and slowly penetrated her. “Yes babe!” moaned Rose. “Harder, please, please” Macko pushed it harder and quicker. Her moaning was very loud. He groaned. He took his penis out. Rose bent down, slowly sucked it. Macko touched her head, brushing her hair. Rose stopped. Macko lifted her to the bed. She opened her legs. Macko put it in. Missionary sex position. “Ahh, ahh! Ahh Ahh!” she moaned louder than before. The moaning made him push harder. The bed was shaking. She gripped Macko’s body with her

legs, then loosened a bit, opening her legs wider. They flipped over. Doggy style. The sound of the bed was getting too loud. Macko pushed very hard. “Ahh, fuck me! Fuck this pussy!” Rose screamed and moaned at the same time. He breathed very fast, roaring like a hungry lion seeing its prey.

He slept with Rose on his chest. Sweat dripped off their bodies, wetting the sheets around them.

Macko was woken by the thunder shaking the corrugated iron roof. Bright streaks of lightning illuminated Rose's naked body. He covered her with a blanket and stood up. His thirst had returned, now more than just a tightness in his throat, it seemed to grip his whole body. He felt as if he hadn't had water in weeks. He ran his tongue over his lips, glanced at Rose sleeping then left the room. Macko opened the back door, again admiring his handiwork. The lightning had stopped and the thunder was a distant roll. He turned and went back to the kitchen, fetched a cup from the shelf and headed out. He was only wearing his underpants but it didn't stop him. Who would be out in the rain at this time of night? He stood under the rain. He felt it splash against his head, wash down his face, momentarily blinding him, stream down his body. He opened his mouth and let the rain fill it. He swallowed mouthfuls of water. He lifted the cup to fill it. He raised it, spilling down his arm. He almost tripped, righted himself and headed towards the door. He pulled the handle but the door stayed stuck. He struggled with it – he had just fixed it, how could the handle have jammed again so soon? He made the decision to go around to the front. Set off, then stopped. A bolt of lightning lit up the sky. A man, standing to the right of his taxi. His first thought was car thieves, mini bus taxis were an easy sale for them. Adrenalin flooded his system. He started to run but his bare feet slipped. The man stepped forward. He was smartly dressed, old fashioned clothes, the trousers and jacket and hat, Macko remembered from his grandfather. He seemed barely wet, as though the water struck against him then streamed off. “Actually what do you want?” Macko heard his voice shake. His feet seemed to sink down into the mud.

“You are needed in Mozambique. Your grandfather passed away. You should go to put together and take care of his inheritance. That inheritance now belongs to you. You must go and take care of all your relatives.” The man spoke slowly. His lips seemed to take the shape of each word that passed them. After he spoke, the man turned and disappeared into the black night.

“Macko! Macko! Is that you?” Rose sat up in bed. “Please baby, fetch me some water. I'm so thirsty.”

Macko stopped, glanced outside the window. The cup was lying in the mud where he dropped it. The rain had stopped. The man was nowhere to be seen.

4.

The taxi owners were collected together outside, taking cover in the shadow of their office wall, standing then sitting, shifting in their seats and checking their watches. From time to time, one of them would rise; take a few steps, as if to leave, only to return again after checking to see if their taxis were full yet. Others stood, stretched their bodies, then sat down heavily again. They had long ago lost interest in playing morabaraba and craft games which had occupied them from that morning. Next to them stood four empty bottles of Coke.

Eventually some of them gave up, seeing no hope of any more commuters, they bid the others farewell and departed in their empty vehicles. “See you tomorrow, gents,” said Tshomane, already inside a taxi. He was average height. And light in complexion. Known to be stubborn, a difficult man who liked to fight. His head was shone and his beard, sheared clean. He rubbed his chin and settled in the seat, took his gun out the make-shift holster of his trouser’s waist and concealed it under his chair before leaning his head out the window. “Macko, my little brother. Pass my greetings to your boss,” he said, raising his voice so it carried over the Sesotho music blaring at full volume from the taxi’s speaker system. “But tell him this thing of us going to Qwaqwa and coming with an empty load is not good.” He watched as his colleagues raised their hands, making a sharp sign with their fingers, then drove off.

Behind him the taxi marshals’ voices echoed, “Here is for Bethlehem!” “That one is for Harrismith!” “Here is for QwaQwa!” “That one is for Bergville!” The drivers paid little attention. They were buried in their passenger lists. They wanted to try to arrive at their destination before it was late, but already they knew they were in for a long wait. There were few passengers and too many taxis. The sun was about to set. People were packing their stuff. Hawkers filled bags with unsold produce. Others pushed trolleys still loaded with stock.

By five o’clock, the sun was low and the taxi owners started to talk.

“The passengers are not many, let’s put together those who are going to Harrismith, QwaQwa and Bergville,” said one, scratching his big stomach.

The driver who was supposed to take the commuters to Bergville said, “Huh? Do you think this thing of combining the passengers of Bergville and QwaQwa will work? They

differ too much,” he shook his head, while scratching his face, as if his newly grown beard had started to itch. After some discussion, they ended up agreeing.

Macko listened to them for a while then returned to his. The door stood open welcoming passengers that did not come. Inside it was quiet. The few commuters for QwaQwa were already seated.

“I pray to God to help to see this taxi going,” said one of the passengers. He was seated up front, his hands folded like he was praying. The other passengers in the minivan nodded. They stared out the window; their eyes following Macko as he did his ups and downs. He was running, weaving through the stationary taxis collecting passengers headed to Harrismith and Bergville. Already two passengers headed to Harrismith were approaching. They climbed in, speaking loudly in IsiZulu. Behind them, four passengers from the Bergville’s taxi also arrived, slinging their bags through the open door. The QwaQwa passengers made room for them, hearing the anger in their voices.

“Yes. You are right, sir,” responded an old man from the back. “It is like there is a fight in here. If we could just arrive home.”

“Yes, it’s like things will be bad. When you are used to these things it’s bad,” another Sotho passenger added in a whisper.

Finally all the new arrivals were seated. Macko climbed into the driver’s seat and closed the door.

“Bathini labantu? Kuncono ukuhlezi unabanye abantu abangamaZulu. Ezinye izizwe lezi! Kubukeka sengathi bangabokufika bonke lapha eMzansi,” said a Zulu man, who had taken a seat next to a SeSotho family.

“Kunjalo, bayanyanyisa. Bayekele kanjalo kodwa,” added one behind him, trying to pack his bags in amongst the luggage of the Sesotho travelers.

The complaining stopped. The passengers were all seated, they were going home. Macko was in his seat up front. Was he going to QwaQwa or Bergville? He would see on the road. For now the important thing was to get moving. He turned the key and placed his hands on the wheel. He hit the accelerator and started to turn the wheel then stopped. Something was stopping him. To Macko it felt like someone was holding their hands over his. Clasp them tight so he couldn’t move them. He struggled against the invisible hands. Behind him the passengers were shifting in their seats. They could see the beads of sweat that collected on his head. They could see him writhing. To them it must have looked like he was fighting some kind of internal battle, as if half of him wanted to go but some other part held him back. Finally, the hands released him. His hands flew up from the wheel. He sat breathing, clasped

them into fists, bent and flexed his fingers as if trying to understand what had paralyzed them. Finally he wiped his forehead with one hand, turned back briefly to the passengers, tried to make it seem like he was just stretching, preparing his body for the long ride ahead.

Macko put his hands on the wheel again and blinked his eyes. It was strangely hazy in the taxi. Things were misty as they are on long rides when the cold from outside meets the heat of everyone breathing. Suddenly the haze disappeared. Macko reached for a cloth to wipe the windscreen, confused by the haze that obscured his vision. As he ran the cloth across the glass, wiping in circles, he heard a voice. "You are needed at home. No one is taking care of your grandfather's inheritance. The inheritance is being wasted." The voice was soft but urgent. It reached Macko's ears like wind blowing through the open window of a moving vehicle. But the taxi was still stationary.

Macko jumped. "Who the hell is that?" his voice was edged with panic.

The passengers behind him started to grumble. Had their driver lost his mind? First they thought he was talking on his cellphone but then he turned towards them, his eye fired with accusations.

The passenger next to Macko shook his head in disgust. He took out his headsets and put them in his ears. He turned up the volume and the sounds of his hip hop music filled the taxi. Macko stared at him, as if he believed he was the one who had spoken. He leaned over and shook the man's shoulder, then slowly bent his hand down to show him to decrease the volume. The man didn't move and for a moment things were tense in the taxi. Finally the passenger switched off his music and pulled the earplugs out of his ears. The taxi was quiet again. Macko revved the engine and finally pulled the taxi out of the rank. The passengers quieted down, happy to be moving at last.

Traffic was tight but Macko knew the roads of Gauteng like the back of his hands and found his way through. He entered this road and exited with that road. He entered that road and exited with this road. He arrived at the petrol station. It was packed with many cars. All the lanes were full and cars queued behind each other. Macko waited a little. He saw a free pump and veered towards it. He stopped. There was no petrol attendant to help him. He looked at the dashboard. The clock read 6 am. He softly hit it several times with his first. It did nothing except make the numbers blink. Macko sat for a while staring at the 6am. He felt like he was dreaming. He shook his head and reached for his cellphone, trying to get a grasp on reality. He realized that it was later than he thought. It was twenty minutes past seven. The darkness added to the truth of lateness. He opened the door and walked out into the cold night. The smell of petrol filled his nostrils and made his head spin more. He crossed the

concrete to the pump. He tried to pull the handle that operated the pumps nozzle but it was locked. Again, he felt frustration at having his hands tied, unable to perform the action he required. Finally he let go. He kicked at the pump. “Sir! Pass me your key, time has gone!” he shouted to an attendant filling up a car across the way from him. The petrol attendant looked at Macko, shrugged as if to say, let him serve himself if he wants to, and threw the key in his direction.

Macko looked at it flying towards him through the sky. He stared without blinking. His eyes grew wide. It was as if the key transformed mid-flight, it grew feathers and wings, a tiny head. He saw eyes. Eyes with a fire in them. The eyes were beaming straight into him. He started to back away, took two steps then jumped side ways and then ran toward the taxi. He got in quickly, started the ignition, pressed the accelerator. It made noise. There was a smell of tar eating a tyre. He paid no attention to the passengers’ grumbles behind him. He headed for another petrol station in the vicinity. He was forced into a long queue. He kept hitting his head with his hand when he realised that the cars in front of him were not there for petrol only, but also to pump the tyres, to have windscreens washed, to have oil.

“Eish, you may wonder why these people were not pumping their tyres and washing windscreens during the day,” Macko said that while checking and rechecking his cellphone’s clock. Behind him the Zulu passengers were speaking in loud voices. They sounded unhappy to Macko but neither he nor the other Sesotho passengers understood the words.

Finally Macko’s taxi made its way to the front of the queue. He opened the door and climbed out. He fetched the air pump while the attendant filled his tank. He kneeled next to the tyre and felt the pump twist in his hand as the pipe swelled with air. He went from tyre to tyre, each time kneeling to fill them. He asked for oil and for the windscreen to be washed. He went inside the shop and came back with three big cans of Red Bull. He quickly drank two of them, throwing his head back and feeling the sweet liquid in his throat, while the car was being attended to. The after-taste reminded him of petrol. When he finished drinking he put the cans down instead of throwing them in the dustbin. The petrol attendant who was helping him looked at him once and pointed to the dustbin. Macko sighed and bent to collect his cans.

As he approached the dustbin he heard the noise of crying. It rose softly but steadily and filled the air like a bad smell. Macko looked around, a child he thought, maybe one of the street children that populate Johannesburg’s streets. No, the sound was more than one voice. He kicked at the dustbin and the noise of the cry increased. For a moment he thought he heard Rose’s voice amongst them. He stepped away, turned and looked behind him. The

petrol attendant was staring at him. He lifted a hand and pointed a finger in his direction. Unable to stop himself, Macko approached the dustbin. Fear hit him. He stretched his neck, ready to run. One side of his heart wanted to open it, another side wanted to leave the dustbin, to get into his taxi and leave the petrol station far behind him. He finally lifted the handle with closed eyes, shaking hands. When he forced his eyes open there was nothing. The bin was empty, not even a piece of paper. He stared into its abyss. The metal bottom was corroding. It smelled faintly of sour milk. He dropped the Red Bull cans next to the bin. Ignored the petrol attendant's shouts and climbed into his taxi. The passengers were waiting for him. He started the ignition without saying anything.

“Sir, will we get where we are going?” one of the Sothos asked. No one answered him.

Macko veered the taxi ready for the road. He fastened his seat belt. He knew that during the day the passengers rarely talked to each other. They just wanted to think of arriving. Macko kept curving. He stopped at the robots. The robots of Gauteng cannot be dodged like the robots of the small towns. There are cameras in Gauteng. Macko kept curving, changing gears. Curving with the road. He went down. He went up. He knew the road as he knew himself. He knew where the potholes were, sudden holes in the tar that can cause a disaster to a car. He decreased speed or swerved to avoid them. He left Gauteng and merged into the freeway. He increased his speed. The taxi was really moving. Most of the passengers were sleeping. The passenger next to Macko had put the headsets of his cellphone back in his ears and was snoring. When the taxi swerved to one side, he swerved with it, his body touching the door. When the taxi swerved to the other side, his body swayed towards the driver. Each time the seat belt stopped him from ploughing into Macko.

Macko glanced at him then back at the road, moving his eyes only. One of the passengers was dreaming. Talking aloud. “You are needed home. You should go,” he said while laughing, while in deep sleep. That dream scared Macko. It made Macko to realise that he was also sleeping. He looked back through his rearview mirror. He saw all the sleeping people. He reached down and retrieved the remaining can of Red Bull. He quickly drank it. He tried to calm himself.

“Let me just turn on this radio. Maybe it will help me,” Macko thought as his hand moved down, pressing the buttons of the radio. He couldn't find a station. The radio hissed and popped. Finally he caught something. He twiddled the knobs to catch the signal. The music seemed to come from far away. Not inside the taxi but outside, somewhere in the dark night. “When are you going home? When are you going home? When are you going home?”

a voice sang. The tune was soft and lovely. Macko felt a sudden wash of cold. He hit the off button. It was quiet. He could hear the sound of the wheels on the tar. He could hear his own breath, air moving in and out his lungs. He concentrated on the road.

One of the passengers woke up and asked, "Where are we now?"

Macko jolted at the voice, paused then answered, "Only an hour and twenty minutes." He didn't know if the person who asked the question heard his answer. The taxi was silent. Macko stared ahead at the road. All he could see was the small patch lit by his headlights, the rest was darkness. Macko watched the patch bend and curve. He felt drowsy. He opened the window. Hot air flooded the taxi. The heat surprised him, it was winter. The weather report had said a low of 3 degrees. The road curved, the patch swung, the heat filled his lungs. Suddenly the darkness ahead was broken by flashing blue lights. He leaned forward, strained his eyes. Ahead he could make out a figure on the road, shining a torch. He was suddenly no longer tired. His heart sped up. Was it a road block? The police had clamped down on the taxis since the trouble had started.

His lights illuminated the police officer's face. It was Detective Baile. He slammed brakes and everything went black for a second. The passengers behind him were awake and complaining. Some hit at the chairs. Others hit each other. They were holding their heads in pain. It was, "Itjhuuu!" Others were holding their elbows and waist in pain.

"What is happening now?" one of the passengers asked.

"My goodness!" one of the passengers exclaimed.

Macko opened the door and climbed out. He stood on the tar in the dark. The road ran ahead of him. There was no police car, no blue lights. There was nothing. There was no one. The road was empty. He turned, checked the front of his taxi but found nothing. He took a few steps forward, straining his eyes into the darkness. Then he saw it, a shape moving, just a shadow.

"Baile?" Macko shouted. What did the detective want? Was he following Macko? Was he a suspect in Baile's investigation? Macko had to know. He swallowed his fear and followed the figure. It took him off the road. He was in a field now, moving between tall mielie plants. Every now and again he could see beams of light. He crashed through the mielies, not caring about the crop. Finally the lights disappeared. He was in the field in the dark. The mielie plants stood next to him, silent witnesses. If they knew anything they were not telling.

Macko was about to push forward when he heard a voice from the road.

He turned and headed back. The passengers had climbed out the taxi. One of them walked forward, “Hehe, sir! Take us home before we beat you now!”

Macko walked towards them. He was dirty. Stalks and husks from the mielies clung to his legs. “Forgive me please, sirs! I don’t know what is happening,” Macko said, breathing so heavily. Macko shook the stalks and husks off his pants, climbed inside the taxi. The passengers were still grumbling. No one slept again. They all looked at the road. They arrived at Harrismith. He dropped two passengers there.

Bergville and Qwaqwa next? Macko was supposed to find a solution. “Sirs, you have to share yourselves. We are going to Qwaqwa or Bergville?” Macko asked.

“Uthini lomontu?” one of the Zulus angrily asked.

“Thiya siya eBergville! Finish and klaar!” said another Zulu, more furious than the first.

“Who are the majority? You see!” a Sotho man said.

“Yebo, sirs here is the money to take you to Bergville,” Macko said that, giving the Zulu men a refund on their taxi fare. He left the Zulus at the garage. They were angry. Insults flew. “People are all devils!”

Macko continued with the trip. He went to QwaQwa. The Sothos were happy when they managed to outvote the Zulus.

“They still think it is the time of Shaka?” one of the Sothos said, laughing. They all laughed.

Another one said, “They rather go and fall in hell!”

Macko kept looking at them through the rearview mirror, shaking his head with a hidden smile.

At about fourteen minutes past eleven they arrived at QwaQwa. Macko left the passengers at the rank. They took special taxis home. Those who couldn’t afford special taxis were left there. Macko told himself that it was not his issue anymore.

He started the taxi and went to his house, Bluegumbosch. He was cruising now, relieved to be home. As he was turning the corner, he saw a car. He recognised it. Tabola’s car. What did the man want in his neighbourhood? He watched the lights of the car curve, then disappear. He shook his head. He had enough questions for one night. He thought of the figure on the road. Was it Bailie. He remembered the voice telling him to go home. Bluegumbosch was not the home the voice meant but it was all he had now. He went inside of his house. He found Rose very tired, sleeping on the bed. Macko was surprised. He curled up next to her and slept.

5.

When Macko arrived home the puppy was waiting for him as usual but instead of bounding towards him, it barked like it was barking at a stranger, like he was a stranger, like it didn't know him at all. It followed him as he closed the taxi's doors. Its ears were pinned back and its body shook with the force of each bark. Bang! Bang! As Macko closed the two last doors.

In the house Rose shook her head then immediately stopped and held it. Her head was still aching. She wondered what all the banging and barking was about. She frowned for a while, her face twisting in then slowly relaxing as she continued to stir the porridge in the pot. The pot was on the mini stove with two cooking plates. The movement of the stirring calmed her. She lifted out the spoon and walked with it to the window where she stood looking out. She saw Macko and his puppy. Macko was throwing stones.

“Voetsek, voetsek!” Macko took aim. He was trying to ward off the male dogs that hovered on the perimeter of their property, beadily eyeing his female puppy. Macko didn't know how he knew the dogs were male – he just did. Something about their tongues, how they lolled. Something in their eyes. Macko knew that look. He kept throwing stones at the dogs. Eye-shining dogs. Eye-lighting dogs. The dogs didn't move.

Rose opened the window. “Love, what is going on?” she softly asked.

Macko didn't hear her. He was focussed on the dogs. On the stones in his hand. On hitting the dogs with the stones.

“Your noise is killing me!” shouted Rose.

Macko looked quickly to the window, saw Rose, saw her eyes, angry eyes, furious. He turned away and went back to the stones. The puppy was barking louder. It was running circles around his ankles.

Rose went out and said, “Macko, what are you fighting with?”

Macko pointed. He pointed speechlessly where he was throwing the stones. He said, “Dogs.”

Rose looked. There was nothing. No dogs. The only dog was Macko's puppy. It had stopped jumping at Macko and stood looking at Rose. “Macko, are you insane?” she asked.

“I swear! There were dogs coming towards here,” Macko looked around to make sure that what he saw was gone.

“This thing of yours is getting worse. I am going to take you to a shrink. I can’t stay with a mad person,” Rose turned and quickly went inside. She was getting more worried by the day. At first she brushed off the comments about Macko’s behaviour. Let people talk if they must. She ignored rumours that her boyfriend was mentally ill. But now she didn’t know what to believe anymore.

“No, I am not going anywhere. I am mentally fit Rose,” Macko followed her into the house. He left his barking puppy at the door. It wanted to get inside. It always wanted to get inside. But Rose wouldn’t give it a chance. Macko sighed. She always told him she hated dogs with their shit.

Macko walked so slowly. His shoulders looked so heavy to Rose. He didn’t say much. He went straight into the small dining room. As he was about to sit down Rose said, “Please don’t sit there. Do you see how you look?”

Macko didn’t say anything to Rose. He just stretched his body. Rose looked at him. His clothes were dotted with dirty oil - from the khaki jeans to the off-white dice jersey. He lifted a hand to wipe himself but his hands were also covered with the black tar. His head was covered with dust. Maybe his taxi had given him problems during the day, thought Rose. Maybe it had broken down. And he tried to fix it himself as he is stingy with his money. Maybe he successful managed to fix it. Maybe.

Rose put on the first kettle and took water into the bathing basin. She put on the second kettle and also poured it into the bathing basin.

“Here is the bathing water!” she screamed.

Macko took his time going to fetch the bathing water. Eventually he went to the kitchen. Instead of collecting up the basin of water, he unlocked the kitchen door and went out. He went to his taxi. He opened it. It didn’t open. He tried again. Still, it didn’t open. He hit the door several times with his fist. His puppy came running towards him. Not silently. With its continual barking. Macko tried to kick it but it jumped aside. The puppy slung away, its nose to the ground. Macko sighed. Slowly he walked back inside.

“Bathing water is getting cold. I am not dishing out this food for you if you are not going to clean off that bad smelling oil.” Rose dished for herself.

It took all his strength for Macko to lift the heavy basin. His muscles could tell that it was all his strength. They strained to their limit. Macko went to the bedroom. He washed and washed himself. He changed into clean clothes. Clean blue jeans and a long sleeve brown golf t-shirt. Not forgetting his maroon dice socks. He was refreshed. Rose dished up for him. He ate like a hungry lion. He asked for more food. He was licking his fingers. The tablespoon

was next to him but he didn't use it. Rose dished up for him again. There was no food left. In the shining pot of sausage and tomato gravy there was only a reddish colour left. You could still smell the faint salty whiff of sausage in the pot. The reddish colour was from the little cooking oil that Rose used to fry sausage and tomato gravy. In the pot of porridge there was only brown scrambles left. Rose immediately filled the pot with warm water and closed it with its lid.

Even though Macko enjoyed the delicious food he couldn't look Rose in the eyes. Rose wondered what was going on. She guessed Macko didn't make enough money for the day, meaning she wouldn't get her share for the day. She didn't ask anything. She wiped up the little scraps of food that had fallen as Macko ate. She put the dirty dishes in the basin.

"You'll find me in bed," she said with her dissatisfied voice. The voice she used when she thought she wouldn't be getting her daily share from her boyfriend.

Macko just nodded with water in his mouth. He looked at Rose's back as she entered the bedroom. His mind was filled with questions. He wondered what Rose's reaction would be. Her reaction to what? Macko stood up and went into the cold dining room. He didn't sit down. He was thinking, and thinking. He looked at his fingers, adding and subtracting. And multiplying. Realizing that his fingers were dirty, he went back to the kitchen. He wiped his hands with a moist dishcloth. He suddenly remembered that he had left the money he made for the day in the car. He took the taxi's key off the fridge and went out.

Rose could hear the kitchen door opening. She covered her head with the blankets, afraid Macko would start with the noise again and bring on her headache.

Macko opened the taxi's door. He got in the taxi. He split the money into three parts. For his boss - to deliver it tomorrow. For him - he pushed it in one of his socks. And the other share for Rose. He took all of it and got out of the taxi. Locked it. The puppy was waiting for him. It ran after him. He reached the door. The puppy stood a few metres away and watched him enter. It looked at him with its sad puppy eyes. Macko left the key on the fridge and went straight to the bedroom.

Rose took off the blankets that covered her head. She waited for him. She smiled when she saw the money.

He gave Rose her share. He put Tabola's share on the pedestal.

"Are you joking? Only one hundred for me today?" Rose looked unhappy. She sat up in the bed staring at the two fifty Rand notes.

Macko didn't look at her. Nor did he reply. He got undressed. He took off his long sleeve brown golf t-shirt. He took off his blue jeans. He looked at Rose to see if she was

looking at him. Rose pretended to be looking at her cellphone. Smiling like she was chatting. Macko looked away. He slowly took off his maroon dice socks. In them it was his share of five fifty Rand notes. Two in one side. Three in the other side. He put it together in one sock.

Rose's eyes were on Macko. She smiled. She couldn't wait to take some of it, or even take all of it. She would take it during the night when Macko was deep in sleep. Or early in the morning when she got up first to make the hot bathing water for Macko.

Macko folded his socks. The sock that had the money was under the other sock.

Macko couldn't wait to take it to the bank tomorrow as he always did if Rose didn't notice or take it all. He looked at Rose. Rose was still on her cellphone. Looking at it attentively.

"Love, you don't want to sleep today?" Rose asked looking at her cellphone.

"I am here. I was just sorting Tabola's money," Macko replied.

"But here is Tabola's money," Rose pointed at the pedestal while looking Macko straight in the eyes.

"Oh, yes. I was just making some calculations," Macko stretched and yawned as he got in bed, not looking Rose in the face.

"Okay. What is wrong with you today?" Rose asked.

"Nothing. Nothing. I am fine." "It is because you seem jumpy and uncomfortable. I am here for you. You can freely talk to me," Rose put the cellphone away and folded her arms.

Macko moved his eyes and said, "Just unimportant work stuff, babe. You know how our industry works. Just many uninteresting things for you."

"I've got time. Try me. I am listening."

"One of them is that one of our taxi drivers resigned," Macko said.

"Why? In these times of poverty?" Rose was surprised.

"Yes, we are the slaves of the taxi owners. We travel the long distance. People are dying daily because of the violence, you know it. We earn nothing but peanuts. We have no insurance. Our lives are simply in danger."

Rose shook her head, and felt a little pain. She said, "You guys are very fortunate. You shouldn't be complaining like that. There are people who long to be just like you. There are people who have nothing on their table."

"Okay, I hear you. Even Dodo is thinking to resign," Macko added.

"Oh, come on! Dodo is a taxi marshal. You can't compare yourself with him. Do you even hear yourself?" The pain increased in Rose's head.

“Let’s leave this, please. I see you are not feeling well. What is wrong?” Macko asked, feeling a sudden wash of sympathy for his girlfriend.

“It’s you who talk too much. Sometimes you think like a sissy,” Rose held Macko’s hand.

Macko looked surprised, “But it’s you who asked me.”

Rose didn’t say anything. She brushed Macko’s hand. Macko felt her touch. Their emotions calmed down. Macko also touched Rose’s hand. He brushed it. Rose put her hand on Macko’s boxers. His penis was not erect. That was unlike him. Maybe he was stressed. Macko slowly kissed Rose. Rose took her hand away from Macko’s boxers. She took off her underwear. She rolled onto the other side. She moved up and down with her bottom touching front part of Macko’s boxer. Macko’s temperature increased to match Rose’s. Rose pulled the boxers down while looking away. Rose felt Macko’s machine getting bigger. “Yes!” Rose said so. She looked to Macko’s side of the bed. He held his machine in his hand. She went down like something was pulling her with her feet. She reached his big machine. She sucked and sucked it. Macko breathed heavily. Rose continued to suck. She liked his erection. She went up in the blankets. She took the penis and rubbed it on her vagina. She took it in her vagina. Macko kept quiet. She softly moaned. Macko was under her. Rose was on top of him. She took the lead, balanced on Macko’s body and enjoying every minute of it. He tried to get motivated by holding her back. He moved his hands from her bottom to her neck. “Babe, please give it to me! Fuck me!” Rose pleaded.

“Babe, I have something to tell you,” Macko interrupted but Rose kept moving on him.

“Yes, babe. I am listening,” she was breathing and moaning softly. “Oh, damn! I love your cock. It is delicious.”

“I have reached a decision. I want to resign from working in the taxi industry,” Macko said. His machine shrank in Rose’s vagina.

Rose pulled off and knelt on the bed. Her hands were on her waist. She stared at Macko. “Where do you think we can get the money? We will pay the rent of this house with your shit?”

“Calm down. We can go to the village, maybe at your parent’s house? And I can look for work there,” said Macko, trying to sound calm.

Rose laughed, “Now you are being selfish. What is there for a girl like me? Instead of working hard so that you can marry me and stop with this damn cohabitation.”

“Hear me out! I beg you. This is for us,” Macko tried to hold her hand, but Rose refused it. She jumped off the bed, aggressively pulling the duvet and blankets. She threw them down. Left Macko naked on the bed shaking his head.

“You are useless! Leave that job and see if there will still be ‘us’. And you won’t get a South African ID, because I won’t marry you!” Rose took the blankets from the floor and left the bedroom

“Suit yourself! You want to live like this. And you will live like this!” Rose screamed from another room, from the dining room.

Macko threw his pillow, hitting the door with it.

Rose curled up on the couch. She threw the blankets over her head. She heard Macko’s bare foot steps.

“Leave me alone! Don’t you dare come next to me,” Rose lifted the blankets and pointed her finger at Macko.

Naked, disappointed, Macko went back to the bedroom. He looked for a sheet in the wooden wardrobe. He found two towels and a sheet. He folded his knees and slept.

6

Rose had left hours ago. Macko might arrive four hours later after Rose’s appointment, if not more than six hours. His taxi was the second one in the rank to take the commuters to Johannesburg. At that time he did not even think about home.

Rose got out of the bathing basin. She wiped her body with a towel and stood in front of the mirror. She turned to the side, looked at her profile. Her breasts were of the average size but tight - showing that she never had children. She put her hand on her hips then moved them onto her stomach. She inhaled trying to make her stomach flat but as soon as she breathed out it protruded again. Not flat but also not that big.

Average, she thought. She sighed. She tried hard to diet but sometimes she couldn’t help herself. Rose liked to eat when she was lonely. It wasn’t always easy to diet when Macko was on the road. She told herself her stomach was Macko’s fault. If she got fat it would be Macko’s fault. She rubbed her hand across the smooth surface. She relaxed and watched her stomach grow bigger. She breathed in deeply and pushed it out. Her swelling. She smiled at her reflection. After admiring herself she pulled her eyes away from the mirror and looked down. Her stomach looked bigger from above. She held it in both hands and

rocked it. “One day is one day, my girl.” No, not a girl. A girl will run after sex to get money, not taking care of me, her mother. “To you my handsome boy.”

Outside Macko’s puppy had started to barked, shaking her back to reality. Rose exhaled and watched the stomach and the baby disappear. She went to the bedroom, stood at the door and stretched her neck to look at the watch. She calmed down. She looked through the window to see what the dog was barking at. It was nothing. She shook her head. She looked at herself from head to toe. She looked at her big ass. She moved her knees back and forth and watched her ass vibrate. She loved how it shook. She liked to shake it at Macko when she was horny. But Macko wasn’t Macko. Lately, he didn’t seem much interested in sex. Maybe he was tired. It didn’t bother Rose. They continued as a couple.

She poured the water from her bath into the bucket. Wiped the floor dry with an old brown facecloth. It had been Macko’s until Rose bought him a new one. She thought if she hadn’t bought it for him, he’d still be using the old one. He was like that. He would wear a thing until it was finished. Rose sighed. She slipped on her panties, lifting each leg and pulling the elastic around her waist. She felt it snap against her stomach. She wore her pink gown, not minding her loose breasts. She took the water outside, poured it next to the outside toilet.

The puppy ran after her, jumping at her legs. “Voetsek! I am not one of your family. Voetsek!” She waved the bucket at it. Instead of it running away, it came to Rose and started sniffing her feet. It was mad. Rose kicked at it and the dog snapped at her. It made a low growling sound in its throat. She let out a shriek, dropping as she ran towards the house. She closed the door.

Her phone sounded and Rose jumped. It was an SMS. She quickly checked it. She read it and smiled. She went to the bedroom and opened her wardrobe. She took some of her favourite clothes out, a mix of dresses and jeans, as well as some of her sexy lingerie. She put them on the bed. She picked a maroon dress, not covering the knees. She held it away from herself and looked at it. It was the dress she had worn on her first date with Macko. She brought it to her nose, smelling the cotton and pressing it against herself. She remembered Macko’s first touch. He opened the car door for her and took her smoothly by the hand. She also remembered the high heels she wore that year. That month. That week. That day. That night. She dropped the dress and crawled under the bed looking for them. She found only one shoe from the pair. It was also maroon in colour. She sat on the bed with the shoe in her hands.

She remembered that day they were at Zee Lounge. It was a beautiful day. A beautiful moment. They laughed together. They ordered the same food. Joseph Dee's "The Smell of the Rose" took everyone by storm that night. Rose and Macko were drunk on it. They had only recently met - by chance. Macko was buying lunch in a store where Rose and her mother did their grocery shopping. He volunteered to push the trolley for Rose, then to take her home. He asked her to dinner. Rose was nervous at first. She had been through a series of bad relationships. As soon as she saw Macko her nerves disappeared. They talked about children. Macko said he wanted four children. Rose laughed. They talked about how they both wanted to find someone special and get married. Today it was over three years and Macko still hadn't popped the question.

Rose put the dress back in the wardrobe and threw the single shoe back under the bed. She didn't want to think about Macko now but there was no escape. Everything in the wardrobe carried traces of him. She picked out a dark blue jean skirt and remembered how shy Macko had been to kiss at first. She took the lead. She remembered leading his hand up her skirt, spreading her legs so the denim pulled tight. His hand sliding into her panties. Rose clasped the skirt tight in her hands and touched her lips. Suddenly she shook her head. She pushed the dark blue skirt back in the wardrobe. She clapped her hands, and continued to shake her head.

Rose looked at the watch. The clock was ticking. She held her waist and looked at the corrugated iron, and looked at the clothes again. She picked up a yellow, designer skirt with its top blouse. Macko bought it for her on her birthday. It was his last money. Rose took the yellow two piece and threw it aside. She had a thought of wearing it. She took a brown, full sexy dress. She took her gown off. She also took her panties off. She was completely naked.

Her phone rang. She left the dress she was about to put on. She ran to her cellphone. Her big ass was shaking. She was charging her phone in the kitchen. As she was about to answer she saw it was Macko. She put on the cupboard again. She looked at it ringing. It didn't want to stop. Macko hung up and called again immediately. Rose held her cheeks on both sides, with her elbows on the cupboard. She bent her curvaceous body. Her bum was out. She looked at the watch. She left her cellphone and went back to the bedroom.

Rose forgot which dress she wanted to fit. She grabbed her white jeans. Slid into them, pulling her stomach in to do up the button. It was one of her favourite jeans. You could see her body through it. But as soon as she let her breath out the button popped. Meaning she had gained weight. She looked at herself in the mirror. Her face collapsed in disappointment. She took it off. She didn't know what to wear anymore. "Maybe I am better without any

clothes, after all I am still going to be naked in the end anyway.” Rose said to herself. She picked and picked. She didn’t have interest in anything suddenly.

As she was about to give up, she saw the brown, full sexy dress. She remembered that she was about to fit it when her phone rang. She took it. She pulled it over her head. Admired her reflection in the mirror. She was beautiful. Even her heart said so. She turned and turned as she looked at herself. Her mind clicked. She stared at the mirror. Her mother had bought her the dress. She bought it for her as a bribe really. Immediately after she paid, she told Rose not to make the mistake of marrying a foreigner. She told her that all taxi drivers are useless. She asked her to dump Macko. Macko, according to her mother, was not earning enough. He would never be able to take care of her.

Rose got angry that day. She nearly threw the dress back in her mother’s face. Her mother sighed. She told Rose that there are many men on this planet. And she could organise some muti for her to get a rich man.

As Rose was a Christian this made her even angrier. “No, ma. You know my belief is against that.”

“What does your belief say when you sleep with someone you are not married to?” her mother asked. “Don’t tell me about beliefs!”

Rose dropped the subject with shame in her eyes. Deep down she knew that her life was wrong according to her own belief. She shed a tear when thinking about that incident. She came back to reality and wiped her eyes with the dress. She stood looking for sympathy from the mirror. She shook her head. Looked at the watch.

“Rose, you are strong. Calm down and live life as it is. You found this life rotten, why you worry about it?” Rose asked and convinced herself. The cellphone rang again. She ran to it. “Ag!” It was Macko again. She left it ringing. She dropped the brown dress. She went to the dining room and played a soul song to get her in the right mood. She played a song by Teddy Pendergrass, “Hold Me In Your Arms.” She smiled. Whether it was a fake smile or not, at least she now had a smile. The dimple provided some happiness.

Rose went to the bedroom. She looked and looked among the clothes. She picked a red mini skirt. She fitted it on. She felt fabulous in it. She felt confident. For on top, she picked a tight pink blouse. Cleavage was out. There was purple lingerie she liked a lot. It was in her mind. She looked for it. It was not among the other clothes. She went to the wardrobe. She looked on Macko’s side. She took out all Macko’s clothes. The smile on her face when she found it was big. She even danced a little stripper’s dance to celebrate. Danced slowly on her way down, and slowly on her way up. She kissed it. Put it on the bed.

The puppy barked outside and she thought about her appointment. She hurried to take the clothes off. She smeared herself with a perfumed body cream. She finished. She changed her mind. She still liked her purple lingerie but decided not to wear it. There was no need for any underwear, she thought. She quickly slipped into the red mini skirt, with a tight pink blouse again. She put all the clothes back into the wardrobe – stuffed them in. Not bothering to fold them. She put her makeup on. She wore blue-red high heels. She cleaned everything. She changed the duvet, and put a clean one on. She changed the pillows. The room was suddenly sparkling. She went to the CD player and changed the song to that one of Boyz 2 Men, “That’s why I love you.”

A sound of a moving car was heard outside. The puppy barked. She went to the window, looked through it. It was just a passing car. The puppy followed it till it turned at the corner. Rose left the window. She lit candles. She went to the bedroom. She braided her hair. Her hair shone.

Another car stopped. She knew the sound. It was a black 4x4. The shining shoes emerged first. Tabola’s shining shoes. He was carrying a bottle of sparkling red wine. He wore smart ironed, black trousers, with a fashionable black shirt. His face matched with his clothes. He took his black eye glasses off, and looked around. He put them on again. He knocked at the door. Rose rushed from the window. She smoothed her skirt and licked her lips then opened the door with a smile. The puppy came running but it was too late. Tabola was in. He gave Rose the wine. Slid five R100 notes in her cleavage. Rose touched his trousers, brushing against his penis. She turned her back, pulling Tabola by the trousers. Rose led the way. Tabola put another five R100 notes in her waistband. Tabola slid off his belt, left it on the floor. They went to the bedroom. The music continued to play.

7.

He stood alone. In his hand were two ten Rand notes. He waved them as if to cool the air. He looked at a group of passengers with big bags who were going to the long distance rank. Maybe he wondered about the money he could have made for the day if he was taking a long distance trip. There was also a question on his mind. He kept trying to push it away and it kept jumping to the front. Why did Tabola allow him to get off taking the Gauteng trip on that day? He knew Tabola liked it when he took the long distance trips, even if he was only

transporting seven passengers in the Quantum seating fifteen passengers, excluding a driver, even if they were not making any money out of the trip.

“But maybe the one day holiday he took to Durban beach, as they say, changed him into a better person.” Macko talked to himself. He yawned, looking up, softly cupping his mouth with his hand.

It was around ten in the morning. It was quiet. Most of the old hawkers were still arriving at the rank. They were building their stalls with different materials. Plastics. Sails. Hardboards. Other opened small containers, public phone booths they had taken over. Others opened their small municipality built rooms. Most people called them the toilets stalls as they fitted only one person at a time. Even taxi marshals were quiet. They were saving their voice for when it was busy.

Macko watched the passing passengers. He followed them with his eyes. Suddenly he was still. Not moving. Not blinking. Two ten Rand notes were not waving like before. His heart was beating. He was still. A middle aged lady approached him. She came from another taxi driver who pointed her to Macko.

“Good day, sir,” the lady greeted. Her face was all white. She had put something on her face. Maybe it was a ‘colourmine’ for rash or pimples.

There was no answer from Macko.

“Sir, help me with change, please,” she said.

Again, there was still no response from Macko. But his eyes were right looking into the retinas of the lady. “I am going home!” shouted the lady. She dropped the big bag she was carrying. She waved her hands in front of Macko’s eyes. He did not blink. Is this man alive? Other passengers had turned and were staring.

A male voice broke the silence, “Sister, we are going without you, it is getting late! We are going home!” Those were the words of the driver of the taxi who was taking passengers from Qwaqwa to Kwazulu Natal, Newcastle.

“Sir, we are going home! I need some change. Please give me those two ten Rands. Here is a twenty Rand note in exchange.” She handed it to Macko.

He did not reply. He kept clasping his ten Rand notes. Suddenly his eyes blinked. His eyes struck the big bag belonging to the lady. He did not say anything but his eyes were caught by something moving in the bag.

“What is that?” Macko asked pointing his finger to a big bag.

“We are going home! It is late!” The lady aggressively took the money out of Macko’s hand and put her twenty Rand note in Macko’s hands. Macko felt itchy. Macko

looked at the lady's face and felt a cold flush spread through his body. His hands had started to shake. He kept hearing, "We are going home!" The words looped in his mind.

"I am not going with you," Macko said, surprising even himself with the force of his voice, the anger contained in it.

"I didn't ask you to, thanks for the change." She took one ten Rand to some boys who had helped her to carry the bag to the rank. One of them was holding a pint of yellowish something, like a glue. The lady picked up her bag and ran to the taxi. She was in the taxi. The engine roared and the taxi turned into the exit.

Macko could feel the sweat running down his face. His shirt was wet. It clung to his body. He shook his head and felt a stab of pain, brought his hands up and held it. He squeezed his temples. His breathing slowed. He looked around the rank. Some people were staring at him, some not. In his head the words kept playing: We are going home! We are going home! We are going home!" His eyes followed the taxi. He wanted to see the lady's face one more time. The sun was shining on the window making it hard to see. He blinked. Instead of the lady's face he saw the detective's face, waving his hand, calling him. He slowly started to back away, almost hit the fruit stall behind him. Two apples rolled free from one of the boxes. They looked very red against the concrete. The woman selling fruits ran after them, glancing furiously at Macko before rubbing them on her skirt and dropping them back in the box.

Macko suddenly felt tired and hungry. He crossed to his taxi. He stood at the passenger door, looked into the taxi, his eyes adjusting to the darkness inside. There was only one empty seat. He looked at the seated passengers, his eyes travelling face by face. Face to face. He shook his head. Slowly opened his mouth. It was dry. His lips felt cracked, his tongue was swollen. The passengers stared back at him waiting for him to speak. Macko said nothing. He slowly closed his dry mouth.

His stomach growled loudly, suddenly craving a plate of a braaied meat. He slammed the passenger door of the taxi and turned towards the mothers manning the stalls. He forced himself to walk past braaied meat. The smell of it filled his nostrils but he didn't stop. He went to a fat woman who sold maize and cow's legs. Next to her a fat woman was selling mieles – raw, boiled and braaied. Macko stood before her. When he was about to ask for maize she stretched her hand for money. She pressed her eyes hard making them smaller because of the smoke billowing up from the braaing maize. She was waving the smoke away with a torn hard box. Macko coughed. He blinked against the smoke and handed her a twenty Rand.

“You want which one?” She asked with small eyes, mucus coming from her nose.

“The braaiied one.” Macko pointed, turning his eyes away from the woman and towards the braai.

“A full one or half?” she asked, opening a metal container that kept the maize hot.

“How much is a full one?” Macko asked, his eyes still averted, watching the fire dance and the maize sizzle, its edges slowly turning black.

“R20!”

“Give me a half of a corn.” Macko said, needing to get some change.

The fat woman reached into the container. She pulled out a mielie, pressed her thighs tight together and pursed her lips to get the strength she needed, then broke it right in the middle with her bare hands. She dropped the broken mielie in a small plastic bag. She gave Macko a small sachet of salt. A red sachet, carrying the KFC logo. Macko chuckled to himself as he took the salt – either the fat woman had a salt sponsorship from KFC or she was stealing the sachets somehow.

“My change please,” said Macko, tearing opened the sachet.

“Ag, you are one of the stingy men.” She said before handing him ten Rand.

Macko didn't say anything.

The passengers in his taxi were growing restless, some wanted to get another taxi, Dodo had to beg them to stay before heading off to find Macko. He found him fighting with a half corn of maize. Dodo ran back to the taxi. Macko followed slowly behind, too tired to run. The mielie didn't touch sides and his stomach was still growling.

“Taxi drivers will always be taxi drivers,” said one of the angry passengers.

“Ya, they will always be shit. All of them!” added another, glancing at his watch.

“Just look at that dirty dog.” A passenger said, pointing at Macko walking slowly towards the taxi.

Macko sighed before he opened the driver's seat door. “Hello, good people,” he greeted the passengers. None of them replied. He looked at them through rearview mirror. They looked unhappy. He changed gear from neutral to first.

Dodo, who was standing to one side, washing a mat belonging to the vehicle of another driver, called after him. “My broer!”

“But I give you lifts.” Macko shook his head then gave him the R10 note.

Dodo smiled without saying anything.

Macko pulled out of the rank. He took the main road. It wasn't busy but numerous roadworks fixing and patching potholes slowed the traffic. Macko stopped for a while. “After

this they are going to make mountainous speed humps.” He said and shook his head. You could swear he was alone in the taxi, as no one even coughed.

“May you please combine your taxi fare according to your seats and passed it to me,” Macko demanded.

The road workers opened the way for Macko and stopped the oncoming traffic. Macko continued. Behind him the passengers gathered their money and handed it forward. He counted it while driving. Slid the notes and coins into his small pouch. He dropped three passengers at the short left. He took out his cellphone. He smsed, “Hi babe. How are you? Are you enjoying Durban with other girls?”

“Bus stop!” Two passengers spoke at the same time.

Macko was staring at his cellphone. Without checking the traffic behind him, he turned into the bus lane, almost hitting the side of a bus pulling into a stop. The bus’s hooter filled the air. He managed to park in front of the bus. Macko breathed heavily. Most of the passengers didn’t notice.

“At least I am out of this taxi. I am not ready to die,” a passenger said, gathering his bags and heading for the door.

Macko didn’t hear. He was looking at his cellphone. He wrote another sms. “Babes, take some beach pictures and send me, please.” Message sent and delivered. His cellphone declared so.

Macko glanced at his phone again one more time before sliding it onto the dash in front of him. He was out on the open road now, heading towards the village. He put his foot down and watched the black tar speed toward him ahead.

Finally he reached the turn off. He dropped two passengers at the corner. The remaining passengers wanted to go into the village and he dropped them next at the big kraal. The smell of cow shit filled the air. Macko breathed deeply. He looked around. He saw the streams of valleys. The green was very green. The place reminded him of the village he grew up in. The birds on the many trees sang songs he missed living in an urban area. He found himself smiling without knowing why exactly. The girls with firewood on their heads greeted him. One of the boys herding the cattle ran to stop a cow from crossing the road. Macko remembered the smell of wet earth and cows in the early morning when he was growing up. Most of all he remembered the sounds of water in the valley. He used to throw a stone in the river and loved to watch the stone jump across the water, breaking the surface into spiralling rings.

Within a matter of minutes he was out of his taxi, almost racing to the water's edge. Standing looking then bending to collect up a handful of stones. Without thinking he lifted his arm, sent a stone skimming across the water. He jumped like he was competing with other people. Suddenly, realising that he was alone, that he was fully grown, a man not a boy anymore, he stopped, glancing around to see if anyone saw him. The herd boys laughed at him. The laughing reminded him of the children he used to play with. The noises they made when they were jeering. He remembered the melodies of the birds. His grandpa always summoned him and his friends to chase them as birds ate his crops. He smiled alone. He shook his head with a big smile. He saw the trees and remembered shaking them so peaches would fall. They collected the fruit and carried it to their grandma who made jam. Homemade jam. He swallowed his saliva. He thought about homemade canned peaches. Homemade dried peaches. The cow that got sick from eating a plastic. They slaughtered it and invited all the people from the community to come and eat. They made biltong, to store it for some time. At that time people brewed a traditional beer – Moqombothi. They ate and drank. It was very cool in the village. No loud unnecessary noise. Peace ruled. Neighbours' sympathy ruled. Sharing was the thing that connected the people. When others had no maize meal they would ask or borrow from their neighbours. When they had no sugar they would do that.

“I can find a place here, it is not bad at all.” He thought. He took few minutes to look around before pulling off. He stopped at the edge of the village, waited for the cows to pass by before he could turn. He drove slowly on the way back to the town. He dreaded returning to the noise and smells of the taxi rank. He picked up his phone, his eyes flicking from it to the road. He checked again. There was still no answer from Rose. He was held up in the queue at the Stop & Go. Macko waited. He didn't notice the time. His mind was on his cellphone. He called Rose but there was no answer. It just rang. After 20 minutes they opened for him. He went through. He arrived at the taxi rank. It was not the same. Different music from different radios welcomed those who were arriving at the rank. The smell of chisanyama was stronger. Macko smiled and held his pouch money when he smelled it. He had money. R40 for a plate was nothing to him. He parked next to a dustbin where two mad people were fighting and digging for food. Taxi marshals shouted on this side, shouted on that side. A group of young girls were singing and dancing next to the entrance. Taxi drivers were happy to see them, as they kept throwing money towards them. Not just coins, even notes. People with groceries in hand were headed to the different taxis. They came from the different shops with the different plastics colours. Yellow. White. Red. Brown paper ones. Young men who smoked glue helped some of the people carry bags to the taxis. Macko

stopped his taxi. Jim, one of the popular taxi drivers stopped next to him with a full “Boss, to be honest with you, you look like hell. Did you sleep yesterday?”

Macko glanced at his cellphone again before turning to Jim, “The funeral yesterday made me tired, boss. Take me serious when I say that child is haunting me.”

“But I heard that you did not even hold a single spade. You need to go home, and rest. I thought I saw your twin ghost in the morning.” Jim continued, slowly revving his taxi.

“Fok, which twin ghost now! It was me. The violence in Gauteng is worse. They don’t want to see FS number plates.” Macko yawned.

“Eish, boss. But try local. You once worked here. You are champ. Go home and tell your madam to massage you. You know what I mean by massage.” Jim laughed.

“I wish she was around. She is in Durban. I am trying to contact her there, but she does not respond,” said Macko, with his eyes on the cellphone.

“I’m sorry about that. Did she go alone?” Jim asked.

“No, with some girls. Her friends.” Macko answered.

“How sure are you? Did you really see her friends?” Jim shook his head and laughed.

“Boss...” he paused.

“We will talk very soon. I should warn you.” With those words he sped away.

Macko watched him drive off, wondering what he meant. He slowly got out of the taxi, and followed the smell of the braaied meat. He checked his cellphone but it was silent.

8.

Macko stretched his body to open the big passenger’s door. But Mantsha shook his head. He wanted to sit next to him, next to the driver. He ignored the open the door and climbed in to Macko’s left.

“Hey, brother! Mantsha greeted.

Macko kept quiet.

Mantsha stared at him, then stretched across, grabbed his arm and shook him, “I’m greeting you man! What did they badmouth me to you?” Mantsha asked.

“Stop, Mr Mantsha. I am fighting with money here. I am at work.” Macko’s eyes were busy, searching for the passengers.

“Eish, you guys and your taxis!” Mantsha looked at the back. His eyes settled on a schoolgirl with a dark blue uniform, her dress taken up into a mini-skirt, showing all - yellow, big thighs spread across the seat.

“You were once a driver, Mr Mantsha. You should teach us how to make money. Anyway, are you going to work at this time?” Macko asked, holding the steering wheel with one hand, glancing across at Mantsha.

“Yes, but I was off, but on standby. I got a call, one of the buses has broken down. But remember I drove when there were not as many taxis fighting for such a small number of people.” Mantsha looked back again. The girl was staring out the window. He looked at Macko but Macko was still busy – looking for the customers

“When it is not the month end like this we don’t make money at all.” Macko said. His eyes fell on the sign pointing the way to the Bolata village. He slowed the taxi, stopped for a moment to see if anyone was looking for a ride. He hit the hooter several times.

“But Macko, today I am brave to ask you. Are driving locally or for distance trips?”

“As you know, I’m meant to be driving long distance. I’m just waiting for the taxi feud to cool off then I’ll start again,” Macko politely answered

Mantsha shook his head. “You never cease to surprise me.”

Two people were approaching the taxi. They were in a hurry. A mother and her son, hands clasped together. Their feet kicked the stones on the ground as they walked, causing dust to rise around them.

Macko sounded his hooter again hoping to attract them. The hooter was loud – probably heard through the entire village. But the woman and her son didn’t even glance up. They passed the taxi and kept going. Macko clapped and pressed the hooter for a minute. “Damn! This is the taxi industry for you. I wonder why they did not shake their heads to show that they are not intending to ride this taxi.”

“Then they will say taxi drivers are stupid, while they are also stupid!” said Mantsha, trying to console Macko.

Macko changed gear and moved on.

“I am very sorry about that, hey. Don’t worry you will find another passenger.” The voice came from behind the men. It was the schoolgirl. She spoke slowly and her voice was soft.

Macko glanced in the rearview mirror and found the school girl giving him a sexy smile and slowly rubbing her thighs. Macko blinked. He slowly turned his head to look at the girl, and found her opening her thighs. Macko saw something black. He coughed and looked

forward. But in seconds he looked again. The girl was not wearing any panties. Macko coughed again. Mantsha glanced at him, frowned then looked forward again. Macko thought about the darkness between the girl's thighs. For a moment it was like it was calling him, like it was a huge black hole that wanted to suck him in. He swallowed hard. He could feel one of his headaches coming on. There was a pounding. Kutu kutu kutu filled his head then dissipated. Macko blinked, tried to concentrate on the road, on making money.

"Please drop me at the clinic," said the schoolgirl as they were about to pass the small brick building.

Macko hit the brakes. "Little sister did you pay me?"

"Yes, I did," she replied quickly.

"When? I've driven you from Lakeside, and since then I haven't collected any money in this taxi." Macko was very serious.

"Oh, yes. You are right. I forgot. I am really sorry." She dug in her bag and found a ten rand note, gave it to Macko.

Macko said nothing. He inhaled deeply. He exhaled deeply. The girl closed the door, and walked towards the clinic gate.

"Then they will say taxi drivers are stupid, while they are doing this!" Mantsha shouted. The young girl paused, obviously hearing the words but did not look back. She entered the clinic, swinging her arse like a famous model.

The taxi moved on.

"These girls! And you won't believe me when I tell you that they do this every day. It's like they belong to one mother. It's as if they tell each other what to do." Macko hit the hooter as he passed a shopping centre.

"I wish I was still a driver." Mantsha smiled. He looked up. You could see that he was thinking about it.

"And if you were still a driver?" Macko asked with a half hidden smile.

"I would never get hungry." They both laughed. "Ei, stop! That Palestinian is stopping us."

The taxi stopped.

"Going to town?" the Palestinian asked. His hands were filled with stock - three big plastics of snacks, a plastic of stock sweets, a box of biscuits, a carton of Peter Stuyvesant, a carton of Dunhill, one of Craven A and another of Courtleigh. A bag of tobacco boxer. A bag of oranges. Macko stretched to open the passenger's door as it didn't open from the outside anymore. He had been stretching like that since yesterday and his body was starting

to feel it. His back was sore. Macko rubbed it while waiting for the Palestinian to settle in his seat.

“Mr Mantsha, these girls, they just want sex and money. You see she is going to clinic, maybe she is going to abort or get contraception. You never know.” Macko looked back to see if the Palestinian had settled. Yes, he had. He was leaning back, breathing hard.

Macko set off again. Some empty taxis passed him. Others had two or three passengers. Those who knew Macko greeted him by flicking their lights. Others hit their hooters.

Mantsha continued with their conversation. “When I got in the taxi I thought she was your mistress.” He moved his seat forward to make the Palestinian more comfortable.

“I have no time for girls. I want money, actually I need it. Having many girls is expensive.” Macko’s head was almost out the window, looking for the passengers.

“That is true. But lately, these girls are fitter than their mothers.” They both laughed. Even the Palestinian joined them, laughing louder. Macko and Mantsha both glanced back in surprise, not expecting the Palestinian to understand them.

“Drop me here. I am going to fix that bus.” Mantsha pointed to a parked bus, its load of passengers standing on the pavement with worried looks on their faces. Mantsha handed Macko his ten bucks and disembarked.

Macko went on. He was near town now. Still no luck finding enough passengers. He hit the hooter again and again. He saw that there was a group of people standing near the robot. Three women – he guessed teachers, just finishing at the school. He knew they’d need transport to town. In the rearview he noticed a taxi coming at high speed behind him. It quickly changed lanes, passing on the left side. Macko pressed his accelerator hard. There was no way he was letting the rival taxi take his passengers. The robot was green. It changed to yellow. Macko pressed his foot flat. The robot was red. He was going too fast, there was no way he could not stop even if he wanted to. He sped through the red robot. After passing it he saw a traffic officer’s car behind him. He decreased his speed. Behind him a siren sounded. The flashing of blue lights filled his rearview mirror. He had no choice but to stop. The other taxi sped past him and then pulled over for the three female teachers. Macko hung his head. There was no point protesting. Even if he didn’t admit his fault, the street camera would have captured it.

The traffic officer wore big black eyeglasses. He wore a cap that hid his eyes. He approached the taxi. Stood at the window writing on a small pad. Macko started to say something then stopped himself. It would probably be better for him to hold his tongue. The

officer tore a sheet out of the pad and handed it to Macko. Macko stared at it. A R750 fine ticket. Shit. Macko closed his eyes. He was imagining what Rose would say when he saw this. She didn't understand how hard it was on the roads and was always blaming him. He turned to the traffic officer, ready to plead his case, then stopped. The officer's face was in shadow. He could feel himself being pulled towards it. He heard a voice. Was it the officer?

“What? I'm sorry...” Macko started.

This time the officer's words were distinct. They echoed in Macko's head: “Go home.” With that the officer turned and started heading back towards his vehicle. Macko stared after him. He was moving quickly. His feet seemed to glide, like there was a space between them and the ground. Macko watched as the man reached his car and drove away. The siren was dead but the blue lights were still flashing. They swirled into the distance.

Macko brought his hands to his face. He pressed his palms against his eyes. Rubbed them. Behind him he heard the Palestinian man shifting in his seat and that brought him back to the present.

He started his taxi and went on. In three minutes they were in town. He dropped the Palestinian. He patiently waited for him to get off. The man took all his stuff. He bent to check under seats, making sure that he didn't drop anything. Then he paid Macko and waited for his R10 change. Macko handed it to him. The Palestinian roughly pushed the door. Suddenly the door was down on the ground. It made a loud bang and dust rose around it. Macko held his head. “Tukutuku! Tukutuku!” He head was filed rhythmic pounding of a traditional doctor's beats.

“I am very sorry, sir. I didn't mean to break it.” The Palestinian pleaded. Raising his hands high, looking like he might cry. Macko saw eyes pause on the sign on the door: ‘Notice: Close the door nicely when you enter or leave this taxi. Don't slam the door. Don't be angry at the door. Please, dear passenger.’ The Palestinian hung his head. It was obvious he felt guilty.

Macko breathed deeply. He inhaled and exhaled. After a few minutes the drumming in his skull disappeared. He slowly climbed out of the taxi. “No, my brother. It is not your fault. Go in peace, I'll fix it.” Macko's voice was calm. He picked up the heavy door, winching as the pain shot up his back. He tried to slide it back in its slot but did not succeed. The Palestinian guy calmed down and helped him to push harder. The door caught in the groove. Macko went to the back and fetched a hammer. He pounded it into place. The red paint was now badly scratched. The Palestinian went on his way. Macko climbed back in his vehicle and drove back to the rank. The queues of the taxis were moving very slowly. After

an hour he realised that he had no chance of getting a load. The sun had already gone to rest. It was getting dark. He thought he should go to the panel beater. The man was an old friend of Macko's. He knew he could count on him to help him and that the man would let him pay when he had the money.

It was a short drive. Macko found his friend busy with some old bakkie that needed his attention. Macko waited. He tried to chat to his friend as he worked but the man's mind was clearly occupied, focused on the bakkie. Macko watched him hammer and wished he had a skill like that – anything but driving. It had grown dark while Macko waited. The street lights came on. Finally he got in his taxi and left for home.

He pulled up in front of his house and sat counting his money for the day. Only three hundred. He subtracted it from the costs he had incurred – the R750 fine and whatever he would have to pay for the panel beating. The day was a failure.

He locked the doors on his taxi and walked slowly towards the house. He was hungry and tired but he did not look forward to facing Rose.

She was in the kitchen cooking when he entered. He approached her from behind and kissed her on the neck, then went straight to the dining room. He watched the news, trying to take his mind off the day's events. Rose brought the food and they ate together, the television still blaring. After eating, Macko pushed his plate away and dozed off in front of the TV. He tried to keep his eyes open but he kept yawning then nodding off. Rose got irritated. She took the dishes to the kitchen and went straight to the bedroom. Macko followed Rose. He sat down on the bed, took out the money and put it on the bedside table.

“Where is my share?” Rose asked with her eyes on the table.

“Today it was very bad. It was worse than other days. You will get it when there's enough, my darling.” A sleepy Macko answered.

Rose crawled to Macko who was sitting on the bed, taking his shoes off. She hugged him while he was untied his laces. “Babe, our neighbor bought a washing machine and a tumble dryer. Can you buy me a washing machine and a tumble dryer?”

“Babe, we don't have money as you see. You cost me a lot when you were in Durban. Besides did you ever use a washing machine and a tumble dryer in your life?”

“Listen to your mouth. According to you, I am not smart enough to use them? You are just a useless man! Some men work very hard every day for their families!”

Macko quickly stood up, “You just said I am useless?”

Rose also stood up, “You give those schoolgirls money. They are your sluts!”

“Shut up, woman! You are insulting me!” Macko pointed a finger at Rose. He approached her.

Rose backed away. “Yes, you don’t reserve my respect!” she wailed. “I said shut up!”

“You want to beat me? You want to beat me? Go ahead! Your cell is waiting for you!” Rose screamed.

Macko stopped. He held his hands on his head and sat down on the bed. After a few moments he climbed under the covers.

Rose stood whimpering. After it became clear Macko wasn’t moving, she climbed in next to him. Macko faced one way. Rose, the other. They did not even touch each other’s backs. Neither wanted to switch off a light. It kept burning. They fell asleep.

Just before morning, Macko tossed and tossed. Rose heard nothing. She was deep in sleep. Macko mumbled. There was a giant monkey like animal, with no head crashing into his taxi. He tried to fight it, trying to save his passengers but he could barely move. All his joints were weak. He couldn’t stand up. He couldn’t talk. He couldn’t move. The giant animal killed everyone in his taxi. Then it approached him. It held him by his neck, and threw him down hard. As he was about to hit the ground, he woke up. He was soaked in sweat, breathing heavily. He lay like that for a moment then turned and fell back asleep.

In the morning Rose woke first. She kissed Macko. Macko kissed her back even though he was still half asleep. He slowly opened his eyes. It was really, not a thought, but a dream. Rose reached down and slid off his Scotch boxer. Macko tried to move his body. Everything hurt. He stopped kissing Rose. Feeling the pain. He changed sides, facing the other direction. Rose sighed. She lay looking at Macko’s back then slowly got up. Macko heard her put on the kettle. He felt her climb back to bed. She brushed his chiskop. “I am sorry for fighting you yesterday.” Macko didn’t hear. He was snoring.

9.

There was space for one person left and then the taxi would be full. Passengers who were already in the taxi kept their eyes on the people passing by. They were hoping they were also going to the Free State. People came with bags, “Is this taxi going to Rustenburg?” Disappointed, the passengers shook their heads. “Is this taxi going to Witbank?” others asked. Again the passengers shook their heads. They eyed another group of people - but no, they

were just selling things. Expensive things at a discount price. Things like gold watches and small DVD players. Things like Nike and Adidas sneakers. Things like Guess and Levi's jeans. All at discount price. Some things appeared to be second hand goods. Others were very new, new from the box. Most of those who sold things checked the surroundings before they opened their bags. They whispered to the customers. Most of the passers by ignored them. Because when you tell them that you don't have money, they ask you how much you do have. They are always willing to negotiate a discount.

Macko stood at the rank offices. He looked at all the paying passengers crowding into taxis. "I wish that money was mine," he said quietly. The lady who was helping the passengers at the counter, a woman by the name of Sarah, didn't even look up at him. Sarah was known for not taking any nonsense from any man. A deep scratch under one eye had a story to tell, a story that made men fear and respect her. Macko watched passengers come and go. His face lit up a bit when a passenger going to the Free State arrived. "I am going to Qwaqwa." It was an old man, who kept coughing. He was thin.

"It is R140, old man!" Sarah said. "Why don't you bother to put your hand on your mouth. We don't want to get infected by whatever disease you have." She held his money at the tips of the notes. Hundred Rand and fifty Rand.

"My child, respect your elders," the old man said, lifting a big bag with a broken handle in one hand and clasping his walking stick in the other.

"You must respect yourself before we can respect you!" Sarah shouted. "Here is your change, go." She gave him a ten Rand note

The old man took his change, and pointed at Sarah with his stick. Sarah backed off even though she knew that the iron bars wouldn't allow the stick to reach her. "I'll smash you now! Show me some respect."

Sarah smiled a little and said, "Okay! Okay, old man! I have a work to do as you can see. Please go. I really don't have time for you." She kept taking money from the passengers who were going to other towns. "Hey, old man! You didn't give me your address, including the address of where you are going and contact numbers."

The old man returned to the counter, "I come from Thokoza, I don't remember the address. I am going to Qwaqwa there is a beautiful village there with green....."

"Just the name of the village and your contact number, please!" Sarah interrupted him. She looked him in the eyes, and closed her eyes when he coughed

“Its name is Monontsha. I don’t have a cellphone, but take this paper. On it is written the number of my older daughter.” He handed her a piece of dirty paper. Rose took it and wrote down the number.

“Where is that taxi?” The old man politely asked.

“Wait for me outside, I’ll take you to it.” Macko said. He didn’t mind an old man, as long he was going to where he was going. Macko went to Sarah. Sarah calculated the money. Macko also calculated it to make sure. Sarah took her fee, and gave Macko the rest. She also gave him a list of the passengers.

“Arrive alive,” she said.

“Thank you. Today I am going to sleep at home. Take care. See you.” Macko took the money and went out

“What do you mean? You slept here yesterday?” Sarah asked while helping other passengers.

“Yes, my taxi had only one passenger, and it was very late.” Macko put the money in his brown wallet.

“Ah, you should have told me!” Sarah had a naughty smile.

Macko just laughed and went out. He met the old man outside and together they went to the taxi.

“This is the taxi, old man,” said Macko. The old man nodded, spluttering then coughing again. This time he held his mouth. Macko noticed that some of the seats were empty. He read a list, “Sello Chabeli?”

“I am here,” Sello responded, with a loud voice.

“Maki Dlamini?”

“Present,” Maki responded, with a quiet voice.

“Paballo Nkgatau?”

“Yebo,” Paballo responded.

“Mokete Mofokeng?”

“Here!” Mokete responded, confidently.

“Tankiso Miya?”

“Sure,” Tankiso responded.

“Dimpho Motaung?”

“Also here,” Dimpho responded, with a shy voice.

“Setjhaba Mokoena?”

“I’m going,” Setjhaba responded in a slow voice.

“Sebolelo Mohapi?”

“I can’t wait for this taxi to go,” Sebolelo said with a big grin.

“Morwesi Rathulo?”

“Eita!” Morwesi responded.

Thembelihle Mabombo?”

“I miss home,” Thembelihle responded.

“Sibongile Tshabalala?”

“I’m also here,” Sibongile responded.

“Motlatsi Molaba?”

“Super!” Motlatsi responded.

“Lesiba Mosifa?”

“I’m with you,” the old man coughed.

“Thabang Molefe?”

No one answered.

“Mohau Twala?”

No one answered.

“Can somebody please tell me where these two people are?” Macko asked. No answers came. “You see now!” Macko got in the taxi. He started the engine. Waited for five minutes wondering about the two missing people. Macko looked at the list. He saw their cell numbers. He immediately called them. “Guys, you want to sleep here? Or you’ll go home walking?”

“Sorry, sorry, grootman. We are coming,” one of them said. Within two minutes they arrived. They found their bags outside the taxi, they smiled, boarded quickly. They were young, around fifteen years old. “We are here, good people. I am Thabang Molefe and this is my friend Mohau Twala.” They opened their eyes wide.

“You smoke nyaope?” Macko asked not expecting an answer. “Get in the car.” They took their seats. They were smiling at everyone. Macko loaded the bags into the back. Siphon, a well known taxi marshal in Gauteng, helped him. Macko gave him some coins then climbed into his taxi. The old man had taken the front seat next to him. He glanced at him then puts his hands on the wheel. It was exactly one o’clock. Macko managed to get a full load of passengers early for a change. He stopped at the first garage. He pulled into a vacant lane to fill up the petrol tank. Got the oil, and water. Washed window screen. And pumped all the tyres. He started the taxi again. He hit his indicator and turned into the road. He took the left lane that joined the highway. The young passengers who boarded late were still smiling.

Every so often they broke into laughter for no reason. Macko kept glancing back at them. They made him nervous. Finally he saw they had fallen asleep, their heads drooped forward and their mouths hung open. Macko shook his head and focused on the road. It ran out in front of him. He put his foot down all the way to the next stop.

When the taxi arrived in Reitz, a few passengers got out, to buy some food. The youngsters who Macko suspected had smoked nyaope were not moving. People pushed them in order to get out of the taxi. Others jumped over them. Most of the passengers opted for the fish and chips. A few preferred Russian and chips. The Portuguese shop always kept fast food warm because they knew that the taxi's would bring hungry passengers. A few complained that the Portuguese food wasn't fresh and headed in the direction of the KFC. The taxi filled up again. The smells of different foods filled the air. People ate. People drank. There was a space for two people – the two they had dropped in Reitz. Passengers quickly filled it, using it to put their food down or spread their legs.

When things quieted down in the taxi, Macko turned on the radio. The voice of the announcer filled his ears. "South Africans are demanding all illegal immigrants return to their countries of origin. There have been reports of threats towards foreigners." A presenter played a song after announcing that news. It was quiet for a moment in the taxi. Macko kept driving.

"This thing of wanting to kill the foreigners is not good at all. God does not like it at all, said the old man.

"Whether God like it or not, foreigners must go to their different countries. Otherwise we are going to kill them." The man who had earlier identified himself as Thabang Molefe loudly.

"I am glad I am finally going home. Everyone must know his and her home especially in times like this one."

The old man breathed deeply and looked at Macko. Macko just kept quiet.

"The problem with us especially men we sometimes abandon our own family, forgetting our own people. Leaving our traditional roots behind."

"Where do you come from, old man?" Macko asked.

"I've been living in Thokoza for almost forty years now. Not even visiting my original home. I wonder if they will still accept me. I was once a police detective," the old man said.

"You've never contacted your family since then?" Macko asked.

“That is why Father’s Day is not important, not necessary at all. You fathers, you men, you like to abandon your families.” The voice came from the back. A woman. There was real pain in how she said it.

“But, not all the fathers. And there are even mothers and women that also do that.” The old man coughed. “Yes, driver. I had never contacted them.”

As the conversation moved, the taxi moved. Soon they found themselves in Harrismith. They stopped, and dropped five people. They went on.

“And one must know that in abandoning your family, you hurt many people. You take the hope of many people. You kill their feeling, their hearts, without realising.” The eyes of the old man were teary.

“Where is your home young man?” he asked Macko.

Macko took time before answering him. After ten minutes he said, “I don’t know where my home is?”

“Everyone has a home. What do you mean?”

“I was not born in South Africa. I came here after I managed to escape the military of my country when I was seventeen years old. I was trained as a soldier when I was thirteen years old. My parents died when I was ten years old, as they told me. And I was raised by my grandfather, who is a farmer, if he is still alive,” Macko said.

The taxi arrived at Qwaqwa. They dropped four people, went straight to the rank with other passengers.

“Hei! Stop! Stop!” Thabang screamed and made a lot of noise. Surprised people looked at them. Macko immediately decreased the speed and pressed the brake pedal. All the passengers lurched forward, luckily they had fastened their seatbelts. Thabang raised a hand. “Driver, you were supposed to drop us at the bus stop. Take us back or give us our change, we paid in full. All the people kept quiet expect Mohau who was snoring. “Mohau, my brother, wake up!” Thabang shook Mohau to wake him up. Mohau woke with fear

“Where are we?” Mohau asked. He raised his feet before raising his body. “Where are they taking us?”

“Young boys! This taxi won’t go back, I am going forward.” Macko aggressively said.

“Then, we are not going anywhere.” Thabang said with pride, and stubbornness. Mohau nodded, agreeing with Thabang.

“Please push me to hell! Macko shouted

The boys did not move. They just shook their heads. An old man, Mosifa opened his door and got out. He quietly opened the passenger's door. People wondered what he was about to do. He grabbed Thabang and Mohau, with their bags. Although they were bigger than him he grabbed them like feathers and threw them on the ground. "Ouch! Ouch!" You could see they were in pain. They didn't say anything further. Macko and the other passengers looked at the thin Mosifa. They were surprised. Mosifa got in a car. Macko started the taxi without saying anything.

In less than two minutes they reached their destination. All the passengers disembarked except the one called Lesiba Mosifa.

"Listen here, young man." The old man tried to get Macko's attention. Macko was busy watching the passengers collect up their belongings. The last one out closed the passenger's door. It was getting dark outside. There were very few people at the rank.

"I am listening, sir." Macko looked at Mosifa.

"I want you to listen to me very well."

"Okay, old man."

"You need to go home. You are needed in Mozambique."

"Wait. Wait. I've told you about Mozambique. Where did you get that?" Macko asked. He stared at the old man.

"Who the hell are you? How do you know my home?" Macko was angry and scared at the same time.

The old man ignored him. He got out of the taxi. He slowly waved his hand at Macko, and then turned away. "Wait," Macko screamed. "Wait, your bag! And stick. What am I going to do with these things?"

Macko reached for them but the items weren't there. He looked back up at the old man. There was nothing. Just the long dark shadows cast by the overhead lights of the taxi rank.

10.

It was morning. Macko was standing next to a twenty-one seater taxi, taking commuters to Johannesburg, Wanders rank. The taxi belonged to a colleague of Macko, Tshepo. There were only two passengers in the taxi. A middle aged man in a dark brown beret slumped in his seat. He wore a brown collar golf t-shirt, a light brown diced jersey,

Brentwood trousers. Brown Crocket & Jones were shining on his feet, white diced socks clearly visible. Maybe he was going to collect his money from some Gauteng firm. Next to him a girl was absentmindedly clicking her black ballpoint pen. Her ears, enclosed in headsets, didn't hear the clicking. From time to time she answered her cellphone. "I also miss you my boo. I can't wait to see you for the first time. Talking to you via WhatsApp was not ayoba – enough for me." As Macko passed she smiled, her big artificial eyelashes flicking up and down.

The next taxi from Qwaqwa was due in 20 minutes. It left around seven in the morning. Macko saw that the taxi next to him was far from full. He looked down, kicked his shoes against the pavement, tired of looking at the other taxi drivers and the owners, who could afford to buy soft porridge from the mothers selling it. He could still hear their murmured appreciation. "Not this cornflakes I eat at my home. I was raised eating this, and I will die eating it."

"Tell that to your wife!"

They all laughed. They laughed while enjoying their warm, tasty porridge.

Others were buying braaied chicken feet with warm fat cakes. Others preferred their warm fat cakes with mango atchaar.

Macko felt his stomach growl and turned his attention away from the food. He focused on the radio blasting from the nearby taxi. He hoped to hear the driver's report, which announced the situations on the different roads, broken robots, accidents, traffic jams. Finally Macko stood up from the plastic chair he was seated in. Rose's words that morning were still running through his mind. As he stood and took a step two drivers rushed to the empty chair, falling over each other until one managed to plant his bum down on the seat.

"Our association should buy us chairs, not to worsen the violence of the taxi industry," Macko said as he walked away. He went to his taxi. There was no taxi behind him. He reversed. He wanted to do a round or two, transporting commuters locally, to get time moving. He left the rank. He collected a passenger headed to the end of Qwaqwa, in Tsheseng. It was a mother, a fat woman, holding three plastic bags. She shut the door hard. Finally a second passenger waved down the taxi. A lady who couldn't open the door from the outside. Macko had to balance the break pedal and then stretch his body to open the passenger's door from his driving seat. The woman asked to be dropped at the nearby veld.

"Are sure you want me to leave you here?" Macko asked. The lady nodded. Macko dropped her in peace. Glancing back in the rearview mirror he was surprised to see her still standing on the road. She lifted her hand to stop another taxi. He shook his head. He hit his

hooter, eyes searching the road for commuters. After a two minute drive he got another passenger, a young nurse who wore her blue work uniform. She sat then immediately pinched her nose tight with her fingers.

Macko looked at her through the rearview mirror. In his thoughts he said, “Nurses – hygienic people.”

The taxi passed people. Other empty taxis were going in the opposite direction to Macko. Finally they arrived at a small, village clinic. Macko dropped the young nurse. “Please close it carefully,” he pleaded and the nurse slid the door shut. After she left Macko tried to find the source of the smell that had bothered her. He turned his head back and breathed deeply. Nothing. His shoulders relaxed. He was relieved. The taxi was back on the small tarred road. Suddenly Macko smelled it too. A cloying foul odor. He tried to cover his nose with his hand but the smell seemed to have penetrated his skin. The hand was of no use. Maybe the smell was coming from outside? He glanced around trying to see if any of the windows were open. Yes, two of them were open, near a fat mother. Probably she had opened them.

“Makhulu, may you please close those windows.”

Without saying anything she reached her hand across and slid the windows shut. The smell remained. Macko thought he must be imagining it. He told himself that there was no smell anymore but his senses refused to listen to him. He could still smell it. In fact, with the windows closed, the smell was getting worse. The smell made Macko lose concentration. He was no longer looking for passengers. He only recognised a passenger when he whistled as the taxi passed him. Macko hit the brakes. Slid into reverse gear and backed up. He balanced the brake pedal and again stretched his body to open the passenger’s door A passenger got in.

“Sho, kakapa. I thought you are not riding with me anymore,” said the young man. He was carrying a car battery.

“No, my bro. I was just busy with something,” Macko said.

The young man turned his head, “Oh, sorry, makhulu. I didn’t recognise you. How are you?”

“I am fine, ngwana ka – my child. It is good to see that among today’s youth there are still some of you who greet elders,” she replied. “May the good Lord bless you, my son.”

The youth started to cough suddenly. He wrinkled his nose. Nodded with a fake smile. Took off his dirty blue top and put it to his nose. Macko realised he was not alone in what he was smelling. The taxi continued forward. Macko turned on his radio.

“Please drop me at that old parking van,” the young man asked. He paid his taxi fare and went off with his battery. “Ke a leboha,” he thanked after getting his change.

“This boy is well mannered. He knows how to greet the elders and he knows how to thank,” the fat mother said, clapping her hands with happiness.

Macko smiled. They turned onto an untarred road.

“You’ll drop me next to that big kraal,” the mother pointed.

Macko stopped the taxi. The fat lady took her time to open the door. She struggled with her three plastic bags. She picked them up at all once. The rotten smell rose. Macko frowned.

“You see I am supporting you. You should also come and support me by buying my malamohodu – animal’s tripe,” she slowly took out a R100 note and paid with it. “After washing them you will eat and eat deliciousness.”

“It is still early, I don’t have enough money,” Macko responded.

“Okay, you’ll get a discount when you buy this meat. Let me tell you, I also sell muti for people like you. I know these taxis make you drivers not perform well in bed as you spend most of your time sitting like now. You need to service your kidney. Ke a leboha.”

Macko watched the old woman walk away, bags swaying next to her.

Macko turned near the kraal. As he reversed, he felt a bump. The taxi slid to one side, stalled. He could hear the wheels spinning on the sand.

“Voetsek!” He said. A hole. He climbed out and surveyed the damage. His one wheel was stuck in a deep hole.

“My boys! My boys! Come and help here!” Macko turned and saw the fat lady, still holding her bags. She shouted and waved her arms and three men appeared. The lady pointed them to Macko’s taxi.

The men were carrying cups – made from tins of baked beans, in their hands – which they put to one side as they approached. “These little guys don’t know how to drive!” One of them said.

They pushed while Macko pressed down the accelerator. The taxi shuddered then jumped free. One of the men approached the window and said, “Give us something to buy another pint of this,” he pointed down. Macko saw the cup he referred to. Something brownish swirled in the bottom. Moqombothi – traditional homemade beer. A bad smell rose. Macko gave him ten rands in coins. He didn’t wait to see what the man did with the money.

He turned back onto the tar road and rushed to the rank. He didn’t stop for passengers. His mind was on Tshepo’s 21-seater. Maybe it had filled and left. In no time he was

approaching the rank. He pumped the volume on his radio. He didn't want his mind to have space to stray towards Rose's words that morning.

"A middle aged woman was killed early today at Johannesburg taxi rank, while she waited in line for a taxi at Wanders taxi rank. The woman was gunned down and three people were seriously injured when a gang randomly fired shots at 8:30 am. After randomly firing shots at the crowd at the rank on corner of Mabiza drive and Sewe Street, the five gun men fled on foot. The shoot-out was believed to have been linked to the taxi violence." After the announcement the DJ played, "God Bless Africa" by Mzwakhe Mbuli. Macko arrived at the rank with the music blasting. The rank was wrapped in silence. It was like everyone was told to be quiet in order to hear the radio. Everyone was supposed to hear the news bulletin. Tshepo's taxi was full but Macko was told that the association's boss, Tabola instructed that there would be no taxis to Gauteng.

"The taxi industry will never be a good place, simply because it was built up with blood," one of the drivers stated.

"Where is Tabola?" Macko asked.

Tshepo lifted his hands high, "I really don't know."

Macko took out his cellphone. Tabola's phone rang and rang. No answer. The taxis to Gauteng had to be cancelled as the big boss instructed. But, where was he? No taxi to Pretoria. No taxi to Vereeniging. No taxi to Johannesburg. Commuters were given back their money. Most of the taxi drivers who were supposed to go Gauteng were happy.

"The taxi industry will never be a good place, simply because it was built up on the blood of innocent people. That blood will always wake up and fight to kill others," a driver stated again.

A group of drivers whose taxis were cancelled didn't waste time. They went straight to the Matimalenyora Bottle Store. They bought their beers. Macko thought about going home. Rose's words jumped in his mind. No, he would rather do another local round. That would keep him busy. He rounded and rounded. He was tired and sore. He did three rounds with a full taxi. He opened the door for all the passengers, balancing the brake pedal and stretched his body from his driver's seat. It was tough. It was enough for him. He decided to go home and face what he didn't understand.

Macko arrived home before the sunset. Rose was not surprised. She knew everything from the horse's mouth. Macko found her on her cellphone. He wasn't interested in knowing who she was talking to or what they were talking about. He went straight to the bedroom. He threw himself on the bed. He closed his eyes.

Rose followed. She sat next to Macko. She brushed his head with her hand. “Babe, we need to talk. Like serious talk,” Rose said.

Macko didn’t move. He pretended he didn’t hear.

“Babe, please wake up. Let us talk.” She shook Macko.

Macko opened his eyes slowly. “I am listening.”

“I have reached a decision. If you don’t want to see a shrink like I asked in the morning, I am moving out. It is over between us. I am helping us here, not you only. Seriously, you have been behaving so strangely. Even at your work, they noticed.” Rose’s face was serious.

“You know I have to work, my boss won’t understand that,” Macko said. He turned and looked at Rose.

“Forgive me, but I had no choice, I asked him. He said it is okay.”

“What? When did you talk to him?” Macko sat up, hit the wall with his fist.

“Babe, please don’t scare me. I am helping you here. I didn’t give him the details,” she folded both of her hands with teary eyes. “I asked him today in the morning while he was still in Gauteng.

“Tabola is in Gauteng? Why is he there? Does he have anything to do with this morning’s shooting?” Macko asked.

“Babe, please leave that. Let’s talk about going to see the shrink,” Rose begged.

“I don’t have money right now, we have to hire a car, babe,” he lowered his voice.

“Your boss is going to lend us that other taxi, and Tshepo will use the scrap outside to work,” Rose softly said.

Macko stood up, looked at Rose who was looking down. Rose didn’t lift her head up. All she wanted was an answer. Macko turned his back on Rose. He held his head with both hands and rubbed it for a while. He looked up and finally said, “Okay. We will go before the end of this week.”

Rose stood up and hugged Macko. “We are in this together.”

11.

Macko pretended to sleep during the night but he could not. Would not. His mind was on the trip. The night seemed to crawl. He tossed. He opened and closed his eyes, hoping to see a clear sky. To deal with the trip once and for all.

Day arrived. For once Macko was up before Rose. They left for Jagersfontein around four in the morning. They didn't talk. It was a long and lonely trip. The road was bad. Macko had to concentrate to avoid potholes. Rose stared out the window like she wasn't there. After four hours they arrived exhausted.

"I thought this 'Jagersfontein' was a better place," Macko said. He looked around. It was a town of white buildings. The old ones. Cracked ones. Old whites were seen jogging. Old whites were seen with their old cars.

Rose didn't say anything. Finally she sighed, "Let us go inside."

They got out of the taxi. Macko locked. Rose held Macko's hand. The door to the doctor's office had a sign on it saying, "Open. Push." Macko walked slowly. Something in one of the trees caught his eye. Movement of feathers. Macko stared. It was an owl. The tree was tall, bare branches, a scattering of leaves. The owl's eyes followed Macko. Macko stared back at the bird as if it was talking to him. Rose pulled him by the hand. She pushed the door. They entered and were greeted by a receptionist.

"Welcome to Dr Du Toit's psychological practice!" she said with a big smile. "I'm the receptionist here. As you see, my name is Mary." They were surprised by her warm welcome. They kept quiet. "Please follow me," she led them to the next room. A waiting room.

"Doctor will call any time from now. Please feel free if you need anything, I'm just there," she pointed to her desk in the other room. Macko was nervous. Rose was happy. The receptionist's phone rang, she answered it.

"Alright, doctor. I'm coming with them," she hung up the phone. She went to the waiting room, "Doctor is ready to see you. Please follow me," the smile was still on her face. Macko followed her. Maybe she was always smiling, he thought. She knocked at the doctor's door, opened it without waiting for an answer. "Please take your seats," she told them before closing the door behind her.

"Good morning Mr and Mrs Ndawu," the doctor greeted them. He too wore a smile. He wore a dark blue jacket with a sky blue Scotch t-shirt.

"Good morning doctor. Thank you," Rose said. She also smiled. Maybe she liked that the doctor had mistakenly called her Mrs.

"Good morning doctor. Thank you." Macko said after a brief pause.

"Lovely. Whenever you're ready, tell me what brings you here," the doctor said, taking off his jacket. "Remember, the only person who can tell your story is you. Let me also remind you that you are your own life's expert. I am not here to judge you. My job is to simply listen"

“Uhhmm, it's Macko doctor, um, Me Ndawu doctor... my husband here has been behaving weirdly lately,” Rose answered, uncertainly. Macko looked at her then his eyes returned to the doctor’s face.

“Alright.” The doctor coughed. “Mrs Ndawu, may you please give me some time alone with your husband?”

Rose stood, uncertainly. She looked at Macko and he nodded. She walked out of the room. The receptionist smiled at her as she took a seat. She sat with her knees together. She kept thinking of Macko and all that had happened. She thought of Macko alone with the doctor. She wondered what he was tell him. She glanced up and found Mary staring at her. She smiled but the smile sat tight on her lips. She looked down at her knees and waited.

Du Toit listened quietly as Macko spoke. He interrupted only occasionally to ask a question or clarify something. Macko spoke in bursts. He felt like everything was pouring out. Finally he stopped. He sat looking at the doctor.

The doctor smiled, his voice was cool but reassuring. He told Macko they needed to discuss treatment options.

“Would you like your spouse to be here to hear the treatment plan?” Du Toit looked at his watch.

“Anything is fine with me.” Macko replied.

The doctor picked up the phone on his desk, “Mary, please tell Mrs Ndawu to come in.”

Macko and the doctor sat in silence. Macko looked at the crumpled tissue in his hand. “Macko, you are needed at home.”

He lifted his head slowly and looked at the shrink. The man’s eyes had disappeared. His glasses were still on but behind them black holes gaped. Macko jumped back in his chair. His heart was racing in his chest. His breathing became fast, exaggerated. His hands were shaking. He was about to stand when Rose and the receptionist entered. Macko looked from them to the doctor. He started to speak but stopped himself. Du Toit’s eyes had returned to normal.

Du Toit looked at both of them. “Mr and Mrs Ndawu, I suggest we continue with these sessions. Please make an appointment for next month.” He looked at Macko. His voice was calm and reassuring again. His eyes were kind. “Your anxiety is completely understandable considering what you’ve been through. The important thing now is to start to deal with the trauma you have suffered. We will do this in our therapy sessions. I have no

doubt you will recover fully. In the meantime I am going to prescribe some medication to help with the anxiety.”

“It’s going to be fine babu,” Rose took Macko's hand and squeezed it.

“Please see yourself out, I’m rushing somewhere,” Du Toit said as he picked up some files on his desk and left them alone in his office.

Macko’s heart was still beating fast. A wave of confusion washed over him.

“But Rose ...”

Rose put her finger on his mouth, “Let us go, babe. We are finished here!” She turned and Macko had no choice but to follow.

“Let’s go get the prescription then go and celebrate, my love,” Rose pulled Macko’s hand.

Macko shook his head. The doctor’s words were ringing over and over in his head: Macko, you are needed at home. Macko, you are needed at home. Macko, you are needed at home. He felt weak. He let Rose pull him outside.

12.

Macko attempted to stay awake by moving his head from side to side, by drumming his fingers on the wheel. Rose softly brushed the top of his chiskop head. Macko squeezed his eyes shut and then open again. The weak evening sunset made the air shimmer. Ahead of them the road swung in a sharp curve. Rose’s eyes followed the road. “Dangerous curve. High Accident Zone.” She read the words of the warning sign as they passed it. She didn’t even notice that Macko was struggling to stay awake. She couldn’t contain the excitement in her heart. She leant over and kissed him, leaving her shining colourless lipstick on his cheek. Macko moved his eyes, shooting her a quick smile before returning to his serious mood. The long road was just so short for Rose. She enjoyed driving. She enjoyed watching Macko drive. It was one thing he did really well. She again leaned over, again her lips found Macko’s cheek, puckering her lips into a long kissing sound that stretched out after the kiss. “Babe, we are on the dangerous road.” Macko was smiling despite his serious mood. He was also enjoying the drive. He loved to see Rose’s happiness and her affection that always came with it. He laughed. “You babe!” He shook his head with a smile. He held his smile. Rose giggled too, “You know my man when you are laughing I feel some chocolate cake in my veins. Damn, I love when you do it!”

Macko laughed again. They both laughed aloud together. Rose continued to laugh after Macko had stopped. She gave him another kiss. Macko slowly opened his mouth while holding the steering wheel. Rose shut his mouth with her fourth finger. "I know what you are going to say." Rose smiled.

"And that is....." Macko said, nodding his head.

"Babe, we are on the dangerous road." Rose imitated Macko's deep voice. They both laughed for a longer time, unable to stop them themselves.

"Oh, now you are reading my mind?" Macko said with a smile.

Rose raised her hands, "Why not? You are my man! Who should read his mind? And I have a right to kiss you whenever I like, wherever I like." Rose proudly said.

"I agree with you babe. You know what?" Macko said with a bold voice. They passed a sharp curve on the road.

"What babe?" Rose asked looking at Macko. She even changed her sitting position. She raised her legs, folded them and sat looking at Macko.

"Kiss me again!" Macko screamed.

"Yipppppp!" She kissed him, not on the cheek like before, but on the mouth. She did that for two seconds.

"Hmmm, thanks babe. I am glad you are wearing a colourless lipstick. Imagine if it was your favourite one." Macko smiled a little.

She lifted her purse, pretended to beat Macko. "Which one is my favourite?"

"The maroon one like the dress you are wearing. I love this dress, it reminds me our special moment. Our first date."

"Yes babe, I love maroon. I didn't think you would notice things like my colour." She leaned into Macko and kissed him on the cheek. She counted her kisses. "One!" She gave him a first kiss. "Two!" The second one lasted longer. "Three!" She kissed him for the third time and then leant back satisfied.

Macko pushed the image of Rose on their first date, Rose in a maroon dress, out of his mind. He concentrated on driving. The sun had disappeared over the horizon and it was getting darker. Rose kissed him again. His cheek was shining with the glow of Rose's lipstick. You could see her lips traced on his skin. Macko's skin was always dry, grey-tinged – even when he used lotion. Even with Vaseline. Even baby oil.

The road ahead narrowed down to two lanes – their lane and the oncoming traffic lane. Macko forced his eyes open wider, slightly shook his head. He followed the road with his eyes. Beside him Rose was finally silent, staring out the window. Macko's eyes closed, he

forced them open again. Followed the road. His lids dropped again. The taxi slid across into the oncoming lane. Macko didn't notice. He didn't see the other car, a silver Porsche appear out of nowhere, travelling at high speed. Its hooter filled the silence, its brights flicked as it crossed to its left hand side, driving in the yellow lane.

Macko's eyes popped. Instinctively he hit the brakes. Rose sat surprised and frozen. She really didn't have time to process what had happened but she saw it all. Everything happened very quickly to her. She saw the face of the young white man driving the silver Porsche. His mouth was twisted, open in a scream. His window was down and she caught a fragment, "Fucking taxi drivers!" She saw his hand fly out the car, twist into a fist and raise a middle finger.

Macko looked at Rose. "You must bear in mind that the owner of this taxi will crash us if we crash his taxi."

"Ag that one!" Rose waved her hand.

"And I still wonder how come he lent me his taxi to come so far. Sometimes you could swear that someone is controlling his moods." Macko shook his head, and opened his eyes wider.

"Don't think too much." Rose coughed. "You are his employee, he should somehow take care of you." She breathed deeply.

Macko wiped his eyes with his left hand while driving with the right. His eyes saw eight lanes even though his mind knew there were only two. Theirs and the oncoming traffic lane.

"I'm sleepy or dizzy. I don't know what is really happening." Macko stretched his neck by moving his head.

"Don't stress. I guess it's the effects of the machines they used to check your body at the psychologist." Rose touched Macko's neck. He kept driving.

"Is there any cooldrink left?" Macko slowly asked.

"No, not even water. We should stop and buy them at any garage we pass." Rose kissed Macko on the cheek. "Calm down, babe."

Macko gave a short smile, glanced quickly at Rose and winked. Rose winked back. She moved her fingers along his neck.

"I'm feeling better now, I just need to rest, and we have two hours left to home." Macko looked fresher, he shifted gear.

Rose said, "I love when you are strong and healthy." She pointed, "Look! At last there is a sign for a nearby garage." She smiled.

Macko smiled too and said, “At last.”

Rose took out her cellphone to take a picture of the eye-catching light in the sky – a light that rose like a hand thrust upward.

Macko jumped a little. He saw a moving person’s shadow on the back seat through the rearview mirror. “What’s that?” he asked.

“It’s a beautiful light, babe. You see?” Rose said. She didn’t see what Macko saw.

Macko looked through the rearview mirror before answering Rose. There was no shadow anymore. He pretended to be looking at the light outside. “Yes, very beautiful. But not more than you.”

Rose smiled. Night was approaching fast now and suddenly the eye-capturing light disappeared. “Aah, its now gone. And I wonder why it does not appear on my camera. But this phone took it very well I saw.” She kept looking at her cellphone. There was no picture of eye-catching light, the hand-like light. Macko was holding his neck. Rose saw him but did not say anything. She was hoping to see the garage.

Finally they saw it. It was now one hour to their town. Macko pulled off the road and parked the taxi next to the one petrol pump. An old one. Macko wasn’t sure it was working. It was a brown, rust colour.

Macko shone his taxi lights on it but it remained in shadows. He hit the hooter. There was no one to help them. Next to a big tree there was a shop. The garage shop door carried a sign, “Open.” Macko hit the hooter again. There was still no one to help.

“Babe, I don’t trust this place.” Rose shivered. She folded her hands.

“I am here to protect you. Don’t worry. Feel safe.” Macko looked Rose directly in the eyes. He opened the taxi door and got out. Rose jumped a little when he shut the taxi door. With him gone, the taxi felt too big for her. She thought she should have gone out with him.

“Hello! Hello!” Macko shouted. “Anybody to help us?” It was only a wind that kept stirring the leaves of the big tree. The leaves never fell down. They just kept flying. To where? Nobody knew. Macko looked back at the taxi. He started to turn back. But his mind told him to go in the shop. Rose was waving her hand, calling him back to the taxi. He saw her waving hand. But to him, it appeared to tell him to keep moving and go in the shop. He turned to the shop. He looked down. He saw a line of drops going to the shop door from a petrol pump. Macko kicked at the drops and they spread. He went to the door. He knocked. “Hello! Hello!” He screamed again. He looked at Rose again. She waved her hand, calling him back to the taxi. He saw her hand waving him into the shop. “Is this a place for a human being?” he asked. “Hello! Hello! I am asking?” He shouted. He slowly opened the door.

“Hello? Hello?” There was no answer. But he heard voices. He entered. He couldn’t see anyone. “Hello! Hello!” No one answered him. Macko saw a rusted fridge with rusted cans of coldrink. There was a wooden counter next to it. He looked up. Above him hung shards of glass of different colours, linked together by what looked like a spider’s web. They hit against each other, making a sharp noise that shot up Macko’s spine into his head. Macko held his ears closed. The wind kept the fragments of glass moving. There were open doors on either side of the shop. He heard wind howling through that door. He slowly followed the sound. The door he had entered was behind him. It was slowly closing. His joints became weak. A strong wind howled through the back door. He slowly continued forward. The entrance door kept moving. He saw a shadow. A movement. His heart started to race. No, it was just a cat. It emerged through the door in front of him, threaded itself around his legs making strange mewling sounds. Suddenly an old black man rose up from behind the counter. Macko stared at him. Frozen. The man had uncombed grey hair and a smile that revealed sharp dirty teeth. “Can I help you? This is the way home!” The old man said.

Macko felt his hair moving. He backed up. He tried to make a run for the entrance door. As he reached it, it slammed shut. He grabbed the handle, rattled and shook it, leaned against it with his full weight. Suddenly the door gave. Macko was outside. Behind him he heard the door slam shut. He didn’t look back. Macko ran to the taxi. He was breathing fast. Rose stared at Macko’s empty hands.

“This is a haunted garage.” Macko said while starting the engine.

“That is what I thought when I tried calling you to the taxi.” Rose shook.

“You called me? Were you not telling me to go inside?” Macko asked.

“No, babe. Let’s get out of this place, please!” Rose’s voice was pitched high.

Macko started the engine. Felt a floor of relief as he heard the motor roar. They returned to the main road. The road was almost empty. A few passing trucks. Macko put his foot down. The road was clear. He took advantage of it. And there were no cameras. They passed several long trucks. There were no curves anymore. The road was straight. The taxi’s right headlight went dim then off. Macko didn’t mind. They were near their town. Only twenty minutes left. When Macko blinked he saw the shiny eyes of an animal. He heard the bang. They’d hit it. The taxi swerved off the road. Macko tried to gain control. Too late. They found themselves in the dirt. Next to a sunflower farm. They got out of the taxi. They saw blood on the bonnet. The windscreen was badly cracked. They walked slowly back up to the road to see what kind of the animal they hit. They couldn’t find a body. Macko walked up and down while Rose watched. “It must have been a donkey or a cow. Did you see the

windshield? Did you see what it did?" Macko kept walking. Finally Rose called him back. She was tired. They crossed the dirt, followed the trail cut by the taxi's wheels. Macko turned the key several times and finally the engine took. Back on the road, he used the taxi's headlight to look for the dead animal in the bush alongside them. They looked and looked. There was nothing.

"Today is the worst day of all!" Macko said, as he turned the taxi towards their town.

"I know, babe. But also look on the other side. The trusted psychologist of Jagersfontein confirmed that you can well." Rose said, looking at Macko. "It was worth it, babe."

Macko was silent. They arrived in QwaQwa. They arrived at their place.

13.

"Here we are!" Macko stretched his hands upwards. He yawned then turned his head back and smiled at the passengers. Some smiled with him, others not. One of the passengers, sitting near the passenger's door, leaned over and opened it. The wind swept into the taxi. It was winter. The mountainous areas of Qwaqwa were covered with a dense mist, hovering around the mountain. In Qwaqwa the winters were harsh. The passengers in Macko's taxi braced themselves. The cold pierced through the bones to the marrow. It was that time of the year when even dogs had to find a hiding place to stay warm.

Most of the commuters were already on their cellphone, notifying their loved ones that they had arrived. Some were new to the town and needed help - where to from here.

"Where are the local taxis?" asked a young man, his eyes directed through the window, trying to get his bearings.

"There are no taxis at this time. It is late," Macko responded.

The man stared at Macko as if he didn't understand the words.

"Where are you going?" Macko asked.

"They said I should get off next to the information centre," he said.

Macko noticed that the youngster was looking unwell. His eyes were red and he kept pressing his nose with his fingers. He sneezed and sneezed.

"But we passed the information centre. Why didn't you ask in time?" Macko's voice was irritated. "You might be lucky and get some taxi to take you from there."

“Okay, thanks,” The young man got out slowly. His luggage was heavy, a big suitcase and a transparent plastic bag containing a blanket. He looked like a student. Yes, the universities were opening for the second semester. Students rested from June. Now it was their time again. Macko guessed he must be a new student registering for the first time in the second semester. The young man lifted his bag and walked, then dropped again and stood looking lost.

“Bro Macko...!”

Macko looked around to see who was calling him. He flicked on his taxi’s lights. The beams lit up a figure moving towards him. It was too dark to make out any features, all he saw was a shape, the black shape of a man coming towards him. The rank’s lights had been broken since summer. It wasn’t so bad then but now that it was winter, the sun set early and the dark was like a blanket. It covered the rank, making it difficult to see anything. Macko only recognized Dodo at the last minute.

“You’ll drop me at Mojalefa’s corner, right?” Dodo laughed at Macko’s surprised face.

Macko shook his head. He closed his taxi’s window. He climbed out and assisted the commuters removing the big bags stored in the back. In no time Dodo was next to him, helping him.

“I am looking for a taxi that is going to Thababosiu,” said a young lady. She was holding a child’s hand and carried an infant on her back.

Before Macko could say anything, Dodo answered, “There are no taxis to the village at this time of the day, my sister.”

The young woman with her children looked steadily at them, “So, what should I do? How to get to the village?”

“Next to that garage. You see it?” Macko pointed. “Pass that corner and you’ll get the meter taxi there, they will take you home with a special fee.”

“Okay, thanks driver,” she lifted the suitcase Macko had just unloaded and walked away, heaving the case in one hand, the other still clutching the child.

“What about us who don’t have money for the meter taxis?” asked one of the passengers, still standing next to the unloaded luggage.

Macko was about to answer when his phone rang. He stepped aside and checked who the call was from. He answered it with a smile.

Dodo glanced over at Macko, seeing the smile; he looked back at the passenger. “It is not the driver’s problem anymore. You have to sort yourself out. You don’t have a car, that’s why you are using public transport. So, this is public transport, not your own transport.”

None of the remaining passengers said anything after that. They lifted their bags and began to walk. Macko hung up, smiling and blushing slightly after the phone conversation. He moved back to his taxi again. The rank was emptying out. Those who had money went to the meter taxis. Others waited for loved ones to arrive to pick them up. Those who had no money or loved ones were on their own.

Macko and Dodo were about to leave too when the silence that had descended on the rank was broken. Screams pierced the darkness. A man’s voice. The words were distinct. They made the hair on Macko’s neck prickle. It was a call for help. Macko glanced at Dodo and they set off at the same time, running towards the nearby road where the sound seemed to come from. As they approached they saw the shapes of three men running away. They were wearing hats pulled low over their eyes making it impossible to make out their features. Further along they saw a young man standing with his suitcase, the lid had popped open and his possessions were scattered across the pavement. Macko recognised the young man as the student he had directed to the info centre. Seeing the young man’s tear-stained face, his empty hands and the suitcase, Macko immediately knew what had happened. The men who had run away must have been robbing him. Probably his and Dodo’s approach had scared them off.

“Eish, little brother. I am sorry,” Macko bent to help him gather his things and pack them back into the suitcase. When they were done he held the young man’s shoulder. “Come with us, we will leave you at the police station so that you can report the matter.”

Macko carried the suitcase. The young man stared at Macko then nodded. Tears were still streaming down his cheeks.

“Here, you must be very careful grootman,” Dodo said.

The three of them walked to the taxi in silence.

A few passengers were still lingering. The incident had put them on edge. They clasped their belongings. They were scared.

“If I had enough petrol I would take you all to your different homes,” Macko told them. He started the taxi. Dodo couldn’t say anything. He also needed to get home. Macko, Dodo, and the young man left the rank. They left the remaining passengers stranded. The young man was still crying, wiping his tears from time to time. Macko’s cellphone sounded. It was an SMS, “My lion, please fly to me. I miss you dearly.” Macko smiled openly.

“What is going on? Is someone in love?” Dodo asked. He looked at Macko and Macko blushed. In less than five minutes they were at the police station. Macko went inside with the young man, leaving Dodo in the taxi. Inside a loud noise welcomed them. There was a drunken couple at the desk, reporting each other. Arresting each other. Shouting at each other. Insulting each other. Two police officers finally emerged from the passage and helped the desk officer throw them out. They were still shouting when they disappeared out the door. Macko shook his head and laughed to himself, thinking of the fights he and Rose sometimes had. The young man glanced at him and Macko feel silent again. A lady with many documents she had to certify was now at the desk.

Macko and the young man sat down, waiting to be helped. They watched as the reception area filled with police officers. Several of them were carrying long rifles. It seemed like something was going down. The officers slipped on bulletproof vests as they headed to the door. Macko overheard bits of their conversation, “There are thugs in the ranks. They just robbed and raped some young lady who arrived in town from Johannesburg. They also raped her toddler, beating her young infant.”

Macko felt his back tense up. He was so distracted in watching the police he didn't notice Baile's arrival. Macko jumped when he looked up. Baile was there to attend to the young man's case. Macko froze a little then shook himself right. He stood up quickly. His eyes clashed with the detective's eyes. He felt like he was staring into a dark pool. The eyes seemed to have no iris. Macko recognised the detective's rusted teeth. He shivered. He looked away quickly. His voice shook slightly. “Hello detective they just robbed this young man at the rank.”

Baile didn't say anything. He turned his back, waved his hand for them to follow. The young man stood and followed. Macko sighed then followed too – what choice did he have? They were in a long corridor. As they kept moving deeper, the corridor seem to narrow. Macko felt like he was suffocating. The air in the space was stale. The floor seemed to slope. The paint on the wall was peeling.

“Where are we going?” Macko asked. The words echoed back at him, louder with each reverberation. Macko covered his ears. His brow was sweating. His feet suddenly felt very heavy. It was like he was sinking. He tried to get the detective's attention. He said, “wait”, but Baile didn't answer. His head was not visible any more. He was just a long coat moving on black shoes. Macko pulled his eyes from the detective to the young man, drew back in horror. The young man's head was also gone. His long black and white Scotch t-shirt, travelled on bare feet. Macko started to turn but as soon as he moved, the walls started to

crack. He froze. Next to him young man's man body paused, turned to Macko. It waved its bodiless hand, telling Macko to follow. Macko didn't wait after that. He ran like a headless chicken. He never looked back. The light bulbs in the roof were shaking. He kept running. Sweat washed his body. In front of him, a dark entrance loomed but he stopped. His feet became heavy. He felt his air leaving his body. He was about to fall down when suddenly he entered into the room in which they had met the detective. Macko stood breathing heavily. The police officers at the desk looked at him in surprise. He collected himself. His hand's were shaking as he crossed to a small water dispenser. He lifted one of the disposable white cups and filled it. He took a quick sip, leaving the cup still in his shaking hand.

"My broer, what took you so long?" Dodo asked. "Your phone has been ringing. I picked it up for you."

Macko finished the water in a long gulp before he answered Dodo. "Who was it?" He was blinking non-stop. He didn't want to look at Dodo. He didn't want him to realize how terrified he felt.

"Jou vrou! I told her you are helping some seun. She said she is very proud of you." Dodo smiled. "What did you feed her? I've never heard jou vrou so happy."

Macko felt the tension leaving his body. He smiled a little then became serious again. "Let's just say we had a wonderful trip last week that changed everything. She is in love with me like she never was before."

"Jesus! I wish I was you," he whistled. "Ya, I noticed you were not around. Tshepo was driving that scrap taxi of yours. Now look, Mr Tabola gave you a new taxi. Good things are happening for you, my broer. I am happy for you."

"That scrap gave me a tough time, but I miss it. It was my best babe," smiling Macko said.

"Why are we turning here now? Authi ya ka, nna ke ya ha ka – My dear brother, I am going to my home. My vrou is waiting for me, I need a sparkling relationship like you. You know these women!"

"We are just quickly going to buy electricity at the shopping centre before they close." He increased the volume of the CD player. He balanced the speakers. The bass was loud. Their taxi roared like a happy lion. The speakers were powerful. Inside, on the roof there were sparkling lights. Changing colours. From blue to green. From yellow to red. The leather seats made it more splendid, more comfortable. When they arrived at the local shopping centre they attracted attention. The bass of a house song – "Shumaya" by DBN Nyts featuring Zinhle Ngidi, filled the parking area, people gathered, even the old ones

moved their bodies. The queue for electricity was not that long. There were only ten people in front of them.

“Our municipality is not fair. We buy this expensive electricity, in no time the load shedding will visit us,” Dodo said, pretending to be angry. Dodo was moving his head in time to the house song playing from their taxi. They left its windows open. The taxi’s rims were shining. Its tyres had hubcaps. The lights inside kept sparkling.

“Don’t blame the municipality. This thing is happening all over Mzansi. But again, we should stop complaining. There are worse countries out there, ask me,” Macko said so. All the attention was on them.

“Yes, you are right. But let’s not protect Mzansi by saying other countries are worse. The governing political organization is responsible!” Dodo jived. He went down a little – bending his knees and went up again.

“You won’t understand as long you’ve never lived or visited other countries. It is really tough out there,” Macko took out money. “Ke kopa motlakase wa R100.” He put money and the electricity slip through the small window. They listened to the song, as it repeated itself. There were other people in the queue behind them. It was getting colder and colder. People pulled their jackets around them. Almost everyone wore hand gloves, warm hats, warm boots.

Macko’s cellphone rang again and he quickly answered it. “Hello babe, I’m just buying electricity now.”

“Okay my babe, please hurry I miss you. I’m gonna grab you....” Rose’s voice was audible.

Macko interrupted her with shyness, “Uhm, yes babe. I am with other people here.”

“Okay babe, come home. Please... love youuuuuuuuu!” She hung up the call.

Macko smiled. They returned to the taxi and they drove off. In less than seven minutes he dropped off Dodo at his rusted shack. He decreased the volume. He calculated the money of the day. He was at home. His puppy was waiting outside, wagging its tail, happy to see him. It greeted the taxi with a bark. Macko parked as usual. He took out the money. He locked all the doors and made sure that all the windows were closed. He was more careful now than he had been with his beloved scrap. He played with his puppy, lifting his hands up and down. It jumped and jumped. It softly barked. He thought of letting it in the house but he didn’t want to destroy Rose’s sweet mood. He entered, closing the door.

“Honey I’m home.”

The house was very warm. It was clean and tidy. Smelling the floor polish made Macko smile. The smell of food made him hungry. Rose welcomed him with a long, soft kiss. She hugged and hugged him.

“Love, I am proud of you. I’m really glad that you are healed now. The psychologist helped,” Rose kissed him and smiled. She wore a new gown. Her face wore a sexy smile. She pulled him by his hand into the dining room. The music was playing. Not just the music, but the real music – “One Man Woman” by Milira Jones, followed by “No More Tears” by Anita Baker, “Followed by Beautiful in my Eyes” by Joshua Kadison, followed by “Hold Me In Your Arms” by Teddy Pendergrass. Rose had lit candles and a soft light filled the room. On the table were dishes filled with food. She opened a bottle of red wine and poured for them. Blushing, Macko lifted his glass, and touched it against Rose’s glass. They smiled at each other. Rose opened the lid of one of the dishes and took out a ripe strawberry. She dipped it in the cream, and lifted it to Macko’s mouth. He bit one half. The juice filled his mouth. Rose laughed and ate the other half. They kissed a little, tasting the strawberry in each other’s mouths. Rose pulled away and stood to dish the main meal. It was mutton oxtail with a homemade dumpling. Macko’s favourite. He melted. He smiled. He shook his head and chuckled. Rose gave him a warm cloth to clean his hands. He ate and ate. He wanted more of the mutton oxtail but Rose shook her head with a smile. She dished out dessert. Homemade smooth custard, with a red raspberry jelly, sliced white peaches with malva pudding, strawberries and cream on the side. They ate.

After eating, Rose took all the dishes to the kitchen and left them in the washing bowl. She returned from the kitchen, turned off the light. She held Macko’s hand, and pulled him towards the bedroom. The bedding was fresh. Fresh new sheets. The sounds of Freddie Jackson’s “Rock me Tonight” accompanied them. Rose opened her new gown and Macko leaned in and kissed each breast, lips soft against her nipples. Rose closed her eyes, opened them. Her gown was down and her shaved perfumed pussy smiled at Macko. He ran his lips down. Breasts. Ribs. Belly button. Waist. Abdomen. Kissed her vagina. Held its lips with his mouth’s lips. He put his tongue in. Hmmm. Macko enjoyed its taste. Rose moaned as she closed her eyes. She spread her legs, kicking off her slippers and standing with one leg on the bed, her other leg on the floor. “Yes, babe! Yes, babe!” Rose moaned. Macko licked and licked. He stood up, pulled Rose towards him. Rose undressed him. His brown jacket was off. His shirt was also off. He helped her to unbutton his belt. He took off his trouser. Rose kissed his penis while still inside his boxer shorts. She slowly slid off the boxer shorts. She bent and

sucked until the erection was harder than ice, dripping. Macko took his hand and fingered Rose. They moaned at the same time. Macko moaned. Rose moaned.

They were on the bed. Rose was on top of Macko. She slowly shook her ass on Macko's hard cock. "Ahhh, babe it is coming! Yes, yes, yes!" Rose screamed. She shook her ass faster and the vibrations swept through Macko's body. She flattened herself against Macko's body. Her vaginal fluid covered Macko's penis. They flipped. Macko was on top. He listened to Rose's moans. Then something happened. It was like a switch flipped in his head. Her moans grew louder, higher in pitch. Suddenly they sounded like the cries of children. He tried to stop them but the voices wouldn't leave him. Every time Rose opened her mouth he heard a small, desperate, piercing cry. No, not now, not now. He tried to ignore the cries. He focused on Rose. Her body. Her tits. Her ass. The cries grew louder. Macko fucked Rose hard with his hands clasping his head. Rose had her eyes closed. She didn't notice until Macko's penis died inside her.

Rose opened her eyes to find Macko holding his head. "Oh babe! Are you okay? Let me find your medication!" Rose jumped up and ran to the kitchen. She flicked on the light, quickly poured a glass of water, and retrieved the medication.

She found Macko looking ashamed and puzzled.

"What was going on?" Macko asked.

"It's you, babe. You freaked me out. I am glad you are okay." She got in bed. "Let us sleep. You gave me rough, marvelous sex. But it is not enough, you owe me."

They laughed. They cuddled and slept.

14.

Macko was near his taxi, watching Dodo. Dodo kept himself busy by washing some of the taxis. Taxi drivers would pay him, even though they hadn't asked him to wash their vehicles. That was how it worked. He had done the job and they would pay, albeit often grudgingly. That was how he was able to bring something home to eat. He finished washing a blue 21-seater Sprinter. He loved his work. All the Sprinter's mats were out. He washed and soaked them. The blue body was shining and attractive. He was polishing the tyres. He bent his body. Half of his ass was out. Even if he noticed it, he didn't mind. He was working. His trousers were slowly going down.

Two young women approached. He didn't hear them coming. They looked at his ass. One pointed with a naughty smile. The other one grabbed her friend's pointing hand. She was also smiling. But she shook her head in rebuke. Dodo was busy polishing. He dipped an old brush into a tin polish. It was quarter to eleven.

"Hello bhuti," two young women greeted simultaneously. They held their bags in their hands. One held an orange movable suitcase. She was wearing black jeans, an orange pullover, showing her cleavage. The other one carried a pink bag, average in size, with a white Nike sign on it, on her shoulder. Lipstick on her mouth was also pink. She wore a pink tracksuit. Her sneakers were white with pink lines on them. She was whiter than her friend.

Dodo cleared his throat first. He slowly dropped the black polish container and small brush. He wiped his hands on his trouser leg. He drew himself erect, pulled his trousers up and smiled at the ladies.

"Hello, beautiful sisters," he greeted them.

"Re kopa ho botsa – May we please ask," the one in the orange pullover said. Mixing Sesotho with English with her IsiZulu accent, not being aware that she was repeating the same thing.

"Where is a Johannesburg taxi?" the other one asked.

Dodo took time to answer. He was looking at the cleavage of the young woman in the orange sweater. He put his hand on his mouth, coughed and said, "Have you registered your names and paid at that cashier's window?"

They looked at each other, and said, "No."

"Okay. Let me help you with your bags." He lifted a bag and a heavy suitcase. You could see that they were heavy for him. Poor Dodo. "You'll find me at that taxi," he pointed at Macko's taxi with his head. "Go and pay."

The young women went to the cashier's window. Dodo went to Macko's taxi. He didn't even greet his friend. He quickly dropped the bags. He breathed heavily. He snatched the water bottle from Macko's hands. He quickly swallowed water without stopping. Five hundred millilitres was suddenly empty.

Macko laughed at him, "I've been watching you. Will you wash and polish my taxi or I am going to show your wife this video I just took?"

"Ag, it just a video. Go and show her," Dodo said. He saw those two young women coming. He looked at the taxi's mirror and cleared his throat. He took out his cellphone, and said, "May I please have your digits?"

They looked at each other. The one with pink lipstick said, “Don’t you dare take advantage of us!”

“Which advantage now?” Disappointed Dodo put his phone back in his pocket.

Macko laughed. He held up his phone and continued to video Dodo.

“Bhuti, is this a taxi to Johannesburg?” The young woman with pink lipstick looked at Macko.

“Yes,” Macko answered. He stopped filming.

The girls opened the taxi door. Macko and Dodo watched long legs slide inside, feet disappear. Dodo shrugged then went back to his work. He left their bags outside the taxi. Macko followed him.

It was half past twelve. An old man arrived. He was not pleased to see that he was number three. He climbed in slowly and sat down.

“Sir, have you registered?” one of the young women asked.

“Yes, my child. I am in the right taxi, right? To Egoli, Johannesburg?” He asked.

The young woman with the pink lipstick laughed.

Her friend answered. “Yebo, baba.”

Around them taxi’s were filling, departing for their different destinations. People came and passed Macko’s taxi. Young women and an old man that they thought were coming to ride with them, but they just passed. The clock was ticking.

“Apples! Apples!” The selling lady shouted. “My lovely customers. Red apples! Green Apples! Gold apples! They are all sweet!” she shouted. She shouted after those who were not buying. If a taxi was open she stood at the door and shouted. If the door was closed she shouted at the windows.

“Is this a taxi to Johannes...?” A young man asked.

One of the young women interrupted him before he could get the word out of his mouth. The Berg was unnecessary. “Yes, yes, my brother. Get in.”

He greeted and got in. The old man and young women greeted him. ‘

One o’clock arrived.

“Remote batteries. Watch batteries. Radio batteries,” a man passed. He wore a brown two piece from Dickies. A brown woolen hat. Dark brown All Stars. His mouth was blacker than coal. He had three scratches. One on the nose, another one under the right eye and the last one on the forehead. No one bought. He passed Macko’s taxi and went to another one.

Cold air began to remind everyone that it was winter. It was half past one. The young women whispered a little, then stood up.

“Sir,” they said to the old man. He didn’t hear. He was sleeping. They looked at the young man. He stared up in confusion. Saw their mouths move, took one headset off the left ear.

“Our brother, we are coming. We are hungry. We have been here for some time now.” They got out. The young man nodded. He put a headset back on his left ear.

Two o’clock arrived. Three people came. A family. A father, his wife and their toddler. They got in. After a while, the two young women returned. They carried KFC. They were a little happy to see another three people. Someone followed them. A hobo. They got into the taxi. The hobo wanted to follow. They quickly closed the door.

He went to a window, “My sister, please. Just a piece of KFC,” he asked, holding his stomach.

They kept quiet. He stood there, staring at them eating.

“Even a bone is okay. Please,” he continued to ask.

“He says even a bone,” the old man, now awake said.

“No, just look at him. He is very healthy. Why doesn’t he go and look for work?” the young woman asked with food in her mouth.

People laughed.

“What did you say, my child?” asked the old man.

“Just look at him. He knows how to ask for money. Why doesn’t he ask for a job instead,” She shook her head while eating.

“They live here, this is how they make a living. They even sleep here,” the old man said.

“Whatever, we work hard, and they just wake up to beg us?” She waved her oily hand. People laughed. After a while the poor hobo went off. It was half past three when a smartly dressed lady arrived. Wearing a maroon leather skirt with a maroon leather top. The gold watch on her wrist was shining together with the ring on her left second finger. She was also heading to Johannesburg.

“I really think they should mix us. It is getting late,” the old man said.

“Yes, you are right,” the woman in maroon leather agreed.

The old man stretched his neck, “Where is that driver? We should tell him.”

“I don’t know where he is. I saw him when we arrived here around twelve o’clock,” one of the young women said, also stretching her neck.

“A warm, fresh mielie, dear visitors. A warm mielie to keep you warm,” a young lady came to the taxi. She opened the door. People felt the cold air coming from the outside. “A fresh mielie!”

“Is it really fresh?” the woman in maroon leather asked.

“Yes. It is really fresh, madam,” she answered.

“How much is it?” she asked again.

“Only R15 for you, madam.” She lifted a mielie out of her cake tin.

The woman in maroon leather took out her purse and gave her R20. The selling lady gave her a warm mielie and her R5 change.

“Thank you, madam. Lovely passengers, are you sure you don’t want a warm mielie?” She asked again. No one answered. She opened the door and was about to close it when a guy wearing green security clothes got in.

“My phone is flat. Why don’t they mix us with Pretoria and Vereeniging passengers?” the lady in the orange pullover said, glancing at her cellphone.

“Yes, it is now four o’clock. Let us all go out and ask for our money back if they don’t mix us.” The young woman with pink lipstick stood up. “Let us go, it is getting late!”

“I wonder if I am still going. We are going to arrive in Johannesburg around nine o’clock, and I have to take another taxi to Carletonville. And I won’t find any taxi to Carletonville at that time. Thugs will just rob us when we arrive there at that time. Last week they robbed my sick friend. They really don’t have any mercy,” complained the old man. He was angry. “I just want my money back, I will wake early tomorrow morning and go to Johannesburg.”

The toddler in the taxi cried.

“But taking back your money will just decrease our number. Okay, good people let us go to demand them mixing us, or demand our money back,” the young woman with pink lipstick said as she got out of the taxi.

“I have to go to work tonight otherwise they are going to deduct my money, I really can’t afford that,” the guy wearing green security clothes said angrily.

The woman in maroon leather also stood up, still eating her mielie and said, “I am going to an interview tomorrow. This taxi must go!”

They got out and went to the cashier’s office. The lady with the pink lipstick led them. The cashier directed them to the association’s and executive’s office. They all went. The mother with the toddler scooped up her child and put her on her back.

The mighty Tabola was in his office with his secretary. He ignored the man and took out his gun.

“Calm down, boss. There is no need for a weapon. It is easy to solve this situation,” the secretary reassured him. He left Tabola in the office. “Dear passengers, what is wrong?” he asked them.

“It is getting late. We just want to be mixed so that we can arrive before it is too dark in Johannesburg. That is all,” the pink lipstick lady loudly said.

“I just want my money back. I can’t and won’t risk going at this time,” the old man said.

The secretary clapped his hands once, and said, “Well, I hear you all. May you kindly go to your taxi now, I am coming. Those who want their money back will get it exactly at five o’clock,” The secretary went back to the office.

Without saying anything, the passengers returned to the taxi. Along the way, they encountered Macko, heading in the opposite direction. He greeted them but most of them ignored him. They returned to the taxi and sat. It was fifteen minutes past four.

Macko arrived at the office and met the secretary who was on his way to puff a smoke outside.

“Exactly, what is your problem?” Macko said as he entered Tabola’s office. He stood in front of his boss’s desk and pointed his finger.

“What the hell are you talking about now?” Tabola left the cards he was busy playing and stood up.

“Number one, seven people died last week because of the taxi violence! Number two, if you and your associates allowed the Gauteng taxi that was here earlier to take the passengers to Johannesburg while I took your taxi to the mechanic, those passengers would be home by now,” Macko shouted angrily.

“You are just a driver. Stop involving your...” Tabola held his hand at his waist, next to his gun.

“I know you are behind this taxi violence. Are you not satisfied with the number of people you killed so far?” Saliva flew out of Macko’s angry mouth. It washed Tabola’s face.

“Go out! I say, out!” Tabola held his gun.

He looked Macko in the eyes and said, “My boy, don’t put your life at risk. Remember you don’t belong in South Africa? Remember I have access to that bitch of yours?”

“What do you mean by access?”

“Just do me a favour. Get out of my way. You are just a driver, I pay you to drive. Now go and drive. Take these people to Johannesburg.”

Macko stormed out of the office. He met the secretary who was entering again. He grabbed the man, held him, one hand on his chest, “How do you let this person kill people?” The secretary was about to answer but then they heard Tabola on the phone.

“This is our territory. Let us kill those who are in our way. Let us clean out those Gauteng cockroaches. Shoot to kill. Shoot!”

Macko didn't wait for the secretary's answer. He ran back to his taxi. He kicked Dodo's washing bucket and water flew. The handle broke. The cashier was in the taxi, counting the number of passengers. Refunding the old man. It was exactly five o'clock. Macko was supposed to go.

Although he was enraged he was ready to go. But something stopped him. He gave the passengers more reasons to complain. The taxi keys were nowhere to be found. He searched his taxi. There were no keys. He looked under the seats. There were no keys. He looked on the ground. There were no keys. He pulled himself upright and returned to Tabola's office. He had no keys. He searched the floor while Tabola sat and laughed at him. He searched his pockets. There were no keys.

“It is the third time this driver has lost his taxi keys. I wonder who bewitched him?” an old woman who had a fruit stall next to the Johannesburg taxis queue said and clapped her hands several times. “Someone who once said, ‘the taxi industry will never be a good place, simply because it was built up on the blood of innocent people and that dead blood will always wake up and fight to kill others’, was correct – Phhhh!” she spat on the floor. She warmed her hands on her open fire in an iron bucket with holes. The few people left at the rank were all angry. “Taxis! They will always be like this. Fuck the taxi industry!” Insults flew in the taxi. “These dirty dogs are very selfish!”

Tabola meanwhile had summoned Tshepo to go and look for the last spare keys at his home.

In no time he had arrived with the taxi keys. He gave them to Tabola. Tabola gave them to Macko. He held them in the air and told Macko to come and get them. He smiled as he handed them over. Macko grabbed the keys, held them in his hand and squeezed until the sharp metal pierced his skin. He did not say thank you. He walked to his taxi with his head down. He opened the door. There was blood on the keys from his hand. He wiped it on his pants. His palm burned as he clasped the wheel. He slipped the bloody key in the ignition.

The engine roared. He pumped the gas so it roared and roared. Quarter to six. It was dark. The taxi exited the rank.

15.

You could hear the engine of his black 4X4 from the distance. Isuzu diesel. Tabola arrived at the rank. Hooters sounded. He stopped. The taxis ahead of him weren't moving. Many engines were still running but the driver's seats were all empty. Tabola hit his hooter. He stretched his neck trying to see what was holding up the traffic. Taxis blocked his view. "You could swear that these drivers are of the same mother!" He turned his engine off. Climbed out his 4X4 and slammed the door. All eyes were on him. His grey leather sandals kicked up dust. He took his hands out of his brown jean's pockets. "What the hell is going on here?" He strode forward. No one answered him. He passed six taxis. On the corner he collided with a boy handing out pamphlets. The pamphlets flew up into the air, then scattered on the ground. Tabola read: "Great Herbalist from Northern Africa, Dr Moyo. Bring back your lost lover! Win lotto and casino! Cleansing for good luck! Penis enlargement! Unwanted discharge!" He kicked the pamphlets and continued on his way.

The boy ran after him, "Hey! Look what you did!"

Tabola didn't bother to look back.

The boy shrugged. "Anyway you helped me to reduce them. They were many," he smiled to himself as he bent over to collect some off the ground.

Another boy came running up to him. He carried pamphlets advertising, "Dr Otongo! Powerful Herbalist from Mali! Quick, safe abortion! Win court cases! Get a good job! Attract someone you love! Strong erection! Recover your stolen goods! Magic stick! If you want a man to pay you lobola!" He looked at his colleague on the ground, crawling and collecting his pamphlets. "Who did this? He must pay you!"

The boy on the ground raised his head, "What would you do if bro Tabola did this to you?"

The other boy whistled and shook his head. He left his friend on the ground. He flicked his wrist and snapped a pamphlet at a passing couple. He approached more people. Some took them. Most ignored them. A few took them then threw them down. Sometimes the boy bent to collect them up again, often he just left them.

Tabola passed the stalls of the mothers selling food. He passed another six taxis. Finally he found the taxi driver responsible for disrupting the rank's traffic. A young man had stopped his taxi to argue with the other drivers who were waiting for their taxis to fill up. The argument was about yesterday's soccer match, the Soweto derby. Pirates and Chiefs.

"It was a penalty!" he shouted. His taxi idled behind him.

Tabola went straight to the taxi, stretched his hands to the keys and turned off the engine. He approached the driver. The man was too engrossed in his argument to notice.

"It is true gents, we were supposed to win that game!"

A few of the drivers laughed then fell silent when they saw Tabola appear behind him.

"What is wrong now gents?"

Tabola klapped him on the head with his large right hand.

"Fuck you! Who the hell are you?" the driver said as he swung around, raising his hands to klap back who ever had klapped him. He saw Tabola. He slowly lowered his hands.

Tabola pointed to his taxi blocking the traffic. "You think this is your mother's rank!" he klapped him in the face, on the forehead. As the driver turned to run to the taxi, Tabola kicked him on the ass. The driver speeded up, he swung the door of his taxi open, started the engine. He was out of the rank.

"What are you looking at? Get back to work!" Tabola shouted.

Taxi drivers whistled as Tabola passed. Macko, who watched the whole incident, shook his head. He was not impressed. He started towards Tabola, Dodo stopped him. Tabola did not notice him. He went to his 4X4. Traffic was starting to clear. As he drove passed Macko spat on the ground. Tabola didn't see the spit. His eyes were ahead of him. His mind was on important business. He parked next to the office. His reserved parking. He unlocked the office. He put his car keys on the table. He took out his cellphone. Scrolled, looking for a number. He picked up the office phone and dialled.

Rose was chopping a tomato when her cellphone rang. She looked at it. She didn't answer it. It rang again. She looked at it and continued to chop and chop. It rang for the third time. She put the knife on the table, licked her fingers, answered. "Rose, hello!" A rude voice.

"Why don't you want to answer my calls?" Tabola asked.

"I knew it was your office but was not sure if it was you," Rose replied. "And why are you calling me on the office phone?"

"Okay. You know MTN to Vodacom during the day is expensive, if you were using an MTN number..." Tabola started.

“Oh okay, but I don’t expect that from a man of your calibre. Does that mean I’m not worthy to be called by your cellphone even when I’m using MTN?” Rose continued to chop. She had her cellphone pressed between her ear and shoulder.

“Don’t fight me. Please. I am bored that’s why I called you,” Tabola lowered his voice.

“Oh, and where is your principal?”

“She is a principal at Tsullung School, not to me. As you know that the schools are closed, she took a vacation to her parent’s home with my kids, it is eight days now. I miss you. I am hungry,” Tabola said with laughter.

“Oh, you miss me when you are bored only? Anyway Macko, my man is still around, as you know we can’t risk. Goodbye,” Rose politely said.

“I can think of something.”

Their conversation was interrupted by a knock on Tabola’s office door.

“Please don’t hang up.” Tabola held the phone away from his face and said, “Come in.”

“Boss, I just wanted to tell you that I’m off on that special trip. Contract workers finished with their work in Bloemfontein,” Tshepo said, holding his woolen hat in his hands.

“Oh, that special! Are you not tired? Macko will take that special as today’s trip to Jo’burg can’t succeed. There are no people to Jozi. And of course you will get your full wage at the end of the week.”

“Dankie boss, plus I have some flu. I will tell Macko on my way out as they said they were already waiting for the taxi from us.” Tshepo smiled.

“Okay. No, don’t tell Macko. I will tell him myself, just tell him to come to the office urgently.”

Tshepo left quickly.

Tabola returned the phone to his ear. “Hello darling, are you still there?”

“Yes, it is you who told me to wait.”

“I just organised something. Macko is about to go to Bloemfontein. Nothing can disturb us now. I will see you in one hour.”

There was another knock at the door.

“You don’t even ask me, you tell me?” said Rose.

“Please, don’t be like this. There is someone at the door, I have to go. See you later,” he dropped the phone. “Come in!”

Macko entered. “Boss, Tshepo said you urgently want to see me. Is there any problem?”

“Just a little problem, my dear brother. Tshepo was supposed to fetch some special at Bloemfontein. He is not feeling well at all, besides that I trust you for these long trips as you know. You are my best, experienced driver. I will add some bucks to this week’s wage,”

Tabola smiled at Macko. “You look surprised, what is it?”

“It is the first time hearing you say I’m your ‘dear brother’.” Macko looked Tabola right in the eyes.

Tabola smiled. “Here are the keys, the money for petrol and the directions. Ke a leboha,” he thanked him.

Macko took the money for petrol and the paper with directions then left. He got in his taxi. He took out his cellphone and speed dialed. “Hello babe, I hope you are well. I am taking an urgent special trip to Bloemfontein. I will be home very late, around eleven at night.”

He listened to Rose’s understanding reply.

“Mcaaaw..... babe. Thank you. I have to go. Byeeee,” Macko hung up the phone. He turned the key and the engine roared.

Tabola waited until Macko’s taxi left the rank. He stopped at the shops and bought expensive chocolates. And a red, transparent panty from Miladys. He sat in the car outside Rose’s house. Sprayed freshener into his mouth. He knocked once. Rose was waiting. He dropped the chocolates and the red, transparent panty down on the floor. He kissed her roughly. He inhaled, pressing his nose to her clothes. He slowly unbuttoned her pink blouse. He pushed up her lime skirt. He tore her pink transparent panty. It dropped to the ground. His belt was open. His boxers and trousers were at his feet. He put Rose on the edge of the kitchen table. He inserted his erect hungry penis.

“Ahhh, ahhh! ahhh!” Rose moaned.

He held her to his body, grasping her breast, “Yes, yes!” He went backward and forward. “Oh damn! It is coming!” He moved quicker.

Rose responded with a whimper.

He pulled her against him as he released.

“Take it easy, why so rough? I want it nicely, I also want to feel and enjoy it,” Rose held his hands.

Tabola pulled his hands free. “Let us go to bed.”

Macko passed Kestell. He passed Bethlehem. He counted the towns. He was happy to be in number three, Senekal, nearer to Bloemfontein. Only two towns were left. Paul Roux and Winburg. As he left Senekal he hit up against traffic. He strained his head. Ahead he could see the accident. A taxi collided with another taxi, right at the Stop and Go. Shattered heads splattered against windows. Blood painted the glass. Macko saw ambulance lights. He signed and pushed himself back in his seat. He drummed his fingers on the wheel. He got out his phone and called Rose. She didn't answer. After thirty minutes the traffic cleared. He passed a detective directing traffic. The detective put out his hand. Approached the taxi and stuck his head in the window. "You must drive safely! It's dangerous on these roads. You would be better off at home"

Macko hesitated. The detective looked familiar. He ran his words in his head. Looked at the man again. Then waved him to go. Macko shrugged. It was nothing. He relaxed in the taxi. Changed the disc. He put on Brenda Fassie. He clapped his hands together when the traffic thinned, let the taxi drive itself. His little happiness disappeared as he hit traffic again. Two traffic officers blocked the road. Ahead maintenance vehicles were still clearing the road. Ambulances were loading bodies. Macko watched their red lights swirl. He was tired. He needed air. He got out of the taxi. He stretched his body to wake up. He walked to the side of the road. Undid his zipper. He passed urine. He shook his penis off, buttoned up. Returned to his taxi. He changed discs. He put on Jazz. He changed it. It clicked his knuckles. He took out his cellphone. He called Rose again. There was no network coverage. He sighed and put the phone in the disc's cabinet. His elbow brushed the hooter as he bent and he jumped in his seat. The blue lights of police cars kept flickering. The red lights of the ambulances kept flickering. The yellow lights of road maintenance vehicles flickered too. Macko pulled his eyes away from the colours. He picked up his cellphone again, scrolled and read Rose's messages. In no time he was laughing aloud.

"How can someone laugh like this right in the mist of an accident?" Macko heard the voices through his window. He turned his head. He saw a couple in the car next to him. They were raising their voices so they would be sure he'd hear. He saw how they looked at him. Their words stung. "These useless taxi drivers! They always fail to be patient. How can that dead driver think of overtaking on the Stop and Go?"

Macko closed his window. He would mind his business and they should mind theirs.

It took the maintenance vehicles a full hour to finish their work. The officers finally gave the signal. Cars started to move. Macko breathed a sigh of relief. He smiled to himself. He got on the road. He had only driven for ten minutes when the phone rang. Macko glanced

at the number. He slowed the taxi, pulled to the side. He answered. Heard static. The network was gone again. He saw the number but couldn't get back to it. He tried dialling several times but failed. Macko decided to get back on the road. After turning on the engine, the call came again. He turned the engine off immediately. He answered.

“Hello! Hello! Do you hear me?” a loud voice asked and didn't wait for a response. “Tshepo gave me your number when I called him. We got help. We got lift. There is no need for you to come anymore.”

“How do you mean because I was already on the way?”

“We got lift because you failed to come in time. We are left with an hour to get home to Qwaqwa. Thanks but no thanks,” the call was immediately broken.

“Damn! Oh it means they took another road. Clarens Road!” Sad and angry Macko looked around to check traffic and then slowly turned back to Qwaqwa. “That evil Tabola will be on my case!”

Macko called Rose again. She didn't answer. He called Tabola. Tabola didn't answer. He just rode. He again passed Senekal. After an hour he passed Bethlehem. It was dark. After one hour and thirty minutes he passed Kestell. He was nearing home. He pressed the accelerator. In no time, the lights greeted him. Smiling with him.

“I had thought of going to Tabola to report to him but it is late, let me go home,” he said to himself. He passed the rank. Hit the hooter, hooting to whoever who was still there. He turned into his street. Slowed. A black 4X4 was parked outside his house. His lights reflected off its polished body. He pulled the taxi in as silently as he could. “This is the one and only Tabola,” he said to himself as he got out. The night seemed too quiet. Even his puppy wasn't there to greet him. There was no barking. He softly knocked at his door. There was no answer. He knocked again. Still, no answer. He opened. He saw chocolates and a plastic from Miladys on the floor. He stepped straight over it. He didn't notice Rose's blue blouse next to the table's feet. He looked in his tiny dining room and found no one. He stopped at the bathroom. He lifted the toilet seat to pass urine.

Tabola paused. “It sounds like someone is here,” he climbed off Rose. Walked barefoot to the half-open door. He heard a toilet flushing. He rushed back into the room. Pressed his finger to his lips to tell Rose to shhh. Rose's eyes were big. She pulled her knees up. Clutched them. She watched Tabola gather his clothes. He slid pants on. Didn't bother with shirt. He pushed open the window. Disappeared half-naked into the night.

Macko opened the door, “Who was that! It was Tabola, right?” his voice was louder. “What was he doing at my house? He is abusing you?”

“Babe, it is you? Are you not supposed to be in Bloemfontein?”

Macko heard an engine outside. He rushed out the bedroom. Ran to the kitchen door. He saw a flash of black metal. He gave chase. He ran after the speeding car.

Tabola glanced in his rearview mirror. He saw Macko running behind him. He kept one hand on the wheel. Used the other to locate his gun under the seat. He opened the window and fired a shot into the sky.

“Tabola! Tabola! What the hell do you want from my family?” Macko pushed his legs faster. “I will find you! I will get you!” Macko tried to jump on the black 4X4 but fell down. Naked Tabola was gone. Rose came running out of the house. She was only wearing a gown. The stones cut her feet but she barely noticed. She ran towards the body on the ground.

“Babe! Babe, are you okay?”

Macko didn't respond. His eyes were shut. Rose touched his head and felt something wet. She saw the blood on her hands. She started to scream. “Please help, please help!”

Lights in the houses next door flickered on. A man emerged, followed by a woman. Rose kept screaming. She wouldn't stop. The woman tried to hold her while the man went for help. Rose screamed and screamed. Finally the man returned with the community nurse. She was still in her pajamas but she carried her first aid kit. She knelt next to Macko. She listened to his heart. She started CPR. She breathed into his mouth then counted. Breathed, counted. Breathed, counted.

Rose held her breath. She prayed quietly in her head.

Macko coughed and then his eyes opened. He rolled onto his side. Rose dropped to the ground next to him. The nurse tried to stop her then gave up and stood to make room. Rose clasped Macko's head. The nurse watched. She said, “He should be okay, but I am calling an ambulance.” She took out her cellphone.

The man asked Rose. “What happened to him?”

Instead of answering Rose wailed. She held Macko's head in her hands and cried. She stayed with him, on the ground, head in hands until the ambulance arrived.

16.

Tabola drove home, opened the remote control gate and parked his vehicle. He unlocked the door and went straight to his private room, his study. He hit the light, crossed straight to the safe and keyed in his secret combination. He smiled to himself as he counted

out the notes. “80 grand should cover it. I know our police are always hungry and broke.” Tabola closed the safe, closed his study. Walked to his son’s bedroom, found a brown envelope in the first drawer of the desk. He slid the cash in, licked the envelope and sealed it. He left the lights in the house on. He got into his car. He didn’t stop at the robot. He didn’t stop at the four-way stop. Straight to the police station. There was no queue. He found a detective, busy filling in some forms. His badge carried his name: Detective Baile.

“Sir! I urgently need help,” Tabola pleaded.

Detective Baile did not look up, he continued with the forms, but said, “Speak, I am listening.”

“I hired some taxi driver, now he is abusing me. He wants to kill me. May I please have a protection order?”

“Calm down, sir. The Warrant Officer will come and help you now.” The detective put down his pen. He stared at Tabola for a second then went to the other office to call the Warrant Officer.

The man arrived promptly. “How can I help you, sir?”

Detective Baile looked at them. He took out his cellphone, positioned it on the table and hit record before walking away.

The Warrant Officer told Tabola to take a seat. Tabola sat, glancing nervously around. They were alone. The other officers, including Baile, were busy at their desks.

Tabola lent in so his face was close to the Warrant Officer. “I have a drink for you.” He smiled.

The Warrant Officer glanced around. “Okay, put it under this booklet” he whispered. “What is the matter?”

“I hired some foreigner, helping him to get something to eat. Now he wants to kill me,” Tabola reached across the table, slid the fat envelope under the Warrant Officer’s booklet. “I want you to make sure that the authorities send him back to his country. He is an illegal foreigner. Arrest him and send him to his home!” He then whispered, “Please don’t mess this up. Ask others, they miss working here and wearing this smart uniform.” He then raised his voice, “Thank you, sir!”

“We will find him. Don’t worry, you are safe,” the Warrant Officer smiled. They shook hands. The officer quickly scribbled his phone number on a sheet of paper and handed it to Tabola. Tabola left the police station smiling.

Tomorrow’s sun rose. Dodo was seen running like a headless chicken in the streets of Phuthaditjhaba.

“Macko! Macko!” Dodo knocked hard on the dining room door.

Macko was busy washing. His head was bent over the basin when he heard the screaming. The white bubbles of the soap covered his face. Outside he could hear his puppy barking. The animal seemed to be going crazy.

Rose stopped midway through brushing her teeth in the bedroom bucket.

“Macko! My broer!” Dodo hit the door with his fist.

Macko ran half-naked to turn off the radio. He heard someone hitting the door. Rose opened the curtain to see who was calling. The early morning sun blinded her and she dropped the curtain again. Macko ran to the dining room door, “Pota! – Come to the front door!”

He heard a person running. Dodo tried to open the kitchen door but it was still locked. “Macko! Please open, my broer!” he clapped the door with his palm.

Macko unlocked the door. Rose was standing behind him.

“Broer, broer...” Dodo was breathing so fast he couldn't speak. He wiped the sweat pouring off his brow with his hand. His other hand was pinned to the door, carrying the weight of his exhausted body.

Macko and Rose looked at each other.

“What is wrong?” Macko asked. He was only wearing boxers, his facecloth was on his shoulder.

“Things...are...bad... my broer.” Dodo looked Macko straight in the eyes.

“Babe, let him get in. ” Rose felt pity for him.

“Come, come,” Macko stepped aside.

Dodo entered. He stood breathing quietly, his hands resting on the table.

“Here is water,” Rose gave him a glass. She still had white toothpaste smudges around her mouth. Dodo drank non-stop and gave Rose the glass to refill it.

“What is wrong my man? Why are you here? What is going on?” Macko clasped Dodo by both shoulders and looked him in the eyes.

“Give him a chance, babe,” Rose gave Dodo another glass of water.

Again he drank all the water, put the glass on the table. “My broer, I heard you were in hospital. Are you okay?”

“Yes, yes, I am really fine, thanks,” Macko said

“You came here to ask this?” Rose asked him.

He shook his head, “I am glad, my broer. Things are bad. You need to vanish. Where is Tabola's taxi, the one you drive?”

“Rose said he came and took it when I was at the hospital. What are you talking about?”

“Please say something,” Rose stared at Dodo.

“When I arrived at the rank this morning I was surprised to find four vans of men and women in blue uniform. They were heavily armed. They were busy looking for you,” Dodo told them. “Did you do something wrong?”

“Are sure they were looking for me?” Macko looked at Rose. “I’ve done nothing wrong as far as I know. Tabola is the one who came here to abuse my Rose.” He held Rose tight. “And I ended at the hospital because of that bastard!”

“They were with him, Tabola in flesh. They are waiting for you at the rank. I am advising you to disappear.”

“To where? I did nothing wrong!” Macko held his head with both hands.

“Just go, they might also come here. I have an aunt in Daveyton. Here is the address. There’s no time left, where Tabola is involved it is very dangerous.” Dodo gave him a small piece of paper with a badly written address scrawled on it.

“And leave me alone here for Gauteng?” Rose asked. She held Macko tight. “I am going with you!”

“It will be too suspicious if you go with him. Let him go alone, just for this thing to calm,” Dodo begged.

Rose started to cry. Macko put his arms around her. They held each other tight. Hugged. Kissed for a moment. Hugged again.

“I am sorry for this, babe. I will get Tabola for this. He is ruining my family, he is willing to ruin me too. He is after me,” Macko dropped his arms. He looked at Rose for a moment, left for the bedroom. Rose ran after him. She watched as he took a grey jean, a red t-shirt and a pair of white sneakers. Rose helped him pack them in a small bag. She also packed his toiletries. Macko pulled on a long sleeve t-shirt and brown Nike pants. He lifted the bed, took out a pile of R100 notes wrapped in a plastic. He counted. “One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. Sixteen. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. Twenty. Twenty one. Twenty two! I am taking this. Here, this is for you, it should also be equal to mine. Here is my card. It should be enough to keep you sometime.”

“Thank you, babe. Always know that I love you!” Rose had started to cry again. They hugged.

“There is no time left,” Dodo shouted from the kitchen. “There is a police van that just passed.”

They looked through the window.

“Oh I get it now, they have been passing here since I was out of the hospital, saying they are looking for some taxi driver. They wanted me, but how did they just pass me?”

“Okay. Macko, my broer. We don’t have time. I am going out of this kitchen door,” he pointed. “And you should go out through the back door.”

Dodo stepped out and found himself face to face with two police officers. They stopped him. “Raise your hands! Are you Macko Ndawu?”

“No sir. I don’t know where he is. I’m here to collect my money and his wife said he isn’t here,” Dodo told them as he slowly raised his hands in the air.

“Get out of our way!” They pushed past him through the open door. Rose screamed as they stormed in.

“Where is your husband?”

“I really don’t know,” Rose burst into tears. She followed the police officers to the bedroom. They held their guns in front of them, burst through doors, entered every room ready to shoot. She watched as they searched the room, pulling open the cupboard, throwing the mattress on the bed. She started to wail as they headed to the dining room, following close behind, hitting at their backs, telling them to leave her in peace.

The police ignored her and continued searching. In the kitchen they threw the food out of the cupboards, knocked over the chairs.

“If you see him, tell us!” Finally they left. Rose watched them get into a vehicle, blue lights flashing. Dodo was gone. Macko was gone. Rose slid to the floor and cried.

17.

Tabola got a call from a 011 number. He just looked at his cellphone ringing and ignored it. He continued to read a newspaper. He sat in his office. His feet were on the table. His cellphone vibrated again. Rang. He didn’t bother to look at it that time. He paged the newspaper. On the third ring, he dropped the newspaper on the floor.

“Tabola here, how can I help you?”

“Boss, it is Mags. We know where Macko is,” the voice said.

“Good shot! Just tell me where he is. Where?” Tabola took his feet off the table, stood.

“He is working for your rival, Tshomane,” the voice said proudly.

“Enough about your folktales. Just tell me where he is now!” Tabola shouted.

“He just went into a shop. He is driving a white minibus. He parked at Eiselen Street, Daveyton, East of Johannesburg. I am right behind him, you want me to finish him up?”

“Hell no, you stupid!” he shouted then lowered his voice. “Just make sure he is still in the shop till my guys come, the cops. I am calling them now.” Tabola hung up and reached for the office phone. “Warrant Officer, be aware that I am doing your work. It has been two weeks and you are doing nothing!”

“I am doing everything I can, boss.”

“That illegal foreigner is at Eiselen Street, Daveyton. He is driving a white minibus. Make sure they lock him up and send him where he belongs. Tell your colleagues I’ll pay. Money is not a problem.”

When Macko left the shop he was shocked to see two police officers circling his taxi. They checked its disc and number plates. He approached them slowly. “This is my taxi, can I help you?”

“Your licence, please,” the first officer said.

Macko switched the bag he was carrying to his other hand. He thrust his free hand in his pocket, pulled out his keys, then the licence. He watched the officer open it then close it again without really looking.

“Why did you obstruct traffic like this? You think this is your road?” the other policeman asked.

“Forgive me, but we always park here as it very scarce to get parking in this street,” Macko started to get nervous. He clasped his keys in his fist, shifted from one foot to the other.

“Sir, we are taking this car. Give me your keys.” The police officer’s voice was commanding. Macko stepped back. “I really don’t understand.”

One of police officers reached out his hand, pried the keys from Macko’s grasp. Macko watched him stride towards the taxi. He opened the door and slid the keys in. The

engine roared. Macko looked on aghast. He wanted to run after the taxi but the other policeman was still at his side, holding his driver's licence.

"Give me my licence," Macko demanded.

The officer laughed and shook his head.

"You took my taxi. So, why are also taking my licence?" Macko asked. He tried to snatch it from the policeman's hand.

The policeman stepped back and lifted the licence in his hand. He waved it in front of Macko like it was a game. He laughed and then stopped suddenly. He stepped forward. "We need to teach you some manners!"

Macko backed away. He held his hands out in front of him.

Passersby had started to gather. They stopped and stared.

"You think we are your friends, I see." The officer gripped Macko's license in his fist.

"Please, just give me my license!" Macko was getting tired of the game. His face felt hot. He was about to make another grab for the licence when he saw the policeman who had left in his taxi return, now driving a police van. Macko felt the blood drain out his face. His taxi was gone. The police wanted to take his licence. He could do nothing but watch the officer park the van and walk towards them.

"Is he still stubborn?" he asked.

"He think we are here to play with him. Are you a South African citizen?"

"Just give me my damn driver's licence!"

As they were fighting, another police van arrived on the scene. Macko stared as another two more officers approached.

"What's the trouble here?"

The officer holding Macko's licence thrust it towards the other officers. "He's resisting arrest." As if to prove his point, he approached Macko and grabbed him by his red t-shirt. Macko tried to pull away but the other officers had him surrounded. Macko stood shaking. One of the officers grabbed his trousers. He fought as he was pulled towards the parked police van. He kicked his legs, thrashed with his arms. They pinned his wrists and managed to slide the handcuffs on. Macko was cuffed to the van's door. He kicked in vain.

The crowd that had gathered moved closer. Macko started to shout. He didn't really know what he was saying. Words poured out of him. He continued to kick. Spit dripped down his chin. One of the officers kicked him hard in the stomach. Macko doubled over. Tried to pull himself upright. He saw angry faces gather around him. The people were fighting with the police. They wanted them to free him. The police started to pull back. They

were scared of the people. They fired a shot into the air. The crowd scattered briefly then started to return.

“Hey, hey!” Shouted someone one.

“Why are you doing this?” The question was addressed to the police.

The people moved together as a crowd. Macko heard the sound of the engine. He stumbled as the police van lurched forward. He started to beat on the side of it with his fist. The police were driving away. He was still cuffed to the door. He tried to run but the vehicle was moving too fast. His feet fell out from under him. His white sneakers bounced against the road. His flailing body was dragged. A few people from the crowd tried to run after him. He could see their arms waving, mouths moving. Finally they gave up. Macko tried to pull himself up. He fell back. His feet swept the tarred road. The crowd dispersed, people walked shaking their heads. The road was empty. The traffic was still.

18.

“Tabola. Please help me to find my husband. It is three days of not hearing from him.” Rose was crying. She pressed the phone tight against her ear.

“Stop crying, my daughter. You will find a better man for you. I did warn you about that dirty boy,” Rose’s mother pulled her daughter close and held her to her chest. The cellphone fell between them.

The van arrived at the police station. Macko was bleeding badly. Eight police men surrounded him. Blue shirts. Their black shoes shining. As the van stopped at the police station’s gate Macko tried to stand, but his legs wouldn’t hold. His hands were still cuffed to the van. His wrists were bloody where the cuffs had cut into his flesh. He tried to flex his fingers. Felt the pain race through him. His trousers were wet, shoes scuffed and broken. He took a shaky step but his loosened trousers tripped him. He fell on his knees. His face was bruised. The blood from his head ran into his right eye. He closed it. Looked with one eye. Two people at the gate stared at him. They approached him slowly. Macko tried to stand up again. His legs shook. “Why are you so evil?” He shouted at the police officers. One of them picked up a brick off the ground and hit him above the left eye, on the forehead. “We told you to keep quiet! You don’t listen!” the officer said, pointing a dirty finger at him.

Macko slowly shook his head. The pain travelled from right to left in his brain. Heavy brick cop pushed him against the back of the van. Blood flowed from his forehead and he had to close the left eye too. He slowly went down. Handcuffs hindered him from sitting flat on the ground. He dangled. He tried to get up but went down again. "Ahh! Please have mercy on me," his wrists bled from the handcuffs.

"Shut up you moron!" one of the police officers said.

Another approached him. Pulled him up. "Let's go inside where you belong!"

The officer unlocked the handcuffs from the van. He locked Macko's two hands together. Macko fell on the ground. Blood dripped from his head. From his nose. From his forehead. A police officer pulled him up and held his shoulders, "Undress him."

"Drop him on the ground so that I can get these trousers off." The man let Macko fall. He felt his sneakers being pulled off. He felt the cold of the concrete as his jeans slid off.

One of the policemen pulled him up. He was only wearing his boxers. As he stood, the other kicked his ass. Macko was not crying anymore. He felt numb. He stumbled as they escorted him into the police station. Others at the front. Others at back. Others at the left side. Others at the right side. Someone took a picture. One of the officers carried his trousers. The police officers in charge in the CSC stared at the half-naked, bleeding man. They stopped and looked.

"What did he do?" a female police officer asked.

"You don't want to know!" The arresting officer said. He hit Macko on the back, pushed him forward. Macko could not see the way. His eyes burned.

"Why don't you take him to the clinic first? The clinic is just around the corner!" a female police officer asked.

The men didn't listen to her. They took him to a holding cell. Macko refused to go inside. He stood swaying. He dropped to his knees. One of the police officer's hit him with a plastic chair. The police officer on duty in the cells tried to stop them but the other officer pushed him away, brought the chair down on his back again. Macko stumbled. Another officer slapped him, forcing him down on the concrete bench.

"You must call the paramedics, this person looks bad," said the officer on duty in the cells.

"I will go and call the paramedics," detective Baile arrived on the scene. He looked from Macko to the officers then turned and walked away. The other police officers left Macko in his cell. They left the arresting officer with him.

After twenty minutes the officer on duty in the cells couldn't take it anymore. He slipped away from his post and went to CSC. "Did you call the paramedics?"

Detective Baile was standing at the desk. He nodded then walked away, disappeared.

The police officer on duty in the cells returned to his post. "Is it possible for the handcuffs to be removed?"

The arresting officer did not comment. He walked a few steps away when his cellphone rang. He turned his back to answer. "Yes, we got him."

The officer on duty walked to the cell. He entered and removed the handcuffs. Macko's hands separated. He rolled on the concrete bench. He exited and locked the cell, leaving Macko moaning from pain. Blood pooled around him.

They officer on duty forced himself not to look. He kept himself busy. Counted the inmates in the holding cells. Fed the inmates in the holding cells. He paused when he passed Macko's cell and saw him lying down on the floor. He looked at him and shook this head. Proceeded with his work.

When the station commander entered one of the officers stopped him. "Sir, someone is badly injured in the cells."

"Who injured him, the other inmates?" the station commander asked. No one answered him. He looked around. The officer who had spoken seemed to have vanished. "Who just spoke with me?"

A female police officer raised her head, "I think it was Detective... Baile. He just went into the cells," she replied and continued to write something on a paper.

"The station commander looked at her for a second, then went straight to the cells. He greeted the officer on duty then saw Macko on the floor in the cell. "This is serious! Has someone called for medical assistance?"

"Yes. Detective Baile did," replied the officer.

"Who the hell is this Detective Baile everyone mentions? We have no such detective at this station." The station commander's voice echoed through the cells.

The paramedics arrived sometime later and found Macko lying face down. They turned him over and checked his pulse. "This person has passed on," they told the station commander. They left to get a stretcher. The station commander followed behind them, swearing under his breath. They didn't notice the moving shadow of Detective Baile as he passed them.

The shadow of Detective Baile entered the holding room. It slide along the cement floor. It passed unnoticed through the bars of Macko's locked cell. Macko's body was curled on the floor. The shadow crept over him. It covered him. Macko stirred. He looked up. He could see someone standing above him. A face in shadow. For a moment he thought is was Tabola. He started to draw back but the shadow expanded. It filled the cell. Cast everything in darkness. Through the darkness Macko saw a light, then Detective Baile's face, lit up as if he was shining a taxi headlight.

“Baile,” Macko tried to speak. His tongue felt heavy. A dead thing in his mouth. Baile raised his fingers to his lips. He bent down and held Macko, “The time has come. Don’t worry, you will be in peace when we arrive at your country. We are going home.”

When the paramedics returned with the coroner they found no one in the cell. The cement floor was swept clean. There were no marks of a scuffle. No blood stains. They looked at the officer on duty thinking that he had taken Macko.

“A taxi driver dragged behind a police van. Inquest launched into missing body.” Mantsha read a newspaper on his way to work. He shook his head. “This taxi industry is dirty, drowning in blood. When will it stop?”