

On the 3rd of February 1964 I set foot on a train for the first time. I was going to Carltonville, promised a job plumbing. My cousin, who had found me the job, met me at the station. When we arrived at his place, the people were happy to meet me. I felt at home.

The following morning he went to work. Work started at seven in the morning. I had to wait for the manager; to get his approval to work there and to see whether I was satisfied with the conditions set down by the firm. Minutes ticked away slowly. I was eager to see myself working. In fact there were also other people waiting for the manager, looking for a job.

At nine o'clock work stopped, but still no manager appeared. It was tea time. It lasted until 9.15. Work resumed.

I was struck by the way work was done there. It was unlike the way we worked back home. People here worked at a very fast pace. Sweat was pouring down their half-naked bodies. They were wearing nothing from the waist up. Some were building houses, others were pouring cement for the foundations. Some were doing the roofing and others were doing the job I was to do, plumbing.

They worked in a very determined manner. I wandered around all the departments looking carefully at the work carried out in each one. There

was a nasty job where concrete was mixed. The sun was hot. The black workers, from the ground floor to the third, were pushing wheelbarrows filled to the brim, along planks that looked so unsafe. I felt as if I was dreaming, I was so scared.

Suddenly, a man who was pushing a wheelbarrow fainted. Other workers rushed to him with a water pipe and poured water all over his body. They also used an air pipe. When he came to his senses they took him to a cooler place.

This incident did not affect the way people were working. They were still being hurried as if it wasn't worth noticing. The foreman kept on shouting: "Kom muntus. Mina funa phelisa lo silep today, hay tomorrow wena yiswakhale. Muntus mina funa we vuka ayifika yifalapha msebenzi kamina". (This is 'fanaklo' - roughly meaning: "Come on Muntus. I want to finish the slab today, not tomorrow do you hear? Muntus I want you to wake up, not to come and die here, in my work".)

Then the foreman came to us. We were watching what was happening. He greeted us and asked if we were all looking for a job. Eight of us wanted a job but the rest said they were only looking on. He said all those who wanted work should stand to one side. Those who didn't want work must "fakofu" ("be off"). He didn't want anyone hanging around. Seven hurried away.

After chasing them away he turned to us and inquired whether any one of us was Humphrey's cousin. I said, "I am he, Baas".

He said I looked like Humphrey but added: "you look like a Boesman. Are you a Boesman? Anyway I'm giving you a name: Mooi Klein Boesman. Do you hear?" (Raising his big hoarse voice.)

I agreed immediately that I was his Mooi Klein Boesman. He came to me threateningly - as if he would have hit me had I not answered him immediately.

He told us that at 10.15 the "Makhulu Baas" (the "Big Foreman") would come to see us and to find out whether we were suitable for the job. He wished me luck because he sympathised with my cousin being the only Transkeian on the building site. He also told me that my cousin worked

well, was respectful and was dedicated to his job. He was one of the few workers who did not use his absence as an opportunity to loaf.

Of course I agreed with everything he said. What troubled me was whether I was able to work under these harsh conditions.

At 10.15 the Manager arrived. Some of those waiting were no longer prepared to work because of the way people were being hurried. They were driven off like a prison span. One by one the manager asked us what kind of a job we did. We told him. I produced my documents. He read them. He smiled and said I should start work that very moment. He then took me to Mr Jacobs the foreman of the plumbing department.

Mr Jacobs also seemed to be happy with me. He asked me all kinds of questions. I answered him. I worked that day, worked till the end of the week, worked the following week - without being registered by the firm. Not being registered created problems with the people I stayed with. Humphrey stayed in the same room. The other people feared that since I was not registered I would steal their belongings and be off. This troubled my spirit but there was nothing I could do.

I had spotted a car not far from the hostel. I told my cousin that someone I worked with had suggested I share a place in his dormitory. Of course I was telling him a lie.

I took a towel, soap, some toothpaste and other little necessities. My cousin did not try to stop me because he was aware that things were taking a nasty turn in the room. Things were not at all well. I went to work and, ignoring knock-off time, stayed around until dark.

I went to the car. It had seats but no wheels. I slept comfortably for eight days. On the ninth, at about 3.30 in the morning, I felt as if the car was overturning. I was falling this way and that. I was frightened. I didn't cry, although I was almost in tears.

I nearly called out for help but that would not have been easy. They would have asked me questions, like what was I doing in that car so early in the morning. I searched for a place to escape and after some struggle I managed to open the door. I grabbed my bag with my belongings and ran as fast as I could, away from the car. Once I was sure I was far enough

from the scene to be safe, I halted. I looked at the car but I could see nothing strange. The car stood motionless in the night, its door open, and silence prevailed.

I was overcome by loneliness. I was alone in a world of strange people and happenings, wandering through the night with no place to stay, away from people and frightened. I went and sat under a tree until daybreak. I found a tap in the morning, washed myself and prepared to go to work. I didn't tell anyone about my night.

At 10.15, after tea-time, Mr Stein arrived and said he wanted to talk to me. He asked me whether I had a pass book, and whether I had it with me. I told him I had it. He said he was taking me to register me. Fear returned when we were at the pass office. People were being sent back to the countryside. All the same I kept consoling myself that I was different because I had never parted with my certificates.

We went to the Labour Bureau at office number 7. Mr Stein carried my reference book and I followed behind. One of the labour bureau black jacks (municipal police) asked me: "Where is your home?"

"At Flagstaff."

"How many years have you?"

"22 years, Baba."

"Is it your first time to seek employment."

"Yes, Baba."

"Do you see these things?" (Pointing at the handcuffs which were tightened on his belt).

"No, Baba."

"They will go around your wrists and I will be with you till I dump you in your police station in Flagstaff."

"Why, Baba?"

"You say 'why Baba?' You are not allowed to put your foot here. I was at Lusikisiki the day before yesterday. Tomorrow I will be at Flagstaff with you. Matanzima wants his people in the Transkei and not in the cities so you had better go home."

While he was still telling me what was going on I was called inside. I jumped inside. Mr Stein went straight to the counter and started up a conversation with the white official there. The two of them talked and talked as I was consoling myself that everything was to be alright. After

some time, he called me and asked if I had accommodation. What did this mean? Was 'yes' or 'no' the right answer? I told him the truth: I did not have any accommodation, and the place I stayed in (the hostel), I stayed in illegally. I did not tell him that I lived in a car. He asked me if I had R2.50 and I told him I had. The official phoned the hostel and the hostel said that I should come. I had made it.

Mr Stein said I must wait for him outside. When I looked at the papers I found that I was registered. I was so happy that I took my papers to the black jack, saying the official said he must take me home to the Transkei.

He looked at the papers and said: "No, I can't take you home, you are registered. You are lucky, Mfana." After a few minutes Mr Stein came out and we went to the hostel office.

Mr Stein drove me there. They were waiting for us. I filled in their forms and paid my R2.50. Searching through my pockets I realised that I only had 22c left after that. There were three days left before pay day. I was forced to live on 4c a day: I bought 2c worth of bread in the morning and also the same amount for supper.

My room was near my cousin's, I discovered. I went over to fetch my belongings and the people who stayed with him were interested to know where I had found a place to stay. I told them my room was near their's. They were suspicious and asked how was I able to get this place without being registered. I told them that I was already registered and that I had a receipt slip to prove it. I showed them the card with the number of my bed and the receipt.

"How did I manage to be sorted out so soon?" they persisted. I told them that they had to realise that they had wronged me by chasing me away for not being registered. I had come to this place because the white man, the employer, called me. I had made an application and arrived as a virtually employed person.

They were left disappointed. Having troubled me so much, so hastily, having even threatened to call the police, I was now going to get a room so near to them. They couldn't do anything, it was clear to them too, they had been evil.

Three elderly men showed me my new place of residence. I was by far the youngest. They were glad to have me there. Since I was there, they said, I was to be their errand boy. They were good company and guided me correctly in the ways of that world. One came from Maputo, one from Mzimkhulu and one from Ntabankulu. I conducted myself well and did everything with determination. I was always the first to arrive from work. By the time they arrived I'd already cooked for all, and boiled water for bathing. You see, there were only cold showers.

I worked well on the construction sites - with the same determination. I worked quite happily. Soon I became used to the job and found no problems. But then I got injured.

It was on a Sunday at about 1.45 pm. I was on my way back to the hostel from church when I came across three people. All I held was a hymn book and a lotus cane (walking-stick) but they assaulted me. I hadn't done anything to them. I could not do anything to stop them. I blindly resisted but they beat me. It was a hard fight. It's difficult to explain how I defended myself from my assailants. Everything blurs in my memory - I only remember pain and confusion.

In the end, I found myself lying down in a concrete water furrow. Water flowed in it and stopped and flowed again. There was a bayonet in my hand. Where did I get it from? A policeman arrived on the scene but I did not realise who he was. I kept on fighting. I was put in the back of the police van. It was then that I realised that I had been shot in my left leg, my body was blue right round. I had been hit very badly but I never stopped fighting - even inside the van, fighting anyone I could. The policeman drove away. One policeman came and sat at the back with us. We arrived at the police station. No statements were taken, we were driven straight to hospital instead.

We were admitted and received treatment. I got a few stitches and the bullet was removed from my leg. I was feeling very sick all along, in really deep pain. My friends came to visit me, my boss came with my cousin and asked how I got injured. I told them everything. Even the police came in to ask me to make a statement.

After a week my girlfriend Sindiswa came to the hospital to visit me. It was only one month since we started going out, and only two months

since she started living in Carltonville. When I proposed to her she had told me that she was going out with some guy I didn't know, but mentioned that she didn't really love him. She said she was just a victim of circumstances, since she was forced to go out with him in order to get accommodation as she had lost her auntie's address. The man had left work and joined a gang called the Russians. He looked older than her father, she had told me. Sindiswa came from Mount Frere in the Transkei. She had heard from the guys I worked with that I was in hospital. When she came to see me I was still in a bad state of health, although I looked much better than when I was first admitted.

She told me that the guy who tried to kill me was her ex-boyfriend. She started crying. I felt so sorry for her that I cried myself. I told her to look around hospital since all the guys who had attacked me were also lying with me in hospital. She went out for a short time, and came back to inform me that one of the guys was in fact the culprit.

I started feeling ill-at-ease. I couldn't believe that a man could kill me just like that. After some days, when I felt much better, I was able to take a pair of crutches and go slowly from ward to ward looking for this man. I found him lying down, being examined by a doctor. Something inside me snapped and I just wanted to tear him to pieces.

You see I was furious: my kinsfolk were writing to ask me for money for their children's books, and this guy had put me out of work. Lying helpless in hospital was frustrating: where the hell was I supposed to get that kind of money from?

I dropped one crutch down, and as he was lying down there with the doctor looking after him, I lifted the other one up in the air and hit him on the head. Then there was chaos, the whole ward was gripped by panic, patients were jumping all over the place, and I kept on hitting. Everyone started to run away. The nurses were the first to disappear - within seconds. But the doctor returned and tripped me over with a flying-tackle.

I landed with a thud on the floor, unable to stand up again. I sat there crouched, furious and shouting; partly from fear but also from pain, because I had over-exerted myself. I was taken back to my ward.

The hospital staff descended on me and placed my leg in traction. Despite my pain though, I felt quite happy inside. He had to be stitched all over again after the cuts I gave him on his head with my flying crutch. They could put me in jail, I thought to myself then, and I would not mind.

But I was taken aback when one of the doctors came to tell me that an ambulance was waiting for me outside. And that it was there to take me to prison. The doctor said that I was to spend my nights in prison, because I was such a trouble-maker, but that I had to return to the hospital by 9 o'clock every morning for treatment. How I got there was my business, the doctor added. The ambulance took me to my hostel instead. But sure enough, the police were waiting there and took statements from me. After that they left me alone. All my room and block mates came to see me.

I told them everything, and I related to them all my troubles. Some sympathised with me but many argued that I got what I deserved. I also told them that I was chased away from hospital. Some blamed me, others agreed with what I had done. I was, to tell the truth, scared of going to jail.

I was discharged and went back to work. I worked for only two days before I had to appear in court. I felt disgruntled and could not sit down before finding some "muthi" (medicines) for my case. Fortunately one of my room mates in the hostel was a Nyanga (or Mmuthi-Man). He administered some "muthi" for me so my confidence increased at court.

I was cross-examined at court. They insisted that the most serious mistake in my actions was to fight another patient at hospital. I told them that I had to; I told them I was forced by circumstances, that I was frustrated, that I was not working because of these people who just decided to attack me.

For four days I appeared in court trying to defend myself and explain my behaviour. On the fifth day the court discovered that two of the men had criminal records for housebreaking and robbery. Still I was accused of taking the law into my own hands by attacking this man, especially in hospital. I tried to plead in mitigation: I told the court again that I was out of work because of them; that I could not buy food for my family and that my brother needed school books, that I couldn't take it. I also told the

court that it was self-defence and I was well brought up to avoid violence. I respected other people.

Before sentence was passed I was told by the court that I had done them a big favour by exposing those criminals. The magistrate added that my fighting spirit must have been a gift of God (since I was a church goer) and that I was brave since they were so well armed. He added that I was lucky I was only shot once; they could have shot me more because they had lots of bullets. Policemen in the area were afraid of these criminals.

The court did not find me guilty. "But," added the magistrate, "you must never make this mistake again. A hospital is a quiet place with all different kinds of patients wanting their peace. Do you get me?"

"Yes, my Lord," I said, trembling in anticipation. I could not believe the magistrate's statement: "The court does not find you guilty".

It was my turn to join the audience and watch Moyoletsi, Sindiswa's ex-boyfriend, the criminal, be sentenced to two years - for possessing a gun illegally and for shooting Alfred Temba Qabula. The court mentioned another three people who had been shot with the same gun.

"The court" said the magistrate, "is giving you a heavy sentence because you are dangerous to this society".

Mjwara, his accomplice, did not have other criminal records.

Court: "Mjwara. What made you join the gang?"

Mjwara: "I was on a drinking spree and I saw these men wearing their "Russian" uniform. They were well armed. I was terrified so I had to join them! One of them told me I had to pay a membership fee, buy a uniform and attend meetings. I was trying to protect myself."

He was sentenced to fourteen months imprisonment,; it was his first criminal offence and he was still going to be a state witness in other cases. I was glad, assured of at least two years of peace.

I was glad too that one of my room mates was a witchdoctor. This made me really believe in witchcraft! His "muthi" was so good that even my enemies at court had to agree with me throughout the case!