

discard those who bask in the aura of his sun and maintain the myth of his infallibility? We shall soon know. If he does so; if he sets himself to purge the party and the administration of corruption and nepotism; if the party members can adjust themselves to the new post-revolutionary situation and develop genuine democratic authority and accountability; then this historic transformation of a tribal colony to an independent, democratic, modern state can be achieved, and all Africa will salute the courage and wisdom of those who have won the battle.

## NICE TIME

HARRY BLOOM

“Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!”

He swung the bike around sharply in the road, dragging his foot in the sand to keep balance, and came to a skidding stop alongside the girl walking on the opposite pavement. As he did so, he made a series of rapid, short, chopped off whistling noises. Wasn't she the cherry who used to work for Wing Kee Cash Bazaar? The one he danced with all night at that victory party for Harry Dhlomo at the welfare centre?

But when he looked more closely, he saw that it was the wrong girl. She stared hard at him, thinking he was somebody *she* knew. He missed the moment to say something bright and shrewd, and the girl became embarrassed and suddenly turned round and walked off. He sat with both feet on the ground and his arms folded across the handle-bars—the bike was too small for him—and watched the red satin blouse, the green skirt, and the black patent leather shoes make a swinging, bouncing, angry retreat along the pavement.

“Hullo Sugarcake” he shouted after her; She paid no attention, so he whistled and said “Come here, I want to talk to you.”

“What is it?” she said, turning, and eyeing him suspiciously.

“What you doing today? tonight?”

“Go to hell.”

She walked on and he studied the show of trumped-up injury in her gait, without any hurt feelings at the rebuff. He watched until she disappeared around a corner; then he shrugged his shoulders, pulled the bike round and continued his ride to the location.

He rode slowly for a few moments, thinking what he ought

to do that night in Jabula—then he felt a sudden wave of exhilaration go through him, and he raised himself off the saddle and started to pedal very fast. He could not explain the sudden feeling. It was just a surge of excitement that ran through him. On that half-sized bicycle—it belonged to his young brother—he had to work hard to get up speed, churning furiously on the low-g geared pedals and banging his ankles on the pedal-sticks. It was all quite pointless, but he rode for several hundred yards with his buttocks hovering high above the saddle, his back almost horizontal, his elbows splayed out, his head down, just as he had seen the bike racers doing it on the newsreels. His white linen jacket flapped in the wind and his navy-blue sweat-shirt with broad white stripes across the chest crept out of his trousers and rucked up around his midriff.

Riding in that position he could feel the money and the magical cat's-eye pressing against him in the back pocket of his tight-fitting pants. He could feel them both distinctly, the rolled-up money and the heavy round marble. It gave him a good feeling and he arched his back to tauten the material of his trousers, just for the pleasure of having the wad of money and the lucky *goen* bulge in against him.

The money was his wages wrapped up with three pounds he had taken off the boys at New Amsterdam Laundry and Dry Cleaners the previous evening. The small change he had left in the game. The cat's-eye—that he had found in the street two weeks ago. He saw it lying there, in the gutter near the primary school, and something said to him "Don't overlook that, boy". He picked it up, and it seemed to wink at him, as if saying "You and I *know* something". The glass was furred but the colours were nice, and anyway it was *finding* something, and that's always lucky. So he spat on it and tossed it in the air and put it in his pocket and that afternoon he won thirty bob in a dice game at the dairy where he worked. Since then he had been right in the groove, topping everything with that game at New Amsterdam, when he seemed able to just whistle the right cards out of the pack. Yes, that glass was going to change his life.

The road started to climb and he settled back into the saddle and rode on now at a lazy pace. He had worked up a sweat and the shirt was sticking to him, moulding itself so smoothly over the firm round muscles of his chest that it showed up the tight points of his nipples. He was riding into the sunset. Ahead, on the horizon, was the power station, with a faint grey mist whispering off the tops

of the three huge concrete-cylinder cooling towers. The building was blazing with lights, although it was still day-time, but the lights looked brighter than ever against the peach coloured sky. There was a small lake, lined with baby trees and set among the grey slag-hills, and its surface caught the pink of the sunset, and at the same time the sharp, nervous twinkling lights of the power station. He had never seen it quite like this—so pretty—although he often came this way, and it gave him a kind of dreamy feeling, as if he were not really seeing it at all. It was like one of those places you see in the bioscope, before the big picture, Japan or some place.

He pedalled slowly along, thinking of Japan and countries he was really interested in, the musical countries like Rio and California, and the political countries like Moscow and Nigeria. Maybe, when he had enough money, he would see them all some day. They were little more than names to him, but it always gave him a sweet feeling thinking about visiting them, dressed in a sharp white silk suit and a panama hat and a walking cane . . . maybe . . . who knows?

. . . . .

He did not see the stranded taxi until he was almost on it. It was standing on a lonely part of the road, a big, dirty-black hulk of a car with cracked windows, and torn upholstery. The driver looked somehow like the car, large and shabby, with crooked glasses mended over the nose with a piece of string. He was standing beside the open bonnet, his jacket off, his huge misshapen trousers sagging on his threadbare braces, but he was not attending to the car. He seemed to be having an argument with the eight passengers who were sitting in a row, silent and stubborn, on a grass bank at the roadside.

‘What’s the matter?’

‘No petrol,’ the driver said through his teeth. Then he lost his temper. ‘But these bastards . . .’ He spat.

‘It’s not our job,’ one of the passengers said.

‘It’s not your job, it’s not your job,’ the driver said bitterly, and mimicking him.

‘It’s not our job to fetch petrol. We pay him to take us to Jabula location, not to walk all over the country fetching petrol.’

‘All over the country? You hear that? It’s not even one mile.’ He held up a quivering finger. ‘It’s just down the street.’ He turned to the boy and said helplessly, ‘I’d go, but I can’t walk’.

He pulled up one side of his trousers and showed his leg wrapped in an untidy swath of iodine-stained bandages.

The boy picked up the empty green can standing beside the car. "Give me the money," he said. They watched him ride away, gaily swinging the can. After a while he returned, balancing the full can between his arms on the cross-bar.

When the petrol was in the car, the passengers started to climb in again. "Oh, no you don't," the taxi driver said when some tried to take their old places in the front seat. He made all eight of them squeeze into the back, and when he had heaved the door closed on them he offered the boy a lift. "No need to pay. It's on the house," he said. They hoisted the bicycle on to the roof, secured it to the luggage brackets, and then, with the two of them sitting in majestic comfort in the front, and a heaving, stifling mass of bodies in the back, they started for the location.

"And what is your name?" the taxi driver asked, making it plain to the passengers in the back that they were going to be ignored for the rest of the trip.

"Tau. Koko Tau."

"Koko?"

"Well . . . Jake. That is Jacob. But the gang call me Koko."

"My name's Kelly MacKelly," the taxi driver said, fishing in his pocket and producing a grubby visiting card. "Coloured," he added, as if that explained the improbable name. "You have a gang?" he asked.

"Not exactly. Not like the Casbah boys, or Moola's mob. Just a bunch of us go places together. No crime or stuff like that."

"Ever been in gaol?"

"No. I keep clear of that place."

"I been," he said, jabbing his chest. "But not for crime either. Not supporting the wife and kids, that's all. A frame-up, that was. Tell me—you work?"

"Yes. Thorlund's Dairy."

"In what capacity?"

"Delivery." He paused for a moment. "But next month I'm being moved up to driver." As he said it, he clutched hard at the magical cat's-eye in his back pocket. It was not true—nobody told him he was going to be made a driver—but saying it with his hand around the lucky glass made it seem certain that the good news would be announced any day, and it did not feel like a lie saying it.

"That's damn good, boy. Your age?"

"Nineteen."

“Live with your family?”

“No. I lodge with my aunty in Pola location, me and my small brother.”

It was dark when they reached Jabula location. MacKelly stopped just inside the gate, and without turning his head, reached his arm back and opened the door. “Everybody *OUT*,” he yelled over the protests of passengers who wanted to go further into the location. When the passengers were all out he drove on again, slowly and meanderingly, as if not sure where to go.

“I think we go and have a little short mahog.<sup>1</sup> I know a nice little place,” he said at last.

. . . . .

Koko looked around him at the unfamiliar faces and furnishings of the shebeen. Somehow he felt like a stranger here. He wished they had gone to one of his own places, places where people smiled when he came in and said “Hey, Koko!” and where he was sure to catch up with some of the gang. This place was a little too fancy for him, and although they brought out the stuff all right, they looked sour at you, as if you’d come there casing up for the dicks. The thing was, you didn’t just *go* to a joint, you *belonged* to one and then everything was easy, and you could sit back and have a nice time, Saturday night. What’s more, there didn’t seem to be any *doppel* going on here—just drink and talk and dames. He was itching to get his hands on the dice.

This certainly was a fancy joint. It even had a fancy European name, Silver Slipper. In all his life he had never seen a joint like this. There were glass-topped tables, and a carpet, and coloured pictures—mountains with snow and ships sailing in the storm. You sat on chairs, blue plastic ones like those at the Sunrise Cafe, and there were four Beward benzine lamps that lit the place up bright as daylight. On one side of the room there were two brand-new all-white kitchen dressers, and whenever one of the girls opened the front to serve a drink, he saw the rows and rows of half-pint bottles of brandy and gin. This was no skokiaan joint—they served hard European liquor here. He wondered how much it cost the joint to keep the dicks quiet.

Kelly MacKelly was having a good time. He started off with four brandies in a row, knocking them back one on top of another, and then had another three, more steadily. Suddenly, from being

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<sup>1</sup> Mahog, abbreviated from Mahogany, meaning Brandy.

a rather sad and respectable old man, he became wild and talkative. He was sitting at the other end of the room from Koko—next to a well-known character called Kid Chocolate—and telling everyone ridiculous, flattering things about Koko, as if he had known him all his life.

“Some boy, that. He’s got a heart of gold. And hard-working too. You know what? Supports his *whole* family. You’d never think it, looking at him. Such a youngster.” Maybe his purpose was to put the proprietors and habitués of the shebeen at ease regarding Koko. Koko had taken three brandies, and so far Kelly hadn’t let him pay for a thing. He was beginning to feel the effects—the tight feel of the skin around his eyes, an extra edge forming hazily around people and objects, and a growing confidence in his wit and opinions. He heard Kelly start into a discussion about boxing with Kid Chocolate, and he sat back and began to allow himself to enjoy the evening.

A girl came and sat on the chair next to him. She wore lipstick and a kind of dusty brown powder on her cheeks. She asked him all kinds of questions—where did he work? did he have a girl friend? what did he do on week-ends? did he play sport?—and he answered dreamily and not caring much whether the answers were correct or not. All the time she kept ordering drinks for both of them, and as Kelly was now absorbed in the boxing talk, he paid for them himself, fumbling thick-fingered with his wad of money. The girl had a warm weaving voice, and she talked all the time, with her hand held lightly over his, not giving him a chance to think, and as she talked she grew more and more beautiful. She had a perfume which at first he did not notice, but which began to twine itself round him, making him groggy in a different way from the liquor.

Vaguely, he heard MacKelly saying “. . . yes twelve. All knock-outs. The *thirteenth* did for me—unlucky thirteen. But it was a foul, a dirty below-belt kick with the knee right in the private parts. It wasn’t even a punch.”

“Howcome the ref didn’t see?”

“It was a frame-up. The ref was bought.”

Koko turned his attention away from MacKelly and looked again at the girl. He said to her:

“How’d you like to come to Rio with me, baby?”

“That would be wonderful.”

“Yes, I’ll be pulling up and hitting out for there one of these days.” He slumped back and for a moment they said nothing.

Then he peered into her face and asked tenderly, "Didn't you work for Winkie the Chinaman one time?"

She patted his hand but did not answer.

MacKelly was standing up, his fists in a boxing stance. "I had what the press called a secret punch," he said, making a clumsy jab into the air. He was very drunk and could hardly keep his balance. "Like this—see. Left to the solar . . ." he plunged his arm down at an angle—"right feint to the chin—so. Then *wham*—left hook. You know, I never used to wait for the ref to count them out. Just take my towel and make for the dressing room." This mild display of shadow boxing had left him completely breathless.

"It can't be done," Kid Chocolate said. He was a stocky, tough-looking man with very wide shoulders. He had once been a famous boxing champ until drink and high life put the skids under him. Everybody knew him.

"What do you mean, it can't be done?" MacKelly said.

"I mean you can't knock a man out like that. It can't be done."

"Well, I done it—twelve times in a row."

"The man's never had a fight in his life. He's a big mouth," one of the other customers said.

"Is that so?" MacKelly snarled, glaring furiously all round the room. "Okay," he said to Kid Chocolate. "You want a demonstration?"

"Okay," Kid Chocolate said standing up and winking at one of his cronies. They squared up to each other, and MacKelly sent out a flabby left to the midriff which Kid Chocolate easily parried, a right cross which Kid Chocolate flipped out of the way, and the famous secret punch, a whirling circular hook which Kid Chocolate evaded by simply nodding his head to the side.

MacKelly stood with his hands at his side, looking as surprised as if the roof had fallen in. Everybody was laughing. "I didn't get it quite right, he said. "Let's try again." They went through the whole charade again, with exactly the same result.

"Oh well, you knew it was coming," MacKelly said. Everybody could see that he was distressed—"It's supposed to be a *secret* punch. I told you beforehand how it supposed to work. You were just waiting for it."

"Go-arn, you never had a fight in your life," Kid Chocolate said. He started to walk away and suddenly MacKelly struck out and caught him a slithery untidy blow on the ear. Kid Chocolate swung round with thunder in his face, but after a moment his

shoulders relaxed and he smiled and said in a friendly voice, "Let's try that punch of yours again". They faced each other and MacKelly sent out the now familiar left, the right, but suddenly a fist crashed through his hands, his arms, and squashed into his nose, sending him reeling over a chair, to lie flat on his back, unconscious.

A shriek went up from the women, and in a moment there was a free-for-all. Koko was in the thick of it, shoving and grunting and flailing his arms, not knowing why he was fighting, nor which side he was on. And then suddenly the noise died down and the fight was over. Another man was lying on the floor, but this one had blood spurting from his neck. Nobody seemed to know who had stabbed him.

"You dogs. You pigs!" one of the women, a partner in the Silver Slipper, was screaming. "Now we're going to have the police here. Oh, you dirty pigs."

There was a rush for the door and a panicky scramble down the steps. They all stood in a bunch on the pavement, very serious and sober and hardly talking, and then they realised the danger of standing there all together, and they began to disperse.

As he was walking away, Koko felt a hand slip into his arm. He looked down and saw that it was the girl from the shebeen. Although the fight and the cool night air had sobered him up, her pungent perfume brought back something of the mood he was in before the excitement started. They did not speak while she led him to her room.

He awoke sometime in the dead of night. After a moment he sat bolt up and began patting the bed around him. He found that he was alone in it. He fumbled at the end of the bed for his trousers, took out some matches and lit the candle that he remembered was standing beside the bed. He saw to his surprise that there was another bed in the room with a couple sleeping in it, and two men curled up in blankets on the floor. He tried to recall what had happened. He remembered coming into some sitting-room place, and having more drinks, and smoking, and the girl getting undressed. It was real powerful *dop* she gave him. He remembered going into a dark room, and the girl lighting the candle, but nothing more. He could not even remember if he made love to her.

He got dressed and went out into the street. He had a stinging headache, and was not yet quite sober. Suddenly he felt a desperate desire to know the time, but he walked for two blocks without meeting anyone. Then he heard a familiar rumbling sound, and a line of night-soil carts, with shadowy mules and bobbing red lights,



came round the corner. The driver of the front cart told him it was one-thirty.

He decided that there was still time for a little game and he started walking fast towards one of the dives that he frequented. The place was near, and he hurried down a narrow alley and pushed open the door. The room was wreathed in a thick fog of cheap cigarette smoke and there were more people in it than he could count in the dim candlelight. In one corner a crowd of fellows were sitting on the floor throwing dice. He recognised some of his pals, Charlie and Chips and one or two others, and he pushed his way into the ring.

When he put his hand in his back pocket, it remained glued there, and a sick look came into his face. The pocket was empty. He probed around with his fingers, unable to believe it was true. That dirty thieving cow had not only taken all his money, but the lucky cat's-eye as well.

"What's the matter, Koko boy?"

"Nothing," he said. But the temptation to play was too strong so he borrowed ten shillings from Charlie, and when his turn came he held the dice in his cupped hand, blew into it, rubbed it with the palm of his other hand, and said "Come on, you darlings, show them," just as he always did when he knew that the dice were listening, and that he could not lose. But when the dice trickled to a stop, they showed only a three and a two. He lost four shillings that round, three the next, and then the last three. He borrowed another pound, and although he won a few rounds he gave it all back. Nobody would lend him anymore. He spent the rest of the night moodily watching the play, hovering around outside the circle enviously studying the flow of the money, the pattern of the numbers that turned up. When dawn came the party broke up and he went outside and fell asleep under a tree.

He woke up feeling stiff and wretched. He thought about getting home, and remembered Kelly MacKelly, and that his bike was tied to the top of his taxi. He stood up, stretched his arms and started walking towards the Silver Slipper. The place was bolted up and there was an African constable on guard outside. When Koko asked him if he could tell him where to find Kelly MacKelly, the man who was knocked out last night, the constable asked: "What name!"

"Kelly MacKelly—you know, the taxi driver. Kid Chocolate knocked him out."

"Oh *him*. You mean Bob Theunissen. Oh, they took him back

to his house—he lives in Buxton Avenue, thirty-six.”

He found MacKelly—he could only think of him as that—propped up in bed with a thick wad of dressing taped over his nose. The old taxi-driver stared blearily at him with trembling, bloodshot eyes. “Your bike’s on the taxi—your bike’s on the taxi” he said weakly, but the words merely echoed Koko’s, and he did not seem to know what he was saying. Koko started to make conversation about the previous night, but he stopped short. He saw Kelly looking at him with a puzzled, hostile frown, and he realised suddenly that the man could not recognise him.

He untied his bike and began the journey back to Pola location. He had no wind and he found the going hard. After a few miles he stopped for a rest. The power station was behind him, up on the hill, and he turned round and looked at it. It didn’t look at all pretty now, just grey and dirty and sprawled out. It didn’t remind him of Japan or anything. He got on his bike again and his thoughts turned to to-morrow’s work. For a fleeting moment he saw himself at the steering wheel, driving one of the company’s vans. But there was something sour in the thought, and he put it from his mind.

“A—ah, the hell,” he said and pedalled slowly home.

## HOME THOUGHTS

### I

Strange rumours gripped Olympus. Apollo’s hand  
Paused at its work, set plummet and rule aside;  
Then glittering in clean-cut bronze he sped  
To rout the brash disturbers of that peace  
Which year by year had raised archaic Greece  
Nearer his vision of the poised and planned.  
O barbarous with drums, with dancing drums,  
Amid a snarl of leopards through whose hide  
Shimmer disastrous stars; the drunkard comes,  
Black Dionysus roaring in his pride!

Ten thousand times they fought, wrestling before  
Both gods and men; it seemed the very rocks  
Watched those wild bouts among the barley shocks,