

A second move forced her against a tree and there, with his body pressed against hers, a knee already between her legs and his hand still on her mouth, there he looked into her eyes. She struggled once but he held her firmly. She clutched her shoebox with even greater desperation.

For a few seconds neither moved. He studied her calmly, her eyes, her neck with the pulse of an artery under the warm skin, deliberating his next move while the warmth of her body crept into his and her breasts, full and firm, panicked under the weight of her chest.

Unknowingly he relaxed his grip. With a twist of her head she freed a corner of her mouth and screamed a second time, but before he could do anything his attention was torn away from her to the shoebox she carried. He released her and stepped back sharply.

She had stopped her scream and was staring now at the box with a horror deeper than her fear of him. With both hands she lifted it, and when nothing happened she held it up to him and for a second time he backed away. With a sudden movement she thrust it into his hands, and he held it clumsily. Tsotsi only had eyes for the box now, and ears too, neither seeing nor hearing the woman as she turned away and with a low sob ran back the way she had come, deep into the white night.

The lid had slipped off in the sudden impulse of her generosity. Tsotsi had found himself looking at a face that was small and black and older than anything he had ever seen in his life: it was lined and wrinkled with an age beyond years. The sound that had stopped him, and saved the woman, was the cry of a baby.

Tsotsi watched her from under the trees. Without realizing it, his heart began to beat faster. It was almost perfect. The woman came towards him in the night, he didn't know her, he didn't hate, but he slipped slyly from tree to tree to the point where she would enter the grove. He didn't know what he was going to do but his fingers flexed at his side. His hands were ready.

She was opposite him now, having paused on her way to lean against a wall and shake her head. She crossed the street and walked into the grove of bluegum trees.

He caught her by one arm and swung her into the darkness, his hand cutting short the scream of terror that had fallen from her lips like splintering glass.