

Big Yellow Taxi Tree

The big yellow taxi pulled up to the curb. The airport hustled and whistled behind them, a rash of rushing bodies rustling through corridors in search of escape, homeward bound instincts, animals roaming across the savannah following their intuition.

The taxi exuded fumes threatening the senses with a billow of frightening novelty, lungs bellowing to escape. She wanted to cry desperately but didn't dare. She'd already thrown a fit when they passed customs. He threatened to leave her behind. Then explained he couldn't. She just shrieked. As if it all made sense. He seemed more confused than she was. The woman had gone off ahead to avoid the scene.

They smelled strange, too clean and fresh, not like real parents who stank and cursed and glared in your eyes. That's what she had imagined at least. She had only very limited experience. Their faces were lined, even when they smiled and tried to kiss her floating head, glance off her cheek as she tried to reward them with a vague smile while wondering if she could escape, or if they would let her, or if she could trust them not to.

She'd never seen a big yellow taxi and had no idea what a parking lot would be. They spoke about their flat, and the huge trees out front around the play ground. She'd seen pictures. But she had never seen a flat. She'd never slept alone, not that she could remember. Who would she talk to at night. It looked lovely, but it smelled like them, foreign, no dampness, the rank homely curl of potatoes going off, boys farting, girls crying themselves to sleep when lights went out after a day scrawling through shredded notebooks in what passed for education. A bedroom all to herself was scary.

The taxi lurched. Horns squealed. The driver shouted. She didn't understand what he said. Voices, smells, rushing multicoloured cars all too alien and threatening squeaked into a blaze. She couldn't hear anyone anymore.

Presumably she'd learn. Loneliness punched her stomach. She sucked in a deep breath of stench and strange smells. A loneliness for nothing she could identify as missing. She didn't want the big yellow taxi to ever stop. She wasn't ready for the next stage, big trees, a park, something called a flat, a home, a family, parents. It was all too new. A concrete parking lot would have been simpler: smoothed over, no space for new roots, it had its attractions.

She sat between them. A bit rigid. Still shook from the scene in the airport. She hadn't been able to sleep all flight. Crying, screeching, in this new man's arms. Nobody on the plane would forget that particular journey. Scene after scene. She wasn't proud of her creations but had no other reaction. She leaned into the woman. Mum she called herself. That was cool. Dad he called himself. She liked him too. Just wanted them to stay, even when she cried and screamed and kicked and knocked his glasses off on a crowded plane. She struggled between the comfort of a hug and the fear of repulsion, being thrown away again, stubbed out in the ashtray of abandonment.

Being adopted was just like catching a big yellow cab and forgetting you had no address to give. The nearest tree house would do. Or any available parking space. Kind words floated and hovered but you had no idea what was happening and wove yourself into a nest of fear and constant buzzing as the strangeness outside spun you into a hive of fretfulness.

The big yellow taxi stopped. The building loomed above. It was enormous. She was going to learn what a flat was. She felt too young for all these obstacles. Her new dad kissed her on the head. Her new mum held her shoulder. Maybe it would be all right. She didn't really want to leave the taxi. It had become home. She let them hold her hand. Trees and parking lots, maybe nature wasn't that bad. Real life of course was more complicated than concrete. Buildings were simple. Relationships complex. She caught her new mum's eyes for the first time. The taxi door swung shut. She watched it disappear down the street, up into the park. She hoped there were slides.

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