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Challenging the Representation of Masculinity & Themes Pertaining to Rape Culture in Film & Televisual Media

Gondo, Jackson Onai

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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No Man’s Land

by

JACKSON GONDO

Original Screenplay

EXT. DUMPSITE - DAY

A little girl, dressed in a yellow dress top and a pink skirt, kneels down, throwing stones into a bucket. We stay at her feet. She begins mumbling something under her breath, an innocent little tune.

She stands up, leaving the bucket on the ground and proceeds to walk ahead.

Her mother yells after her.

LITTLE GIRL'S MOM
Lesego! Don't go too far!

We see the little girl skipping along, definitely out of momma's sight now.

LITTLE GIRL'S MOM
This girl...

Lesego's mom continues to walk when suddenly-- she hears a baby crying softly in the background. She drops her bucket.

LITTLE GIRL'S MOM (cont'd)
(panicking)
Lesego? Where are you?

She looks around frantically. The baby's cry gets louder.

We see the baby in the distance, we creep towards it. The mother follows the growing sound and arrives at the baby. She hesitantly picks it up. We get a glance at the baby, covered in blood and cuts, crying loud.

We see the head of a little girl and move out to reveal her standing and staring into a dark shed, with a dark red glow shining at her. As we move out we see a trail of blood leaving the shed and creeping towards her until a large puddle sits directly under her skirt between her feet.

LITTLE GIRL'S MOM (O.S)
Lesego! Lesego! Where are you!
Lesego! Come back my child... Come back.

OPENING TITLE SEQUENCE

NO MAN'S LAND

CUT TO:

EXT. MANDELA BRIDGE - NIGHT

Inside a car sit two detectives, BEN, late 20s/early 30s, slim fit guy, clearly very smart and MALUME, late 40s, big stocky guy with 24/7 shades. Malume sits at the steering wheel, Ben in the passengers seat looking down at his feet.

Over the radio the news softly reports a dead girl that was found at a dumpsite.

MALUME
Is he here?

BEN
Not yet.

MALUME
We need to be swift--

BEN
-- i know, I know...

Ben, eyes glued to the phone as he is waiting for an Uber ride to arrive. He sees the Uber marker nearing where they are.

A car pulls up behind them and it’s lights glare into the rear view mirror.

BEN
I think that’s him.

MALUME
Silver Sedan?

BEN
White.

MALUME
But she was last seen in a silver Sedan--

BEN
-- i know, but his name and the number plate match the witness testimony... Maybe he repainted his car?

MALUME
Hmm... Talk about a red flag.

BEN
As bright as a neon night in Tokyo.

MALUME
You ready?

BEN
Do I have a choice?

Ben clicks his gun. The driver sends a text on the app "I have arrived."

A game of patience as Ben and Malume stare at the car in their respective mirrors. The drivers lights continue to glare into the rear view mirror, as the the rain patters down.

The Uber immediately gases on and pulls up beside Ben and Malume’s vehicle. They all lock eyes in a silent moment. Suddenly-- VROOM! The Uber driver storms off. Malume steps on the pedals. A car chase over Nelson Mandela Bridge.

Swerving through red lights and traffic they go. Malume pulls up side by side as both vehicles continue at high velocity. The detectives and the Uber driver exchange a gaze once more. The Uber driver rams his car into the cops’ car, Malume immediately swerving to avoid oncoming traffic.

(SAME SEQUENCE)

INSERT CUT: Outside a food shop in the streets of Braam, a sweet looking girl, early 20s, wearing a yellow raincoat and holding a pink umbrella, says goodye to her friend as she walks off with an ice-cream.

(BACK TO CAR CHASE)

Back on neon streets of the night, the bumper cars go crazy. Ben turns on the siren and speaks through the megaphone.

BEN (cont’d)
(shouting)
Sir, we need you to pull over--
now!

The Uber driver goes even faster and swerves onto the next road. The cop car bolts right behind, people jumping on the sidewalks and running away.

The Uber swerves onto a right turn one more time, the cop car immediately swerving right behind it.

Suddenly, everything is dark. The Uber finally stops.

BEN (cont’d)
Dead end.

MALUME
We got the son of a bitch.

Suddenly the reverse lights of the Uber turn on and --- WHAM! Reversing at high velocity, the Uber smashes into the cops so hard that the siren noise immediately gets cut off. The cop car is now being propelled into reverse.

Ben turns his head as he sees the car is about to leave the alley and join the traffic in the road.

BEN
There’s people on the road!

Malume presses the breaks-- a squeaky pop goes off.

MALUME
The breaks are shat!

BEN
Accelerate!

Malume steps on the acceleration pedal. It works. The friction creating a cloud of smoke. The cars almost reach the road but now match in acceleration. Both accelerating equally hard in opposite directions, there is friction but they are static.

BEN (cont’d)
Good, keep it there!

The tide turns. Malume starts winning and moving the cars forward back into the alley, avoiding the road. Suddenly, Malume’s car stops and the Uber accelerates all the way to the end of the alley. Malume’s car remains at the edge of the alley near the road. A silence as the threat seems gone.

The Uber driver’s door opens and the driver sticks out his hand in surrender.

BEN (cont’d)
Switch it off before it blows.

Malume switches the engine off. Ben opens his door to get out when -- the Uber driver suddenly shuts his door and turns on his engine, immediately reversing again - this time with the length of the alley as his runway.

Malume tries to turn the engine on, it coughs. He yells at Ben who is in an awkward position.

MALUME
Get out!

Ben jumps out the car and runs behind the car. Malume keepts trying to turn on the coughing car but to no result.

MALUME (cont’d)
Lord, have mercy.

Malume braces for impact.

Ben sprints behind the car into the alley. The girl with the yellow raincoat and pink umbrella licks her ice cream as she approaches the alley turn.

--- WHAM!

The Uber smashes into the cop car and it jumps onto the sidewalk, Malume’s airbag pops into his face.

A pink Umbrella lies on the floor in the middle of the road, all bent and twisted. The bright lights of the city and flashing lights of the cop car glowing through the umbrella. A strange irony as the rain falls onto the inside of the umbrella.

Lying next to the umbrella, upside down is the ice-cream. A faint ambulance siren is heard as it approaches in the distance.

After a moment the cracked umbrella is picked up by the girl in the yellow raincoat. Terror fills her face as she stands motionless, almost paralyzed. She exchanges a long glance with Ben who is on the floor, also very much horrified, more for her than for anything else.

The girl breaks her gaze and looks down at her ice-cream. She puts the pink umbrella over her head, turns around and walks away.

Ben remains shaken. He glances at the ice-cream and proceeds to ook ahead.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

A wild combination of smacks from the Giant in Malume send the Uber driver,40s, thick Nigerian accent, to the ground. Not so tough without the metal shield of his car.

Ben lights a cigarette in the background.

DRIVER
(begging)
Please let me go, I don’t know anything!

BEN
You sure made a whole lot of a fuss for someone who doesn’t know anything. Even if by some cosmic miracle you hadn’t done anything before, you’ve sure done enough now to get your ass locked up either way.

DRIVER
Please... I was scared!

MALUME
YOU were scared? Tell that to the girl!

DRIVER
I didn’t do anything to her, I swear!

BEN
And yet you know exactly who we’re talking about.

DRIVER
Of course I know who you’re talking about, it’s all over the news!

BEN
Some witnesses say she was last seen getting into a white Sedan with a driver that happens to share your name and number plate. Perhaps you can start by telling us why you suddenly decided to change the colour of your car? Every idiot knows that you should start by changing the plates.

Ben continues to drag on his cigarette.

DRIVER
Please, i’ll tell you whatever you need to know! I just need some assurances.

MALUME
(aggressive)
Assurances?

BEN
He really doesn’t like that word.

WHAM! Malume let’s out a wild kick right into the driver’s gut.

MALUME
I’ll *assure* you that i’ll beat the living shit out of you if you test me!

BEN
I don’t know if you’re partially blind, which I doubt judging by your skillfull driving-- but it doesn’t look like you’re in any position to be negotiating.

DRIVER
I have information that you need...

Malume smirks.

MALUME
What do you think i’m trying to get out of you?

DRIVER
I told you, i’ll tell you whatever you need to know... I just need some assurances.

Ben bums his fag.

BEN
I told *you*... He really hates that fucking word.

BANG! BANG! WHAM! DUSH! CRACK!

The driver lets out a loud yell as Malume hits all the right spots. Ben moves towards him and kneels down next to him. He hands him a handkerchief.

BEN (cont’d)
How about you start by talking... And we sort out the rest of the contract a little later? And if I were you... I’d be very careful
(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)
with the next thing that comes out of my mouth.

A silence comes upon the room. The driver looks around nervously.

BEN (cont'd)
Weigh your options closely, pal. You've got far too few if you ask me.

The driver suddenly erupts and begins to cry.

(As he speaks we cut back and forth between him and a montage of his story playing itself out)

DRIVER
(trying to control his sobbing)
... It was a normal night... I had been driving around town, picking up passengers. But it suddenly got really late, and whenever it reaches that time, a dark cloud comes over me and I get really worried for my safety. It's a different world out there when the sun goes down. You really get to see some scary things with this job. So as I was driving off, I saw a girl. Beautiful, in an innocent baby-like way. She was standing alone. I thought, if i'm terrified in the comfort of my car... I can't imagine how she might be feeling. Especially with all the stories we've been hearing about what's been happening to young girls around the country. So I pulled up next to her and asked her if she needed a lift. She was a bit worried and scared by me, but I wasn't offended. I knew where it was coming from. So I tld her that the ride is for free and she can take down all my details: name, number and car and send it to a family member or friend she trusts. She immediately called my cell and it rang. So I suppose that made her trust me. Her battery then died so she smacked her phone and shoved it

(MORE)

DRIVER (cont’d)
into her bag. I told her i’d leave her door unlocked and the window open, and let her lock it on her side. Just to give her some comfort. We drove, and drove, and drove. We drove so far that whatever money I had made that day from trips was immediately gone from the amount of fuel we spent. We eventually arrived. When we stopped, she wouldn’t leave the car... Instead she bagn to cry. I asked her why she was crying, but she never answered. She quietly left the car and gently closed the door. She didn’t say anything... But I could feel her gratitude. But when she approached the door... that dark cloud returned. I saw a man, watching her exit the car. I only saw him as a silhouette in the window. I suddenly felt a deep fear for her. You know, sometimes you just have a feeling. I so badly wanted to stay and make sure everything was alright but... You know when it’s the middle of Winter and you’re walking home in a white neighbourhood, no matter how cold you are, you feel a need to take your hood off, just so nobody sees you as a threat... Well, I worried that if I stayed, I would cause alarm to people in the neighbourhood. I fear police, so I do what I can to avoid trouble. So I left... And next thing I saw, she was on the news.

The driver weeps really hard. Ben and Malume pause a moment to take it all in.

BEN
The man in the window... Did she tell you who it was?

DRIVER
Nothing. I knew that whoever she was seeing, it was meant to be a secret.

MALUME
Boyfriend?

DRIVER
I think so.

The driver continues to let out his cry.

MALUME
So why all of this nonsense? Running away, changing your car? Why didn’t you come forward with this information?

The driver remains silent.

BEN
Now’s not the time for silence.

DRIVER
I came here from Nigeria.... I’m with my wife and my two kids, a daughter and a son... They don’t have the right papers... Not yet. And I know how this system treats people like me.

Ben and Malume exchange a look.

BEN
Do you remember where you took her?

DRIVER
I couldn’t forget it if I tried...

Malume, no sympathy to share, throws a pen and a notebook at the driver. The driver scribbles into it. Malume picks up the notebook and hands it to Ben.

MALUME
Organize a team, we need to get to this location, NOW.

Ben takes the notebook and makes his way out. He gets to the door and Malume is still standing over the driver.

MALUME (cont’d)
(to Ben)
Close the door...

Ben closes the door.

DRIVER
I told you what you want to know... Will you let me go now?

MALUME
Your family has done nothing wrong. And i’m sick and tired of women and children paying the price for the actions of reckless men. You on the other hand... I have a lot less sympathy for.

DRIVER
(desperately pleading)
I did what I could to help her... I tried.

MALUME
So what? You’re a good man? Your actions tonight nearly took the life of another young woman.You picked the wrong day to dance with the devil.

DRIVER
(desperate)
You assaulted me! You broke the law!

Malume takes off his tie.

MALUME
I am the law.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE DEPARTMENT FOYER - NIGHT

Ben stands in the foyer with a raid team ready to go. Malume comes out and joins Ben, this time with no tie.

BEN
What did you say to him?

MALUME
I just reminded him that the law is alive and well... Let’s go.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN ROADS - NIGHT

Drone view of cop car lights tailing each other in a suburban neighbourhood.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD - NIGHT

The raid team tiptoe and cover the perimeter of the house they're raiding. The same house the driver spoke of.

Malume and Ben head to the front door. Wham! Malume kicks open the door. Malume has his gun pointed at a silhouette holding a mug.

MALUME
Freeze!

Ben shines a torch on the silhouette's face, revealing a woman dressed in scrubs. The mug, in fear, is immediately dropped to the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. NURSE'S HOME - NIGHT

The raid team stands outside guarding the door, one stands inside as backup. Ben and Malume are seated across from the Nurse (early 30s, white lady) in her lounge. Ben has a notebook that he writes in during the interrogation. The nurse, looking distressed, lights a cigarette.

BEN
May I?

The nurse nods her head. Ben lights his own cigarette and rests it on the corner of his lip as he scribbles in his notebook

BEN (cont'd)
She was here the night she was killed.

NURSE
I know.

MALUME
Why didn't you come forward?

NURSE
There's things she wanted to keep a secret... Even in her death, I wanted to honour that.

BEN
Coming forward with this information would help solve the case.

NURSE
(snapping)
And then what? She’s remembered as the pregnant dead girl carrying a baby with an unknown father? Allow her to be nothing more than a slut-shamed social media trend?

MALUME
So you were her pregnancy consultant?

NURSE
(smirking, sarcastic)
Pregnancy consultant? Do you men know anything? I was more than her *"pregnancy consultant"*. I was going to deliver her baby, right down the hall.

We look down the hall into the bathroom. We can faintly see a man’s silhouette standing down the passage.

BEN
Why did you allow her to travel so far?

NURSE
She never told us she lived so far away. In fact, she always acted like she was close enough to walk or to take a quick taxi. But in retrospect, that’s the kind of girl she was. She would bear the brunt of everything and do everything in her power to make sure that nobody beyond her is burdened. And after everything that’s happened, I think that’s how she wanted it. There are enough hospitals around her that she could get this done with ease. So her coming here wasn’t just about giving birth...

She starts to cry
... It was about running away.

BEN
Running from what?

NURSE
From everything.

She takes a massive drag.

MALUME
Do you stay here alone? Is there by any chance a man in the house?

She pauses.

NURSE
(yelling into another room)
Baby? Please come in here.

A big Afrikaans man, MR. NIEKERK, 40s (big but soft) walks into the room and sits beside her. Ben and Malume exchange a look.

MR. NIEKERK
Good evening, officers.

MALUME
(correcting)
Detectives.

MR. NIEKERK
Sorry... Good evening, detectives.

BEN
Mr Niekerk, were you here the night of Zoe’s disappearance?

MR. NIEKERK
(thinking)
Uh, no officer-- i mean detective. I believe I was working that evening.

Ben and Malume exchange another look.

BEN
Mr. Niekerk, the driver who dropped Zoe off recalled that he saw you standing in the window.

MR. NIEKERK
Oh, yes! That’s right officer-- i mean detective! I think I was here. Just got my dates mixed up a bit.

Another exchange between the two detectives.

BEN
How did you get that scar on your face?

Niekerk looks to his wife.

NURSE
It’s okay, baby.

MR. NIEKERK
I’ve had it since I was a child... My father was a bit of an alcoholic.

BEN
Are you an alcoholic?

Niekerk looks to his wife again.

NURSE
Go ahead baby... Go ahead.

MR. NIEKERK
(stuttering a little)
I-- i’m not perfect... Nobody is.

BEN
What was the nature of your relationship with Zoe?

MR. NIEKERK
I didn’t know her... I’d just see her when she was coming to see my wife.

BEN
Mr and Mrs. Niekerk, I’m going to be very, very frank. This is Zoe’s last recorded location before she was found dead. If everything you’ve told us thus far is all that you can offer, i’m afraid that we have no choice but to consider you both prime suspects.

A pause falls upon the room. Mr. Niekerk looks to the ground.

NURSE
After our meeting, she left.

MALUME
What do you mean she left?

NURSE
She left... It was late, I set up a bed for her but she refused to stay. This time I actually offered to take her home in the morning if she stayed but she refused. She said that she had to get home or her parents would be worried. I was scared to contest that because I knew the stakes were high for her. She had told me that her parents were preachers before. So I knew that something like this had to be handled very carefully and at her discretion.

MALUME
(angered)
So you just let her walk home?

NURSE
I would never allow that. We watched her from the window, she didn’t walk far. I was about to go and bring her back inside when a car pulled up beside her.

MR. NIEKERK
A black car.

NURSE
A black car... She got in the car and left so I assumed that she had requested a driver.

She starts to cry.

NURSE (cont’d)
That was the last time I saw my Zoe.

A moment for her cry to settle.

BEN
When the car drove away... Was Zoe’s window open?

MR. NIEKERK
It was closed.

Ben looks down in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR ON HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Ben and Malume drive down the Jozi highway late at night, the blinding lights skidding off their windows. Ben on the phone, Malume in the drivers seat.

BEN
(on the phone)
I need you and the team to check all the cameras in that neighbourhood. Look out specifically for a black car that the girl went into. We need that number plate. If we can’t get that we’re just cluthcing onto red herrings at this point. Tonight please. Thanks.

Ben cuts the call.

MALUME
This is all too intense... We need to go out and grab a drink.

Ben ignores him and stares out the window watching the lights go by.

MALUME (cont’d)
What’s the matter?

BEN
... Her phone was dead.

MALUME
What?

BEN
She didn’t call a driver... Her phone was dead.

A silence falls upon the car.

BEN (cont’d)
Do you remember the first line of the last poem in Zoe’s diary?

MALUME
Yeah... Something about a scar.

BEN
"With a scar on your heart that left marks on your face... you touched me.". That’s the clue.

MALUME
The marks on the face?

BEN
Yes.

MALUME
As that why you suspected the Nurse’s husband?

BEN
Yes.

MALUME
So do you think she knew her killer?

BEN
... Without a doubt.

Another silence.

MALUME
Maybe... Maybe it’s something we have to let go.

BEN
Let go?

MALUME
Yes... Let go. What happened, happened- nothing can change that. That’s one thing you learn on this job- most things remain unsolved.

BEN
Well they probably remain unsolved because your attitude is "Hey, just let it go. Just let it go, forget that there’s a murderer on the loose who can brutally kill yet another young woman, let’s just let it go. It is what it is."... Letting go is somebody else’s job, not ours...

They drive into the night.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN’S HOUSE - NIGHT

An exhausted Ben opens the front door. He stands in the passage for a while before actually walking into the house. He closes the door and walks in to find his girlfriend, SAM, late 20s, brunette, standing in the kitchen.

BEN
Baby... I thought you’d be asleep.

SAM
I couldn’t sleep.

BEN
Is everything okay?

SAM
... I’m pregnant.

Ben, caught off guard.

BEN
What do you mean?

SAM
It’s a boy.

BEN
You’ve known this long enough to know it’s a boy? Why didn’t you say anything?

SAM
I was hoping you’d notice. But then again, you’ve never really been good with details.

BEN
What am I supposed to do with this information?

SAM
I don’t know detective, isn’t it your job to figure that out?

BEN
What am I supposed to do with this information after a long and hard day of dealing with the most fucked up shit i’ve ever seen in my life?

SAM
Well, I'd assume it would make you happy and maybe give you something beautiful to believe in.

BEN
Of course it's easy for you to say that, you have no idea how intense my days are.

SAM
I have every idea of how intense your days are, it's all you ever talk about.

BEN
Well what the hell am I supposed to do?

A pause of silence between them.

SAM
What are *you* supposed to do? What am *I* supposed to do, i'm the one who's fucking pregnant!

BEN
Get rid of it.

Sam, shocked.

SAM
Excuse me?

BEN
You heard me.

SAM
I did. Loud and clear. I think that's my decision to make, thank you very much.

BEN
So empower yourself and make it.

SAM
Excuse me! Do you think I planned for this to happen? Do you think I was ready for this-- do you think I wanted this? You're not the only one who's busy, not that you'd know since you never fucking ask. But things are going well for me, I'm
(MORE)

SAM (cont'd)
on the brink of a damn promotion and this happens, do you think this is ideal for me? You don't think *"getting rid of it"* was the *first* thing to cross my mind? Well it was! And I held myself back...

Silence.

(mocking Ben)
"Well, why did you hold back, my love, since I care so much about your feelings that I ask follow-up questions!".

I held back because of you. Because ever since I met you you've always told me how much the absence *and presence* of your father left you feeling like a lesser man. How it left you with a hole that you can never fill. And I thought to myself, maybe this will finally fill that hole. Maybe if he has a child of his own, a *son* of his own, he'll be so happy because he'll be able to give his son all the things he never had. He'll be able to have a second chance and be the father that he never got... And what did you say? *"Get rid of it."*. You know your dad was an asshole. Funny thing is "get rid of it" was probably what he said to your mother about you... And look how fucked up you turned out.

Beat.

BEN
... I just want to go to sleep.

Sam shakes her dead.

SAM
You can go and sleep, baby. But there's no chance in hell i'm going to sleep in the same bed as you right now.

Ben pauses a moment. He turns around and exits the frame. The front door slams shut. Sam is left alone. She breaks down.

CUT TO:

INT. MALUME’S HOUSE - NIGHT

A knock on Malume’s front door. He opens it. It’s Ben, wide-eyed and lost. Malume, no shades for once and in a T-shirt. He examines the lost puppy.

MALUME
Come on in.

DINNER TABLE

Malume’s wife gives him a kiss as Ben digs into his dinner bowl.

BEN
Thank you so much for the meal.

MALUME’S WIFE
You’re always welcome, dear.

Malume’s wife leaves the frame. Ben continues to dig into his food as Malume watches him. Out of nowhere, Ben starts to weep. Head down facing his bowl, he sniffs it out.

Malume stretches out his arm and touches Ben on the shoulder.

MALUME
You ready to go to bed?

Ben nods his head. They both stand up. After a moment of standing aimlessly, Ben falls into Malume’s shoulder and gives him a hug as he continues to cry. Malume is caught slightly off-guard but he hugs Ben back immediately.

CHILD’S BEDROOM

Malume opens a door.

MALUME (cont’d)
We don’t usually have gustes over, so I hope you don’t mind- you’ll have to stay in this little box.

Malume turns on the light and suddenly the room illuminates in a blue glow. Toys on the floor in a corner, a race car duvet on a child-sized bed. Clearly a child’s bedroom. We see a photo on the drawer of Malume, his wife, and a young boy of about 5. Playing in the background is a lullaby chime that was clearly activated by the light turning on.

MALUME (cont'd)
I don't come in here often so... I never really got down to turning that thing off... It'll shut up once the light goes off.

BEN
It's okay.

Ben walks over and gets into bed. Malume turns around and faces the passage away from the bedroom, struggling to be in the bedroom. He keeps his back facing the room as he speaks to Ben.

MALUME
You comfortable?

BEN
Yes... Thank you.

MALUME
If you need anything just... Feel free to knock, we're right down the passage- you won't miss it.

BEN
Sure.

MALUME
Goodnight.

BEN
Goodnight.

Malume closes the door. Ben stares at the roof for a moment, looking at the glow-in-the-dark inflections on the roof above the bed.

He suddenly gets an idea and reaches over to his jacket on thr ground and he pulls out a diary. He lies in his bed and reads a poem from the diary.

ZOE VOICEOVER(O.S)
"With a scar on your heart that left marks on your face, you touched me.

Is this where you bury your trauma? Deep inside me?

As if a seed is being sown for me to give birth to a trauma of my own.

I tried to escape you but it was an impossible task because everywhere I turned, there you were.

Watching me. Eyes glued to my body as if I had something that belonged to you and you were desperate to get it back.

Is this my inheritance?

What a blessing I am to have what I have, you say.

A remark to which I rebuttal, it is a curse to be a blessing. For to be a blessing is to give yourself up for free and to be taken for granted.

I am yet to meet a blessing that weeps, due to the mere fact that it is impossible to meet oneself.

Perhaps a glance in the mirror is an answer to this probe. But is that all that I am? A soul with a shell to be glanced it?

With a scar on your heart that left marks on your face... You touched me."

Ben looks up and reflects. He puts the book away. He falls asleep.

CUT TO: DREAM PLACE

Bright afternoon, on a cliff that overlooks the Joburg skyline. A little boy sits on the edge of a cliff, playing with a stick.

We hear a car door closing and a figure approaches the boy. As the figure approaches, a shadow comes over the boy. The figure pulls out a cigarette and smokes. The figure is a big man wearing a fancy suit and thick sunglasses. He looks at the kid, watching him play with a stick.

He looks back at the horizon.

SHADOW MAN
I hate this place.

He stretches out his arm, like he’s pointing a gun with his fingers. The kid watches and stares at the "gun (fingers)".

BACK TO REALITY

INSERT CUT: SUN RISING OVER JOBURG THE NEXT MORNING

INSERT CUT: BEN TAKES A HOT AND STEAMY SHOWER

KITCHEN (MORNING)

Ben, Malume and Malume’s wife sit at the breakfast table like a happy family. Ben digging into his food once more.

BEN
This is amazing, wow.

MALUME’S WIFE
Why, thank you.

MALUME
You shouldn’t make it too good. Now I don’t think he’ll leave.

They all giggle.

MALUME’S WIFE
You boys have yourselves a good day. Stay out of trouble, please.

MALUME
No promises.

Malume kisses her. She leaves the room. Ben watches them and smiles.

Malume looks at Ben eating, a bit of conern.

MALUME (cont’d)
You good?

BEN
I’m okay.

MALUME
Whatever it is just... Do what’s gentle on the heart. And I’m not just talking about yours.

Ben nods his head. Malume’s phone rings, he answers.

MALUME (cont'd)
Hello? (whispering to Ben) They said they've been trying to reach you.

BEN
(whispering back)
My phone died.

MALUME
(to phone)
His phone died, what's up?... Shit, how many? Alright... We're on our way.

Malume hangs up.

MALUME (cont'd)
They looked at all the CCTV footage from the block. They managed to capture and run the numbler plate. Three suspects linked to the vehicle.

BEN
Could it be all three?

MALUME
Let's go find out.

CUT TO:

INT. STATION - DAY

Ben and Malume enter a tech room in the police station where they are met by RAVI, 30s, indian guy, sitting at his computer.

RAVI
We have three suspects linked to the car. One, Thabo Sithole.

Ravi shows his photo and his mugshots on the computer.

RAVI
Arrested twice but let go on good behaviour. Both times.

BEN
What was he arrested for?

RAVI
First time, petty theft. Second time, he raped his 5 year old niece when he was babysitting her. One year sentence.

Ben and Malume exchange a look.

RAVI (cont’d)
Next guy, Rynard Vosloo. Currently serving time for attempted kidnapping. Last guy, Andrew Mlambo. Never been arrested, but he’s had some restraining orders.

Racvi clicks to his picture and we see a scar above his eye.

BEN
That’s him.

MALUME
We need to analyze everything throughly.

BEN
That’s him, I know it’s him. He fits the description.

RAVI
I need to add that this car has been picked up on camera footage at different joints around that town. On at least two occasions it was being used by men who aren’t our suspcts. We know this because two of them were in jail at the time and the third one, well, we could just see he wasn’t one of them from his physical features.

MALUME
Do you think they’re a gang?

RAVI
They say there’s no loyalty amongst criminals but... There’s definitely some kind of code. When we get one of em, another one takes the reigns. When we get all of them, our supposed "good guys" turn into them.

MALUME
What are you saing, Ravi?

RAVI
I’m saying how do you stop an illness from spreading if you can’t tell who has the disease? Furthermore when it’s mutated into something incurable from years of not being treated?

MALUME
So are you suggesting that we just lock up every man we see in the street?

RAVI
I’m not saying all men are responsible. But if we locked every one of them up, the brutality would stop. Or rather, it would relocate and instead of taking it out on the world, they take it out on themselves.

BEN
This is our guy. I want to track his every move. Since he’s a nocturnal fellow, let’s catch him when he comes out to play.

RAVI
On it.

Ben and Malume exchange a look.

INSERT CUT: A Timelapse of the Jozi skyline going from day to night.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR OUTSIDE BAR - NIGHT

Malume and Ben sit in the car, watching a guy light a cigarette outside the bar entrance. It’s their guy.

MALUME
There’s our shark.

The guy enters the bar.

BEN
Say... How about that drink?

CUT TO:

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Malume and Ben sit with some beers. Ben already sipping his down. Malume stares at him. Ben stops. Malume gives him a clink (cheers) and takes a sip of his. They look over at their guy, having a good time, drinking his drink.

MALUME
You can tell a lot about a man by the company he chooses.

BEN
If you have an issue with me, just come right out and say it.

MALUME
I’m talking about alcohol.

BEN
Oh... So what does that say about Scarface over there? He’s just got a water, *which is normal*. But then again, who orders half a glass of water at a bar?

Malume stares at him.

MALUME
It’s vodka.

Ben raises his glass to take a sip but Malume grabs it out of his hand.

Their guy begins talking to a woman at the bar counter. He shares a smile with her.

MALUME (cont’d)
He looks like he’s having a good time.

BEN
Yeah... He wants her to say hello to his little friend... If he’s not careful, we’ll make him say hello to ours.

MALUME
Please don’t mix your metaphors ever again.

BEN
... That’s not even a metaphor--

Suddenly a waitress arrives at their table. She hands them two glasses of champagne.

WAITRESS
Here are your two drinks.

MALUME
We didn’t order any.

WAITRESS
Oh, they’re courtesy of that man over there.

The guy, SCARFACE, raises his glass in a toast. He lets out a cheeky smirk.

BEN
We’ve been made. Be easy, it’s bait.

Malume gets visibly angry.

BEN (cont’d)
Be easy, please.

Scarface puts his arm around the woman’s waist-- Malume pops and his legs bang onto the table, knocking over both glasses of champagne. Scarface bolts out of the bar.

BEN (cont’d)
Shit.

On foot, Malume and Ben chase him out.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAR - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Outside, Scarface bangs on the trunk of a car twice, and the car turns on and bolts. Scarfaces hops onto a motorbike and speeds along behind them.

Malume and Ben get into the car.

MALUME
Not this shit again.

They turn on the cop siren and the lights. They chase the car and the motorbike onto the highway.

HIGHWAY

They swerve and swerve and swerve. Blinding lights as the rain pours down. Ben dials his pager and calls for back up. All the vehicles offramp one after the other.

PROJECT NEIGHBOURHOOD

Ben and Malume arrive in a dark project neighbourhood in the South. They arrive and see the car and motoribike lights still on and all the doors open. Malume parks the car. The rain falling down heavy.

BEN
We should wait for backup.

MALUME
That gives them more time!

BEN
It’s not worth it, we’re outnumbered, let it go and let’s attack when we have backup.

Malume giggles. He’s surprisingly gleeful. The rain pouring down and the lights shining into the car.

MALUME
Like you said, kid... Letting go is for other people... Not us...

Ben contemplates.

MALUME (cont’d)
... I got your six... You got my six?

BEN
... I got your six.

Malume pulls out his gun.

MALUME
Guns akimbo, kid... Time to dance with the devil.

Malume exits the car. Ben follows. We follow them moving stealthily towards the abandoned project house. The sound of the rain softens as they enter.

They hear skidding and shuffling footsteps and flinch. They move further inside. They are fully in the big wide project space. A silence falls upon the structure.

They suddenly hear quick footsteps sprinting and a windy souund of something in the air when -- CLINK CLINK! The sound of shattering glass is heard and fire immediately erupting in the middle of the floor of the house. They turn around, another one!

A wall of fire now stands at the entrance of the house. They’re trapped. The fires close in on them. Malume suddenly let’s out a yell. Some glass got on him and a line of fire inflames his arm. He tries to pat it off, Ben panics.

BEN
Take off the jacket!

Malume takes off the jacket and throws it on the ground, shaken. Ben even more shaken.

MALUME
We need to--

BEN
What?

MALUME
We need to keep an eye out for---

BANG!!!

Malume has been shot. He immediately collapses to the ground.

BEN
No, no, no, no...

Ben is dizzy. All the sounds around him fading. The fire keeps growing. Another gunshot in that direction forces Ben to move away.

He now stands in the mddle of the empty house floor. Fire literally surrounding him in a circle. He keeps rotating, not sure which side of him to cover. Suddnly --- PLONK!!

A rock bangs Ben square in the head. He drops his gun from the impact. Dizzy, Ben tries to gather himself but as he rotates he sees fading black shadows approaching him froom every single direction, as if they’re emerging from the fire.

His face is covered in blood. As he stands still he somewhat regains his consciousness. He looks up and sees himself surrounded by 7 men, circling him. The shadows have come to life and they’re all glaring at him.

The sounds fade. One of the men approaches Ben, holding his gun. The main points the gun at Ben. It’s Scarface.

Ben stares the gun down with horror in his eyes.

SCARFACE
(gently, while pointing gun)
Take of your clothes.

Ben, fearful and also still shaken from being knocked in the head. He hesitates.

Scarface takes a wild strike with the gun at Ben’s face and with the knife in his other hand he slashes Ben’s cheek. Ben yells in agony.

The gun is pointed against Ben’s forehead again. No more gentless left.

Scarface screams at the top of his lungs.

SCARFACE
I SAID TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES!

This shout echoes throughout the house. Ben begins to unbutton and remove his shirt. After that he hesitantly removes his pants until he’s left in his underwear. He then looks into Scarface’s eyes and sees the reflection of fire- the wrath and fury of men.

He sees the soulless shell of a man in Scarface not even budge. Ben takes off his underwear and stands naked, surrounded by these men.

Scarface puts his gun and knife down and proceeds to take off his jacket. Ben weeps. Scarface takes off his pants. Each man in the circle proceeds to take their jacket off. Ben weeps and weeps. All the men around Ben are now naked. They begin to take steps forward and the ring around him gets smaller and smaller.

Ben cries and cries. It’s all he can do. As the men close in on him, the fire glistens off all their backs and we see all their bodies covered in scars and cuts. If there are no scars, tattoos compensate.

Scarface approaches Ben. Ben so weak and ashamed, his head faces the ground. Scarface reaches his finger out and gently raises Ben’s head from his chin. Ben and Scarface look into each others eyes. It is what it is. Scarface’s eyes more sorrowful than menacing.

Suddenly the faint sounds of police sirens get louder and louder as they approach.

GANG MEMBER
It’s the police!

The gang all begin to panic and retreat like a bunch of roaches. Scarface remains and stares into Ben’s eyes.

GANG MEMBER
Scarface, let’s go!

Scarface, unmoved and unshaken. Scareface gently turns around, leaving his clothes behind. He walks into the fire and disappears into it.

The cops have arrived, now yelling and entering the space.

Ben, with the face and worn out eyes of a dead man walking, just collapses to the ground.

The cops arrive and attend to him.

SLOW FADE TO BLACK.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN’S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Ben stares out of the window in the hospital room, dressed in scrubs and bandaged up around his face, looking out at the city lights.

A nurse enters the room.

HOSPITAL NURSE
Detective, you’re all good to go. You’ll just have to take some painkillers and get some sleep. But if you’re ready... You can go.

Ben, blank.

HOSPITAL NURSE
Detective?

Ben turns around.

BEN
Where is he?

CUT TO:

INT. MALUME’S HOSPITAAL ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Malume lies in bed, unconscious and on an oxygen supply. Ben stands beside him, staring with swelled up eyes. He begins to cry and leans in to hug Malume.

BEN
Is he going to be okay?

DOCTOR
We don’t know... But we have to give him as little disturbance as possible.

Ben pulls away and wipes his eyes.

DOCTOR
He was conscious for a few seconds... While you were asleep. He spoke.

BEN
What did he say?

DOCTOR
He said we should tell you to go home. He said "Be with her". And "Do what’s easy on the heart.".

CUT TO:

EXT. BEN’S APARTMENT DOOR - NIGHT

Ben stands in his hallway, outside his door, absolutely drained. He opens the door and walks in.

CUT TO:

INT. BEN’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Standing in the dark, silhouetted he begins lamenting.

BEN
Baby... Baby I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I’ve been so selfish. I haven’t loved you the way you’ve needed to be loved.

He sulks in silence.
I want to keep the child. I want to keep him, if you do too. Let’s bring something good into this world... God knows there’s nobody i’d rather do it with... I’m sorry... And I love you.

Ben awaits a response. Silence.
Baby?

Ben turns on the light. Empty apartment. No furniture. No Samantha.

He walks to the corner of the empty lounge, where the wall meets the window. He sits on the ground. He lights a cigarette. A tear falls down his face as he smokes away his sorrows.

DREAM SEQUENCE

The little boy sits with the big guy, still looking at the city skyline from the cliff. The shadow of the big guy fully covers the boy from the sun.

SHADOW MAN
I have to go now.

LITTLE BOY
No... Don’t leave.

SHADOW MAN
Why not?

LITTLE BOY
If you move, the sun will burn my skin.

The Shadow Man giggles.

SHADOW MAN
You’ll get used to it.

The shadow man gets up and walks away. The sun glaring, burning the boys skin as he struggels to take it.

BACK TO REALITY

In the corner of the room, Ben continues smoking as he weeps into the night.

FADE TO BLACK.

CUT TO:

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

We hear sniffing and a church bell. A full church. A priest addresses the congregation. A photo of the beautiful Zoe stands tall in the chapel, and we just hear weeping and crying.

PRIEST
We serve a merciful God... At times like this, such a statement sosunds foolish and is simply offensive to some. But the lord is merciful irrespective of how we feel. The lord giveth... And the lord taketh away. All we can do is pray for the lord to have mercy. Mercy on our hearts. Mercy on our souls. And on the hearts and souls of our neighbours and our enemies. May our beautiful Zoe, rest in the eternal comfort of the lord.

The congregation is silent, all their heads bowed. Suddenly an angelic voice is heard lamenting in song across the room.

ZOE
(singing)
Senzeni, na?

Ben’s head lifts. He looks to see where the voice is coming from. The voice begins to sing ’Senzeni Na’ and is joined by an invisible choir of angels. Zoe stands in front of the congregation in a bright, white robe, ghostly and angelic.

As she sings, we see the tears rollin down the bowed heads of the congregation. Ben is the only one who can see the angel.

The angel sings beautifully.

The angel weeps.

Senzeni na?

CUT TO:

EXT. DAM - DAY

Ben stands at the edge of a dam. He takes off his bandages revealing his scar-filled face. He brings out the girls diary and opens it. Her voice begins to read the poem.

ZOE VOICEOVER(O.S)
With a scar on your heart that left marks on your face, you touched me.

Ben throws the diary into the water, letting go.
Is this where you bury your trauma? Deep inside me?

He watches the diary sink to the botBen of the dam.
As if a seed is being sown for me to give birth to a trauma of my own.

As the diary sinks, Ben’s own reflection in the water becomes clearer.
I tried to escape you but it was an impossible task because everywhere I turned, there you were.

Ben’s scars glisten in the water.
Watching me. Eyes glued to my body as if I had something that belonged to you and you were desperate to get it back.

We see Ben from behind, watching him look into the wide dam.
Is this my inheritance?

What a blessing I am to have what I have, you say.

A remark to which I rebuttal, it is a curse to be a blessing. For to be a blessing is to give yourself up for free and to be taken for granted.

From Ben’s back looking over the dam, we transition to the back of the little boy as he looks over the city from the cliff, being burnt by the sun.
I am yet to meet a blessing that weeps, due to the mere fact that it is impossible to meet oneself.

Perhaps a glance in the mirror is an answer to this probe. But is that all that I am? A soul with a shell to be glanced it?

The boy turns around and we see his innocent eyes but with some wrinkly and crumpled skin, as if he has the face of an old man.

With a scar on your heart that left marks on your face...

The little boy raises his arm and points a gun at us with his fingers.

...You touched me.

NO MAN’S LAND

THE END