cut him a half of her ten-cent cake.

"Eat some more, son," she said.

When they were finished eating, she got up and said, "Now here, take this ten dollars and buy yourself some blue suede shoes. And next time, do not make the mistake of latching onto my pocketbook nor nobody else's — because shoes got by devilish ways will burn your feet. I got to get my rest now. But from here on in, son, I hope you will behave yourself."

She led him down the hall to the front door and opened it. "Good night! Behave yourself, boy!" she said, looking out into the street as he went down the steps.

The boy wanted to say something other than, "Thank you, M'am," to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones, but although his lips moved, he couldn't even say that as he turned at the foot of the barren stoop and looked up at the large woman in the door. Then she shut the door.

How is Roger like Hezzy in "Some Get Wasted"?
Early in this story, Mrs. Jones asks Roger if he is hungry. What do you think influenced her to ask this question?

Why does Hughes have Mrs. Jones say "I were young once"? Notice that in other instances she says, "I was."

It has been said satirically that the world is composed of the Takers and the Taken. Would you say Mrs. Jones is one of the Taken? Why do you think she acted as she did toward Roger?

Have you ever dreamed that one day your fortune would be made if you just took a chance?

SOUTH AFRICA · Ezekiel Mphahlele

The Suitcase

One of these days he was going to take a desperate chance, Timi thought. He would not miss it if it presented itself. Many men had got rich by sheer naked chance. Couldn't it just be that he was destined to meet such a chance?

He sat on a pavement on a hot afternoon. It was New Year's Eve. And in such oppressive heat Timi had been sitting for over an hour. An insect got into his nostril and made him sneeze several times. Through the tears that filled his eyes the traffic seemed to dance about before him.

The grim reality of his situation returned to him with all its cold and aching pain after the short interlude with the insect. Today he had been led on something like a goose chase. He had been to three places where chance of getting work was promising. He had failed. At one firm he had been told, "We've already got a boy, Jim." At the second firm a tiny typist told him, "You're too big, John. The boss wants a small boy—about eighteen you know." Then she had gone on with her typing, clouding her white face with cigarette smoke. At the third place of call a short pudgy white man put down his price in a squeaking voice: "Two pounds ten a week." Three pounds ten a week, Timi had said, "Take it or leave it, my boy," the proprietor had said

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as his final word, and snorted to close the matter. Timi chuckled softly to himself at the thought of the pudgy man with fat white cheeks and small blinking eyes.

He was watching the movements of a wasp tormenting a worm. The wasp circled over the worm and then came down on the clumsy and apparently defenseless worm. It seemed to stand on its head as it stung the worm. The worm wriggled violently, seemingly wanting to fly away from the earth. Then suddenly the worm stretched out, as though paralyzed. The winged insect had got its prey. Timi felt pity for the poor worm. An unequal fight, an unfair fight, he thought. Must it always be thus, he asked — the well-armed and agile creatures sting the defenseless to death? The wasp was now dragging the worm; to its home, evidently.

He remembered he had nothing to take home. But the thought comforted him that his wife was so understanding. A patient and understanding wife. Yes, she would say, as she had often said, "Tomorrow's sun must rise, Timi. It rises for everyone. It may have its fortunes;" or "I will make a little fire, Timi. Our sages say even where there is no pot to boil there should be fire."

Now she was ill. She was about to have a baby; a third baby. And with nothing to take home for the last two months, his savings running out, he felt something must be done. Not anything that would get him into jail. No, not that. It wouldn't do for him to go to jail with his wife and children almost starving like that. No, he told himself emphatically.

A white man staggered past him, evidently drunk. He stopped a short way past Timi and turned to look at him. He walked back to Timi and held out a bottle of brandy before him, scarcely keeping firm on his legs.

"Here, John, drink this stuff. Happy New Year!" Timi shook his head.

"C'mon, be — be a s-sport, hic! No p-police to catch you s-s-soo?"

Timi shook his head again and waved him away.

"Huh, here's a bugger don't want to have a happy New Year, eh. Go t-to hell then."

The white man swung round, brandishing his bottle as he tripped away.

If only that were money, Timi thought bitterly.

He remembered it was time he went home, and boarded a bus to Sophiatown. In the bus he found an atmosphere of revelry. The New Year spirit, he thought; an air of reckless abandon. Happy New Year! one shouted at intervals.

Timi was looking at a man playing a guitar just opposite him across the aisle. Here a girl was dancing to the rhythm of the music. The guitarist strummed away, clearly carried away in the flight of his own music. He coaxed, caressed and stroked his instrument. His long fingers played effortlessly on the strings. He glowered at the girl in front of him with hanging lower lip as she twisted her body seductively this way and that, like a young supple plant that the wind plays about with. Her breasts pushed out under a light sleeveless blouse. At the same time the guitarist bent his ear to the instrument as if to hear better its magic notes, or to whisper to it the secret of his joy.

Two young women came to sit next to Timi. One of them was pale, and seemed sick. The other deposited a suitcase in front between her leg and Timi's. His attention was taken from the music by the presence of these two women. They seemed to have much unspoken between them.

At the next stop they rose to alight. Timi's one eye was fixed on the suitcase as he watched them go towards the door. When the bus moved a man who was sitting behind Timi exclaimed, "Those young women have left their case."

"No, it is mine," said Timi hastily.

"No, I saw them come in with it."

This is a chance...
"I tell you it's mine."
"You can't tell me that."
Now there mustn't be any argument, or else. . . .
"Did you not see me come in with a case?"
I mustn't lose my temper, or else. . . .
"Tell the truth, my man, it bites no one."
"What more do you want me to say now?"
The people are looking at me now. By the gods, what can I do?
"It's his lucky day," shouted someone from the back, "let him be!"
"And if it is not his, how is this a lucky day?" asked someone else.
"Ha, ha, ha!" A woman laughed. "You take my thing, I take yours, he takes somebody else's. So we all have a lucky day, eh? Ha, ha, ha." She rocked with voluble laughter, seeming to surrender herself to it.

"Oh, leave him alone," an old voice came from another quarter, "only one man saw the girls come in with a suitcase, and only one man says it is his. One against one. Let him keep what he has, the case. Let the other man keep what he has, the belief that it belongs to the girls." There was a roar of laughter. The argument melted in the air of a happy New Year, of revelry and song.

Timi felt a great relief. He had won.
The bus came to a stop and he alighted. He did not even hear someone behind him in the bus cry, "That suitcase will yet tell whom it belongs to, God is my witness!" Why can't people mind their own affairs? He thought of all those people looking at him.

Once out of the bus he was seized by a fit of curiosity, anxiousness and expectancy. He must get home quickly and see what is in the case.

It was a chance, a desperate chance, and he had taken it. That mattered to him most as he paced up the street.

Timi did not see he was about to walk into a crowd of people. They were being searched by the police, two white constables. He was jolted into attention by the shining of a badge. Quickly he slipped into an open backyard belonging to a Chinese. Providence was with him, he thought, as he ran to stand behind the great iron door, his heart almost choking him.

He must have waited there for fifteen minutes, during which he could see all that was happening out there in the street. The hum and buzz so common to Good Street rose to a crescendo; so savage, so cold-blooded, so menacing. Suddenly he got a strange and frightening feeling that he had excited all this noise, that he was the centre around which these angry noises whirled and circled, that he had raised a hue and cry.

For one desperate second he felt tempted to leave the case where he squatted. It would be so simple for him, he thought. Yes, just leave the case there and have his hands, no, more than that, his soul, freed of the burden. After all, it was not his.

Not his. This thought reminded him that he had done all this because it was not his. The incident in the bus was occasioned by the stark naked fact that the case was not his. He felt he must get home soon because it was not his. He was squatting here like an outlaw, because the case was not his. Why not leave it here then, after all these efforts to possess it and keep it? There must surely be valuable articles in it. Timi mused. It was so heavy. There must be. It couldn't be otherwise. Else why had Providence been so kind to him so far? Surely the spirits of his ancestors had pity on him; with a sick wife and hungry children. Then the wild, primitive determination rose in him; the blind determination to go through with a task once begun, whether a disaster can be avoided in time or not, whether it is to preserve worthless or valuable articles. No, he was not going to part with the case.

The pick-up van came and collected the detained men and women. The police car started
up the street. Timi came out and walked on the pavement, not daring to look behind, lest he lose his nerve and blunder. He knew he was not made for all this sort of thing. Pitso was coming up the pavement in the opposite direction. Lord, why should it be Pitso at this time? Pitso, the gas-bag, the notorious talker whose appearance always broke up a party. They met.

"Greetings! You seem to be in a hurry, Timi?" Pitso called out in his usual noisy and jovial fashion. "Are you arriving or going?"

"Arriving." Timi did not want to encourage him.

"Ha, since when have you been calling yourself A.J.B.?"

"Who says I'm A.J.B.??"

"There my friend." Pitso pointed at the large initials on the case, and looked at his friend with laughing eyes.

"Oh, it's my cousin's." Timi wished he could wipe a broad stupid grin off the large mouth of this nonentity. He remembered later how impotent and helpless he felt now. For Pitso and his grin were inseparables, like Pitso and his mouth. Just now he wished he wouldn't look so uneasy. "I'm sorry, Pitso, my wife isn't well, and I must hurry." He passed on. Pitso looked at his friend, his broad mouth still smiling blankly.

The Chevrolet came to a stop just alongside the pavement. Then it moved on, coasting idly and carelessly.

"Hey!" Timi looked to his left. Something seemed to snap inside him and release a lump shooting up to his throat. "Stop, jong!" The driver waved to him.

There they were, two white constables and an African in plain clothes in the back seat. Immediately he realized it would be foolish to run. Besides, the case should be his. He stopped. The driver went up to him and wrenched the suitcase from Timi's hand. At the same time he caught him by the shoulder and led him to the car. opening the back door for Timi. The car shot away to the police-station.

His knees felt weak when he recognized the black man next to him. It was the same man who was the first to argue that the case was not Timi's in the bus. By the spirits, did the man have such a strong sense of justice as to call God to be witness? Even on New Year's Eve? Or was he a detective? No, he could have arrested him on the bus. The man hardly looked at Timi. He just looked in front of him in a self-righteous posture, as it struck Timi.

Timi got annoyed; fraudantly annoyed. It was a challenge. He would face it. Things might turn round somewhere. He felt he needed all the luck fate could afford to give him.

At the police-station the two constables took the case into a small room. After a few minutes they came out, with what Timi thought was a strange communication of feelings between them as they looked at each other.

"Kom, kom, jong!" One of them said, although quite gently. They put the case in front of him.

"Whose case is this?"

"Mine."

"Do you have your things in here?"

"My wife's things."

"What are they?"

"I think she has some of her dresses in it."

"Why do you say you think?"

"Well, you see, she just packed them up in a hurry, and asked me to take them to her aunt; but I didn't see her pack them."

"Hm. You can recognize your wife's clothing?"

"Some of it." Why make it so easy for him? And why was there such cold amusement in the white man's eyes?

The constable opened the suitcase, and started to unpack the articles singly.

"Is this your wife's?" It was a torn garment.

"Yes."

"And this? And this?" Timi answered yes to both. Why did they pack such torn clothing? The constable lifted each one up before Timi.
Timi's thoughts were racing and milling round in his head. What trick was fate about to play him? He sensed there was something wrong. Had he been a dupe?

The constable, after taking all the rags out, pointed to an object inside. "And is this also your wife's?" glaring at Timi with aggressive eyes.

Timi stretched his neck to see.

It was a ghastly sight. A dead baby that could not have been born more than twelve hours before. A naked, white, curly-haired image of death. Timi gasped and felt sick and faint. They had to support him to the counter to make a statement. He told the truth. He knew he had gambled with chance; the chance that was to cost him eighteen months' hard labour.

What does the third paragraph indicate about the attitudes of the white employers toward black applicants?

How is the incident of the wasp and the worm symbolic of Timi's actions in the story?

Does Timi deserve his fate? Is fate or character more responsible for the outcome of the story?

John Oliver Killens explained that he is not a writer who is black, but a black man who is a writer. The African author of "The Suitcase" recalls some experiences which could make a black writer adopt that position.

SOUTH AFRICA • Ezekiel Mphahlele

Epilogue to Apartheid

I can never summon enough courage to read a line from any of my stories that were published in 1947, under the title, Man Must Live. In ten years my perspective has changed enormously from escapist writing to protest writing and, I hope, to something of a higher order, which is the ironic meeting between protest and acceptance in their widest terms. Maybe from the chaff I have been writing since 1947 a few grains have emerged. One story, "The Suitcase," appeared in New World Writing, a New York anthology of prose and poetry, in 1955. The story was recommended to the publishers by Nadine Gordimer, who had already made a name as a novelist and short-story writer. The story was later translated into Dutch for an anthology of Negro stories. It is in essence a true story, told to me by Rebecca about an incident that had occurred in Sophiatown.

No South African journals circulating mainly among whites would touch any of my stories, nor any others written by a non-white, unless he tried to write like a European and adopted a European name. Two or three Coloured writers told me once that they had slipped through the readers' sieve and become immortalized in European pulp. But I have been too busy fighting my own bitterness without trying to prostitute myself in that fashion. Some articles of mine, however, have been printed...