

# The Taxi

by Eloise Griffiths Da Costa



# 'The Taximan'

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## Logline

9 year old 'taxi driver' August is put to the test when his most successful chauffeuring gig hits a few bumps in Sydney's inner-suburbs.

## Synopsis

Every workday at 4:30pm, a little autistic boy, August, picks up his mother, Michelle, and escorts her from her workplace in Alexandria to their home in Waterloo. August is a phenomenal navigator, with a quirky accent courtesy of his Top Gear obsession, and he fully commits to his role as his mother's 5 star personal chauffeur. Michelle indulges him in his roleplay without falter, and embraces her son as the cute social anomaly that he is. He's oblivious to the fact that Michelle just might need him more than he needs her.

We're first introduced to Michelle; a well-dressed, elegant woman. She purchases a drink for herself and her son before flagging down a cab. Instead of a real cab, a little boy appears on the sidewalk in full taxi driver garb, steering a plastic toy wheel. He 'parks' his imaginary vehicle before Michelle. The roleplay commences as the two exchange pleasantries and drinks and Michelle hops into the 'backseat'. August performs the manoeuvres of his 'car' with precision and care; recreating the inertia, doing the thank you waves, turning on his blinkers, etc. People stare at them, but the pair are committed to their roles as professional acquaintances. The two make conversation as they weave their way through the civilian traffic on Mitchell Street's sidewalks. The occasional loud car makes August flinch. We understand he is sensitive to loud noises. Michelle soothes him whenever he's agitated, and we get to see just how in tune with one another the pair are.

Upon entering Fountain Street, August notices a group of scruffy, scooter-armed schoolboys at a distant bus stop. The sight momentarily wipes away his valiant persona. There's clearly history there. They decide to take an alternative, bully-free route. We see the gorgeous scenery of Sydney's inner-suburbs before it begins to sprinkle. August pulls out his arm wipers and the two rush to Regent Street for shelter. Once arrived, Michelle suggests a quick stop at Eddie's - a bakery they often visit. As August waits outside patiently for his promised lamington, the bullies from before show up. They corner and mock August. The valiant, composed persona crumbles as they physically attack him and try to take away his hat and wheel. He finally escapes and beelines for a hiding spot. It's revealed as he cries that the hat was handmade by Michelle.

Michelle receives a big fright when she notices August is missing. When they're finally reunited, there's a new awkwardness between them. The two continue their route, quietly. As they make their way through a peak-hour McEvoy street, August's senses become completely overwhelmed. He snaps at Michelle at her attempt to console him. August breaks down, covering his ears and falling to the ground. Michelle soothes him by 'fixing' him up the same way she would a broken down car. This sets August about his more valiant self again, and they march on. In the final stretch, a tradie compliments August on his taxi service. The unexpected validation is a pleasant change from the awful stares he so often receives. The pair return to their home where Michelle gives him his pocket money and offers him supper. She watches August happily as he runs inside.

THE TAXIMAN

Written by

Eloise Griffiths Da Costa

EXT. MITCHELL ROAD, ESTABLISHING - AFTERNOON

Sunny day. The street bumbles beneath a long canopy. It's peaceful, neighbourhood-y. Dogs walking, people talking.

INT. CAFE - AFTERNOON

MICHELLE, mid-forties, waits by the cash desk at *Blackbird & Co*; a cafe near her work. She's dressed like she never left the 90s; a signature navy coat and Princess Diana pearls.

A coffee and a popper are passed to her. She hands the barista a 50.

MICHELLE

Can I get change in tens?

Michelle glances outside. Business as usual.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Thanks. Have a good one.

She pockets one ten in her coat, the rest in her purse. We glance at the purse. There's a business card in the photo pocket: 'August's Gold Star Taxi Services'.

EXT. MITCHELL ROAD (SYDNEY PARK VILLAGE) - CONTINUOUS

Michelle makes her way to the sidewalk and flags for a taxi.

But wait! It's not a taxi. A little boy in oversized taxi driver garb walks down the sidewalk, steering a PLASTIC TOY WHEEL.

It's AUGUST, 9, Bambi eyed and cute as a button. Pinned to his coat is a BRIGHT BADGE that reads 'Special Needs Student Representative'.

Michelle checks her watch. The hand ticks forward; 4:33pm.

August 'pulls up' beside Michelle, performs a parallel park with his feet, and opens the imaginary door for his mother.

AUGUST

(Tipping his cap)

Afternoon, lady in blue.

MICHELLE

Ah, my favourite taxi driver.

AUGUST

At your service.

Michelle passes the popper to August as she ducks her head to stand behind him, a 'backseat' of sorts. She clips on her invisible seatbelt. They sip their drinks as August adjusts his cap in the invisible rear view mirror.

AUGUST (CONT'D)  
81 Raglan Street, Waterloo?

MICHELLE  
Same as always.

Pause. The world hurries about around them.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
Gotta get home to make din din for the kids. They're crazy when they're hangry. You know how kids are.

AUGUST  
Mhm, yup. Yeah. Kids these days.  
Let's see here-

August punches randomly into the buttons of his toy wheel, each eliciting a high pitched squeak. People look at them.

AUGUST (CONT'D)  
Just gotta put the coordinates into my GPS, manually plot my course so I can give you the quickest journey possible. Because that's what we do at August Gold Star Taxi Services. Hm, ok. Alright, off we go!

He shifts the 'gear stick'. Backs up. Pulls forward. Performs accurate manoeuvres away from his 'parking spot', making close to perfect sound effects. Michelle follows close behind.

EXT. MITCHELL RD. - CONTINUOUS

MICHELLE  
You know what? If you give me a discount I'll forget all about your tardiness today. Three minutes late! I might just have to change my taxi service.

AUGUST  
Wait, no! You didn't see all the civilian traffic!

MICHELLE  
Nup. No excuse.

AUGUST

But that's what happened!

MICHELLE

Good taxi drivers always account for these types of variables. Punctuality is key in this line of work.

August puts his 'blinkers' on and pulls off onto the edge of the sidewalk, letting a fast pedestrian through.

AUGUST

Yes, of course. I'll uh, make sure to go over my travelling schedule. This won't happen again. Ever.

MICHELLE

Ever, ever?

AUGUST

Ever ever ever ever.

MICHELLE

Good. Still want that discount though.

AUGUST

Yes-anything for you mum-*ma'am*.

The two stroll along. August masterfully mimes the perfect driver; pauses at lights, gives thank you waves, does the turn signals, recreates the inertia when he stops and starts.

A COMMODORE speeds past them, the modified engine SCREAMS down the street. August FLINCHES, presses his ear against his shoulder. Michelle rubs his arms.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Yobo!! You crazy drongo maniac!!

Michelle giggles. People look at them.

MICHELLE

Those are some big words, Auggie.

AUGUST

Stupid P plater pillocks. Teenagers should *not* be allowed on the road.

MICHELLE

Lucky you're not a teenager then, Mr. Taximan!

AUGUST

Well actually, there was a parking ranger that said my driving was so good that I could probably even skip my P's when I'm older.

MICHELLE

Is that right?

AUGUST

Of course, duh! Only the best for the lady in blue.

Michelle smiles. August winds around the pedestrians on the sidewalk, like traffic.

They walk by ERSKINEVILLE OVAL. There's a rugby match on. Kids are running around in their school uniforms. It's a world alien to the taximan. Loud, aggressive, boy-ish.

August slows down. His mind elsewhere momentarily. Michelle rubs his arm. He snaps out of it.

MICHELLE

Step on it, taximan. I have an oven to preheat.

AUGUST

What're you making for dinner?

MICHELLE

Why do you wanna know, hm?

AUGUST

Just making small talk. That's what taxi drivers do.

MICHELLE

I reckon you need to step up your conversational skills if your taxi service is gonna be world class.

August hesitates.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

First thing you have to do: avoid politics. No mention of the carbon tax, got it?

AUGUST

Aw!

MICHELLE

Sorry, bub. Off limits.

AUGUST

Well, duh, I'll ask what car they like the best. Lemon squeazy.

MICHELLE

Hm. Maybe no car talk either. Unless you're somehow able to suss out they're autotistic like you.

AUGUST

But cars are cool!

MICHELLE

Well then, I hope and pray you'll meet a *Top Gear* obsessed maniac every day for the rest of your career, taximan-

She's interrupted suddenly as a TRUCK grates itself down the road. It's LOUD. August FLINCHES. Michelle pats his arm.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

All good?

August nods and straightens himself up. Fixes his cap. The two continue down the sidewalk. August makes a turn signal.

EXT. INTERSECTION OF MITCHELL RD. & FOUNTAIN ST. -  
CONTINUOUS

August pales at the sight of four school boys at a bus stop, armed with scooters. He momentarily drops his act.

AUGUST

I um- I apologise for the inconvenience but. Uh. There seems to be a disturbance on this street. School kids and, uh, general farting around. Double demerits in this area, too.

August hurriedly pulls off into a building alcove.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

So, uh, with that in mind. Let's turn around. I'll go to Harley Street. Turn onto McEvoy from there. Should be all nice and clear for us, right before the 5pm traffic-

Michelle steps around to meet August at eye level, takes his cap off. She caresses his hair. Pulls him into a hug. August squeezes her back.



August's breaths slow. Michelle turns him to face away from her.

MICHELLE

Oh, bummer. Silly variables. We still have time, though.

AUGUST

New estimated time of arrival is...  
(He presses the wheel  
buttons)  
18 minutes.

MICHELLE

Perfect!

August tips his cap. They turn around toward Harley Street.

EXT. MITCHELL TO BOTANY RD. - MONTAGE

The pair walk through Harley and McEvoy Street in perfect cadence, paying no mind to any confused glances.

It's all very pretty. Leaves falling, cats roaming, people having coffee. At one moment, a 20-something man who resembles August passes by. Michelle anxiously looks between the man and her son.

EXT. BOTANY RD. - AFTERNOON

It begins to sprinkle; a sun shower. They know the drill.

August passes Michelle the wheel. She tucks it into her bag. He whips out his ARM WIPERS, wipes at the rain.

AUGUST

Due to unforeseen circumstances,  
we need to make a small detour  
under a shelter. Unfortunately  
this is a convertible-only taxi  
service.

They speed-walk north towards Waterloo.

EXT. REGENT ST. - CONTINUOUS

MICHELLE

Here. We can stop at Eddy's while  
we wait out the rain.

AUGUST

I'll turn off my counter.

August 'parks' his car in a bike rest near Eddy's. Michelle takes her 'seatbelt' off, steps out the invisible 'door'. She passes him the wheel.

MICHELLE

Lamington?

August's eyes dilate. He drops character.

AUGUST

Yes, please.

Michelle laughs and disappears inside the bakery.

August vibrates, pretending to be an idling car. People shoot him weird looks.

August stiffens when three uniformed pre-teens chuck their scooters down a few metres away. It's the BUS STOP KIDS.

KADE

Oi, look! It's the taximan!

They all shout in excitement. August takes sudden interest in the brick wall. His 'idling' now appears as if he's being electrocuted. They corner him.

FLETCH

The fuck's he shaking for?

COOPER

No dude it's totally normal, like, scientifically, cause he's a skitso.

August flicks an imaginary switch, makes a car locking 'click'. They chuckle.

KADE

You're a fucking retard, bro.

AUGUST

I kindly ask that you- *refrain* from-

FLETCH

Dude, he's still fucking shaking!

The idling stops. August's face crumples, on the verge of crying.

COOPER

Come on, give us your wheel.

AUGUST

Stop it, I don't like it.

FLETCH

What, we're not good enough for  
your taxi business?

AUGUST

Well, if you behaved better, maybe-

They take off his cap and take turns trying it on. August quickly grabs it back. They wrestle him for his wheel.

AUGUST (CONT'D)

Go away!

August SHOVES them back and makes a beeline for a hiding spot. We hear cruel cackles echo in the distance.

August folds into himself, cradling his hat and wheel.

With shaking hands, he peers at the HANDMADE LABEL inside his cap. On it is a phone number and a message: 'If lost, return to my darling little taxi driver, August'. A signature that spells 'Michelle L' is sewn into the bottom of the hat.

August gives it a squeeze, burying his head in it.

CUT TO:

Michelle emerges from Eddy's with two paper bags. She notices August is missing. Her expression falls.

MICHELLE

Taximan?

No response. She spins around wildly. Her walk turns into a run.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Auggie?!

She almost mistakes a child across the road as her son. Her heels clack loudly in her frenzy.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Don't do this to me, August! I-

She finally spots him, tucked into a small alcove outside the building. He's put himself together, standing up now.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Oh! Darling, you scared me!

She regards him.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Why aren't you idling?

AUGUST  
Save power.

Beat. Michelle enters the 'taxi' again and passes August the lamington.

AUGUST (CONT'D)  
Thank you, mummy.

MICHELLE  
*Ma'am.*

AUGUST  
Thank you, ma'am.

They munch awkwardly as the rain slowly subsides. Michelle eyes August worriedly. The rain eventually stops.

AUGUST (CONT'D)  
Seatbelts on.

Michelle pauses, then twists to put on her invisible seatbelt, making a clicking sound. August nods, turns the 'keys' and begins to hum. He's idling again. They share a look and start 'driving' towards Botany Road.

EXT. BOTANY RD. - CONTINUOUS

Michelle checks her watch; 5:15pm.

The traffic ramps up. August becomes increasingly agitated, digging his ears into his shoulders.

The sounds combine slowly to become an OVERWHELMING, STATICKY CACOPHONY.

Michelle attempts to soothe him. August SWATS her arm away.

AUGUST  
Don't touch me!

MICHELLE  
What?

He marches away from Michelle. He's jittery in the distance.

We close on August's face. The CACOPHONY turns into a PIERCING STRIDENT. He DROPS THE WHEEL and covers his ears with his hands. He falls into a foetal position.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
August!

She races toward him, lifts him gently by the shoulders.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
 What happened? Where's your  
 earbuds?

August rips away from her. He shoves most of his head into his hat, hiding his face.

AUGUST  
 No! Go away!

MICHELLE  
 What do you suggest, then, taximan?  
 How are you supposed to drive me  
 home now?

August kicks his feet and turns away from her. Michelle holds him down. A lady pedestrian glances curiously at their entanglement on the sidewalk.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
 Let's fix you up, okay?

Michelle drags his flailing body onto the grass, pulls out a pair of HEADPHONES from her bag. August shakes his head 'no' as she pulls off his cap and fits them on.

AUGUST  
 I said go away!

Michelle lifts his legs, pretending she's opening a car bonnet. He falls onto his back. She makes a show of repairing him with the office supplies in her pencil case. She tsks and hums and makes the appropriate mechanic sound effects.

August's lip curls.

MICHELLE  
 Oh dear, I think I need to  
 replace the alternator!

August giggles. She pulls out a ROLL OF TAPE and pretends to fit it onto his leg.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
 And, jeez, you've run out of  
 petrol!

She grabs a WATER BOTTLE, pretends to fill up his torso. August laughs when she begins to tickle him.

AUGUST  
 Stop, stop!

She relents, then gives him a pointed look.

MICHELLE  
 Feeling better?

Beat. August fiddles with the tape.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
Don't ignore me. You okay? Yes or  
no.

AUGUST  
Yes.  
(beat)  
Sorry.

MICHELLE  
When the traffic is bad.. earbuds  
are...?

AUGUST  
Rad.

MICHELLE  
Rad.

Michelle fits his cap back on, presses his cheeks to make a smile. He giggles.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)  
We'll be in contact, taximan!  
Michelle's Five Star Vehicle  
Repair Shop is open for business!

EXT. RAGLAN ST. WATERLOO - AFTERNOON

August and Michelle wait at a crossing on a notably quieter street. A P-plater UTE speeds to a halt right beside them. August flinches, then sours.

AUGUST  
(mumbling)  
Yobo.

The TRADIE at the wheel winds the window down.

TRADIE  
Funky outfit, kid!

Michelle nudges August to look at him.

MICHELLE  
He's my personal chauffeur.

TRADIE  
Woah, no way! That's cool as.

MICHELLE  
Yup. The best in the biz, aren't  
you?

August makes a smug, self-satisfied face.

AUGUST

Uh huh! August Gold Star Taxi Services. World class taxi rides at low prices!

TRADIE

That's sick, dude. Hey, best of luck with the business. I'll contact you when I total my Ute.

AUGUST

Don't total your Ute.

TRADIE

No promises there, mate!

The light goes green. The tradie gives them a wave as he drives off. August blushes.

MICHELLE

Hey, look at that. They're not all bad.

August makes a show of being unimpressed.

AUGUST

He broke several road rules.

MICHELLE

Oi, wrong attitude. That's a new customer right there!

August stares down the tail of the Ute as it disappears into traffic. His mouth twitches. His cheeks are visibly red.

The light turns green for them. They cross the road.

EXT. RAGLAN ST. WATERLOO - QUICK MONTAGE

The street is quiet. A proper neighbourhood. They pass by beautiful Victorian terrace houses.

August tips his cap at a passing woman, his mood lifted.

EXT. 81 RAGLAN ST. WATERLOO - AFTERNOON

They arrive at a double-story terrace house. A cute one. With a forest of plants and a colourfully painted porch.

Michelle gives August the ten dollar bill.

MICHELLE

Here's your tip, mister.

He looks at the very *real* money in his hands.

AUGUST

Does this count as pocket money?

MICHELLE

Yes, this counts as pocket money.

AUGUST

Well, I thought maybe you might be stopping the Monopoly money to make it more realistic.

MICHELLE

In what timeline, mate?

August pockets the note. Michelle gestures inside.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Will you join me for supper, taximan?

AUGUST

Oh, I shouldn't. Our relationship must stay professional.

MICHELLE

Oh, but I insist. As thanks, for your *exceptional* service.

August looks inside. He shakes his head.

AUGUST

I cannot be swayed, lady in blue!

Michelle laughs and kisses his cheek.

MICHELLE

Come on, in you get.

She shoos him in, watching as he runs inside.

We hear excited chatter from inside as we close on Michelle's face.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Dag.

END