

- In what ways does the author use contrast to develop the passage?

On Saba's last day in Addis Ababa, she had just one unchecked to-do left on her long and varied list, which was to explore the neighborhood on her own, even though she'd promised her relatives that she would always take someone with her when she left the house. But she was twenty, a grownup, and wanted to know that on her first-ever trip to this city of her birth, she'd gained at least some degree of independence and assimilation. So it happened that Saba had no one to turn to when she got to the intersection around Meskel Square and realized she had seen only one functioning traffic light in all of Addis Ababa, population four million people by official counts, though no one there seemed to trust official counts, and everyone assumed it was much more crowded, certainly too crowded for just one traffic light. That single, solitary, lonely little traffic light in this mushrooming metropolis was near the old National Theater, not too far from the UN offices, the presidential palace, the former African Union—a known, respected part of the city located an unfortunate mile (a disobliging 1.6 kilometers) away from where Saba stood before a sea of cars, contemplating a difficult crossing.

Small, nimble vehicles, Fiats and VW Bugs, skimmed the periphery of the traffic, then seemed to be flung off centrifugally, almost gleefully, in some random direction. The center was a tangled cluster of cars slowly crawling along paths that might take an automobile backward, forward, sideward. In the middle of this jam was a sometimes visible traffic cop whose tense job seemed to be avoiding getting hit while keeping one hand slightly in the air. He was battered by curses, car horns, diesel exhaust as he nervously shifted his body weight and tried to avoid these assaults. Saba quickly saw she couldn't rely on him to help her get across. She dipped her foot from the curb onto the street, and a car raced by, so she retreated. A man walked up next to her and said in English, "True story, I know a guy who crossed the street halfway and gave up."

Saba looked at the stranger. "Pardon, what was that?"

"He had been abroad for many years and came back expecting too much," the man said, now speaking as slowly as Saba. "That sad man lives on the median at the ring road. I bring him books sometimes," he said slyly, taking one out of his messenger bag and holding it up. "A little local wisdom: don't start what you can't finish." Saba watched the stranger dangle his toes off the curb, lean forward, backward, forward and back, and then, as if becoming one with the flow of the city, lunge into the traffic and disappear from her sight until he reemerged on the opposite sidewalk. "Miraculous," Saba said to herself as he turned, pointed at her, then held up the book again. Saba tried to follow his lead and set her body to the rhythm of the cars, swaying forward and back, but couldn't find the beat.

As she was running through her options, a line of idling taxis became suddenly visible when a city bus turned the corner. She realized that, as impractical as it seemed, she could hail a cab to get her across the busy street. The trip took ten minutes; the fare cost 15 USD, for she was unable to negotiate a better rate, though at least she'd found a way to the other side. She turned back to see the taxi driver leaning out the window talking to a few people, gesturing at her, laughing, and she knew just how badly she'd fumbled yet another attempt to fit in. All month Saba had failed almost every test she'd faced, and though she'd seized one last chance to see if this trip had changed her, had taught her at least a little of how to live in this culture, she'd only ended up proving her relatives right: she wasn't even equipped to go for a walk on her own. What she thought would be a romantic, monumental reunion with her home country had turned out to be a fiasco; she didn't belong here.