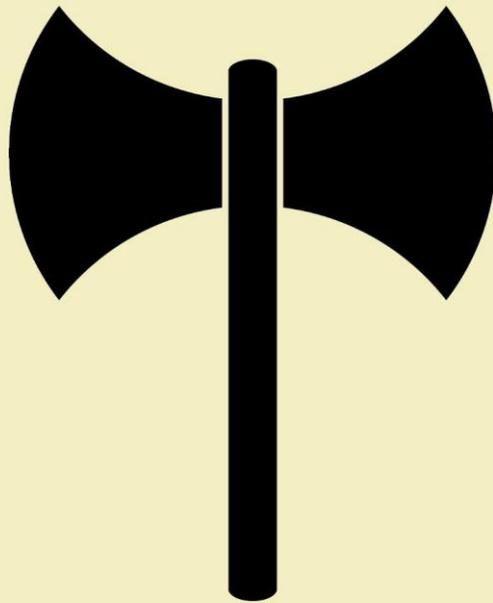


**TAXI**



**Sophia DeLuna**

# **Taxi**

By  
Sophia DeLuna

Taxi  
Copyright © 2012 by Sophia DeLuna

Cover design  
Copyright © 2012 by Sophia DeLuna

\*\*\*\*\*

As always, a big Thank You goes to my dear friend and editor, Agota, for all her help, advice and encouragement.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Taxi

It was a rainy Friday evening and the streets of Berlin were glistening wet from the heavy summer rains. The shops were just closing and despite the weather there were still a lot of people out and about, which wasn't unusual here in the city centre of Berlin. Especially in summer, when there were always tourists bustling about, the city almost never slept. Halting at a red light, Ulrike sat in her old Mercedes taxi, pondering. From here she could make it home in about 15 minutes. She was tired and hungry, and she was craving for a nice homemade coffee instead of the take-away brews she had consumed all day. It had been a busy day. Thinking that she'd had a reasonably lucrative day she decided she could probably afford to give into her craving and her tiredness. She was just about to switch off the light of the taxi sign when a woman in a bright red summer dress and with several shopping bags in her hand on the other side of the crossing gesticulated with her umbrella, trying to catch her attention. Sighing, Ulrike thought, "*Okay, just one more fare, and then I'll really call it a day,*" and as the lights turned green she shifted her foot to the accelerator, passed the crossing and stopped in front of the middle-aged fashionably clothed woman.

Sliding into the back seat, the woman struggled with her umbrella and her shopping bags before she finally pulled the door shut and said, "*Ringbahnstraße, bitte.*"

Looking at the woman in the rear-view mirror, Ulrike asked, "Which one?" hoping to hear *Tempelhof* as it was closer to her home.

"*Halensee,*" said her passenger as she fastened her seatbelt.

Sighing inwardly, Ulrike said, "Okay," turned on the taximeter and, after a quick check, merged into a gap in the heavy traffic. She'd have to turn around at the next opportunity, as *Halensee* was right in the opposite direction. It would be a nice bit of extra cash, but even if she took the urban motorway from *Halensee*, with the insane rush-hour traffic it would now take her at least 45 minutes to get home, probably more. Ulrike changed lanes and took the turn-around in the centre strip to make a U-turn. As she was waiting for the traffic to pass, the radio channel began to play 'Always look on the bright side of life.' Grinning, Ulrike shook her head, and shoving her tiredness and her craving for coffee aside, she accelerated and headed towards her destination. At least she was driving a rather pleasant, pretty looking lady. That was definitely better than the grumpy old bloke she had driven last who had insisted on telling her exactly how to drive, patronising her about taxi drivers always taking the route that was most lucrative for them, and how he wasn't going to let them do this to him. He knew Berlin like the back of his hand and he would not let her drive him through the congested main roads. Ulrike had sighed inwardly and drove according to his directions, letting his lecturing wash over her. In the end, when he paid the fare with a smile, reminding her how very smart he was, Ulrike had smiled too, because she knew that her usual route would have cost him at least four D-marks less - a nice compensation for the punishment of having to listen to his lectures. The passenger she had now was a lot more pleasant to drive, the woman seemed to be quite happy to finally be sitting and it didn't look like she was in a complaining mood.

As Ulrike was driving in the stop-and-go traffic along the *Tauentzien*, she kept taking a peek at the lady in the rear view mirror. She really was a sight for sore eyes, Ulrike thought. With her perfectly styled long mane of curly dark hair and her dark skin she certainly didn't look like a typical German, but rather like a Spaniard or South American. She wore no make-up and the lines around her eyes as well as some silver streaks in her hair revealed that she was certainly beyond her forties. Ulrike thought these signs of age only enhanced her beauty, and it told her that the lady was quite comfortable in her own skin, which was something

Ulrike appreciated very much. And as the lady turned sideways to look out of the window and with an elegant gesture brushed a strand of hair to the side, plenty of golden bangles were jingling on her arm and Ulrike could see that large golden earrings were dangling from her ears. "Wow," thought Ulrike, "*She certainly knows how to make the most of her appearance.*" Shaking her head, she reminded herself to pay more attention to the traffic, and as the lanes merged shortly after, she drove past a construction site that started in front of the *Europa-Center* and ended after the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Memorial Church. She was quite happy that on the *Kurfürstendamm* she could finally take the bus lane. Halting at a red light, she looked again in the rear view mirror to take another peek at the pretty lady. However, when her glance was met by twinkling brown eyes and a broad smile, Ulrike blushed and focused her eyes on the road again.

"It's going to take a while with the heavy traffic, even with the bus lane," said Ulrike to cover her embarrassment.

"Doesn't matter," said the lady lightly. "I'm not in any hurry."

Ulrike's stomach growled loudly, announcing that it opposed this statement, and she hoped that it wasn't heard in the back seat. Taking a quick glance in the rear view mirror, Ulrike saw the lady grinning, but she didn't comment. Blushing again, Ulrike was glad when the light finally turned green and she could drive on.

She could feel that the lady kept watching her, and occasional peeks in the rear view mirror confirmed this. Was the lady flirting with her, or why did she keep watching her, grinning every time when their eyes met. "*Oh heck, I'm just imagining things,*" thought Ulrike as the lady stopped watching her and started occupying herself with her shopping bags and her notebook. Ulrike wondered what she was doing back there, but her curiosity vanished abruptly when a red Ferrari veered onto the bus lane right in front of her to get into the right turning lane. Slamming her foot on the brakes and her hand on the horn, Ulrike cursed, "*Pass doch uff, du arschloch!*" Remembering her passenger, she apologised, "*Pardong,* but that was really close. Makes you wonder if the car comes with a driving license."

"Some people are very impatient, I guess," said the woman, scribbling something in her notebook as they were halting at a red light.

"Then they shouldn't drive in rush hour traffic on the *Ku'damm*, or anywhere for that matter," said Ulrike still somewhat annoyed with the reckless driver.

"Maybe he is late for a business meeting?" offered her passenger.

Ulrike enjoyed that the lady was talking with her. She had a very melodic voice, and although she was speaking in perfect German, there was a hint of a foreign accent that intrigued Ulrike, and she countered jokingly, "Then he should take his helicopter and reserve his Ferrari for times when there's no one on the road."

"But that defeats the purpose of a Ferrari," said the woman, mock-serious. "You can't show off when there's no one on the road."

Glancing back at the passenger, Ulrike said gravely, "Now, that is true." They both chuckled, and as the light turned green, Ulrike drove on.

"Have you been a taxi driver for long?" asked the woman.

"I'd say so," said Ulrike, "Been driving for over 20 years now."

"Wow, you must like your job then."

"Wouldn't want to do anything else," said Ulrike.

"I don't like driving in the city," said the woman, "I rather sit back and let someone else do the driving."

"That's fine by me," said Ulrike. "Keeps me in business," she added grinning.

"I guess it does," said the passenger. "I like driving in the country, though. There's less cars and you can drive faster."

"Well, in the country I would prefer to sit back and enjoy the scenery while someone else drives."

"We would make a good team then," said the woman and laughed.

"Indeed," said Ulrike and joined in the laughter, wondering if they might make a good team in other regards as well.

Shortly after, Ulrike turned right at *Henriettenplatz* and asked, "Which number?"

"Number one," said her passenger, "Right over there, where the parking bays begin."

Ulrike turned left into *Ringbahnstraße* and stopped in front of the passageway that led to the entrance. The lady said, "*Perfekt. Danke!*"

Stopping the taximeter, Ulrike announced the fare, and as the lady handed the money to Ulrike and their fingers touched, Ulrike felt a tingle surge through her body. Both women kept staring at each other until a car honked because Ulrike's taxi was blocking a free parking bay.

"I guess that's another impatient one," said the lady and retracted her hand with an apologetic smile.

"Yes," said Ulrike, "I better get moving," and she put the money in her purse, while the lady gathered her umbrella and her shopping bags.

Opening the car-door, the lady said smiling, "Well then, bye, and have a nice weekend!"

"Likewise!" said Ulrike. The rain had ceased by now, and as the lady shut the door, Ulrike watched her mesmerised as she walked through the passageway to the entrance of the apartment building. Admiring her figure, she thought, "*Damn, she isn't particularly generous with tips but she does look great!*" However, as the other car honked viciously, Ulrike shook her head, bringing herself back to the here and now, and drove on. As she was turning around to drive to the motorway access, Ulrike glanced into the passageway in passing, but the lady, of course, had by now disappeared.

As she had already predicted, the traffic on the way home was slow-moving, but she didn't mind. Her mind was blissfully occupied with thoughts about the lady. "*I wonder what she does for a living. Living in Halensee, it must be a rather lucrative job. Though perhaps it is her husband who has the lucrative job and she's only spending his money. Who knows?*" Though, for some reason Ulrike couldn't picture her with a husband. She wasn't sure why, but it didn't feel right. "Or maybe it is just my wishful thinking," said Ulrike aloud as she left the motorway; and as the radio started playing 'I'm walking' by Fats Domino, she grinned, turned up the volume and drove the remaining distance to her home singing.

Parking her car, Ulrike took her bag from the passenger's seat and got out. As she walked around the taxi, checking to see if all doors were closed as she routinely did, she noticed a small plastic bag from *KaDeWe* behind the passenger's seat. Damn, the lady forgot one of her bags. Cursing, Ulrike took the bag and slammed the door shut. Despite her undenied attraction to the lady, Ulrike was not eager to drive all the way back right away. Well, the woman would have to wait, she decided as her stomach growled yet again; she needed to eat first.

She walked across the parking area, smelling the pleasant fragrance of the wet greenery in the courtyard; and holding her breath as not to spoil the nice scent, she walked past the rubbish containers only letting it out as she passed through the archway to the front of the housing complex. Climbing up the stairs to the second storey, she unlocked her door and entered the flat.

Closing the door behind her, she put her keys, her bag and the *KaDeWe* bag on the side board next to the telephone and sauntered into the kitchen. "*Coffee first,*" she thought, and put the kettle on. She rinsed out her coffee pot, placed the filter dripper on top of it and lined it with a coffee filter. Looking into the fridge, she sighed ... she should have gone shopping today. Well, there was still some salami and camembert that were probably still good, however as she looked at the best-before date on the packet of butter, she sighed yet again, and stepping on the pedal, she let the packet plop into the rubbish bin. The package of sliced bread followed when she noticed that green mould had started to grow a colony on it. Luckily, she always had a packet of crisp bread for such emergencies. The kettle whistled and she went to make her coffee.

When she had prepared her food, she took her coffee and the plate of food into the living room, flopped down on the sofa and switched on the TV. When she had finished eating the familiar jingle that started the news began, and she leaned back into the comfort of her softly cushioned sofa and closed her eyes, just listening.

A while later, she was just in the process of taking a bunch of flowers to the pretty lady when a guy with a gun opened the door instead of the lady and Ulrike suddenly woke with a start, cursing the TV as she realised that the shot came from a thriller which was now showing. Grabbing the remote, she switched to a channel featuring a romantic film and leaned back again, closing her eyes. Around midnight, she had just entered the flat of the pretty lady, when she heard loud moaning coming from the bedroom. The moaning got louder and a strange woman's seductive voice praised her services ... slowly, Ulrike woke, realising she had been dreaming yet again. Disgusted, she cursed the advertisement for phone sex, switched the TV off and dragged herself from the sofa to head for the bathroom. On the way she noticed the *KaDeWe* bag of the lady. "*Mist!*" she had totally forgotten about that. Well, now it was too late. It would have to wait till tomorrow. After quickly brushing her teeth, she headed for the bedroom and barely managed to take off her clothes before falling asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow.

The next morning, she was just getting closer to the pretty lady as they were sitting on the sofa, when the phone rang. She told the lady, "Let it ring," but the phone kept ringing persistently and the lady got up. Slowly, Ulrike woke and realised it was her own phone that was ringing. Dragging herself out of bed she hurried to answer it.

"You can't be serious. You are calling people at 8:00 in the morning to take a survey, on a Saturday? You must be deranged!" Angrily, she banged the phone down on the hook, when her look fell on the *KaDeWe* bag. Thinking, that she would certainly not call anyone at this indecent hour, let alone a stranger, she headed for the bathroom. Uh ... and how would she even call her? She didn't have her number; and didn't even know her name to look it up. "*Mist!*" As she returned, she picked up the bag and curiously took a peek inside. There was a little wrapped box and a folded piece of paper that didn't look like a bill, but more like a note. Curious, Ulrike took out the piece of paper and unfolded it. As she started reading, her eyebrows shot up in surprise and she blushed. The note said: *I'd like to get to know you. Call me if you like.* The note was signed with only the name, Carmen, and then a phone number. It was a beautiful artistic handwriting, and the notepaper smelt of perfume. Of roses to be exact, Ulrike noticed, as she raised it to her face. So the fragrance matched the little rose printed in the corner of the note. Smiling, Ulrike took out the wrapped box and carried both, note and box into the kitchen. Putting the kettle on, she prepared her coffee, and then sat down at the table, staring at the little box. Was this note meant for her? If yes, what did the lady want? Why did she want to get to know her? Could she be interested in the same way as Ulrike was? Hm, she had written the note after having watched Ulrike for quite a while. And perhaps she had seen the little rainbow sticker on the centre console ... Hesitantly, Ulrike took the box and decided to have a look. Carefully, so as not to tear the paper, she unwrapped the box and opened it. "Wow," she breathed as a little silver labrys pendant was revealed. Carefully taking the pendant from the box, Ulrike mumbled to herself, "Well, I guess this answers in what way she's interested. Now the question is, is this really meant for me?" The whistling of the kettle brought her back to reality.

After she had had a cup of coffee, she took a shower, and by the time she was dressed, it was still only 8:45am - too early to call a stranger on a Saturday, at least when one respected the rules of politeness. She would wait at least till ten. Enough time to head over to the bakery and get something for breakfast.

The bakery wasn't far, only a few minutes by foot, so taking a shopping bag, Ulrike slipped into her thongs, grabbed her keys and purse and left. It was a nice summer morning

and the sun was shining, so Ulrike didn't regret having forgotten to put on a pullover. She crossed the two roads, and as she walked through the little park, she saw a Magpie followed by two fledglings that were loudly begging for food. Ulrike smiled and watched them for a bit before she went on. A blackbird was singing its song as she left the park on the other side, and Ulrike thought that after all it wasn't so bad having been wakened early.

At the bakery she ordered two ham and cheese croissants for now and six *Schusterjungen*, her favourite rolls, for later ... she really had to go shopping after she called Carmen. As she left the bakery, she decided to go around the park and get a newspaper from the little newspaper shop. On the way, she saw Renato just opening his hair salon.

"Ciao, Renato! Not in Italy, yet?" she asked.

"Hi Ulli. No, the family is already gone, but Luisa and I are going next weekend. Want to come in for a haircut?"

"No, thanks, Renato. I think I'll let it grow a bit."

"Finally. You know I always thought long hair would suit you better."

"I know, and I will try and see if you're right," said Ulrike, but not entirely convinced yet about the outcome, she added, "But it's practical like this."

"Practical is for men. Women should be pretty," said Renato with conviction.

Ulrike just rolled her eyes.

"Your outfit could use some improvement too," said Renato as he glanced at her baggy T-shirt and men's shorts.

"Don't push it, Renato," warned Ulrike, "This is my comfy gear. I'm not going to dress up to get breakfast and a newspaper."

Raising his hands in a mock defensive gesture, Renato grinned and said, "All right, all right. But don't complain when prospective partners walk past you without so much as a second glance."

Grinning smugly, Ulrike said, "Actually, a 'prospective partner' has been watching me with quite an interest just yesterday."

Renato whistled, and waggling his eyebrows he asked, "Was she hot?"

"Very," said Ulrike.

"You going to see her again?"

"Maybe," said Ulrike.

An elderly woman came up to them, asking, "*Guten Morgen*. Am I too early for my appointment?"

"*Guten Morgen, Frau Müller*," said Renato, "No, you're not too early. I'm coming." And to Ulrike he said, "I've got to go. Good luck!"

"Thanks, Renato. Ciao," said Ulrike and went to the newspaper shop, and shortly after, with a *B.Z.* rolled up in her hand and her breakfast in the bag, she headed home.

As she was sitting at the kitchen table, munching a croissant and flipping through the newspaper, she suddenly stopped chewing when her eyes caught a familiar name. Slowly she continued chewing while she read through the article:

*Friday night, José Bauer, son of Helmut Bauer from Bauer GmbH & Co. KG, and his sister Carmen were injured after his Ferrari crashed into the road safety barrier in the North Curve of the Avus. Police says the Bauers were on their way home from a family party in Wannsee when he lost control of the car, probably due to the wet conditions and oil on the road. Both were taken to hospital with severe injuries. The North Curve in direction of Kurfürstendamm was closed for three hours.*

Could this be 'her' Carmen? Ulrike put her croissant aside and went over to the sideboard in the hall to get the telephone book. Back at the kitchen table, Ulrike started to browse through the phonebook. "Bauer ... Bauer ... ah, here it is." She moved her index-finger over the rows of entries for Bauer. There was no Carmen Bauer, but several C. Bauer, and as she reached for the note, Ulrike said, "Bingo!" The next instant her face fell as she realised that

the number on the note matching the only C. Bauer entry without an address meant that it was indeed her Carmen who was now lying in hospital, severely injured.

The newspaper didn't say to which hospital they were taken, but Ulrike surmised that they would have been taken to the *Martin-Luther-Krankenhaus* as it was the closest - she would go there first and find out. She took the note and the little box she had re-wrapped previously with her and put it back into the *KaDeWe* bag. Then, remembering that she hadn't finished breakfast, she fetched the croissants and put both, the *KaDeWe* bag and the bag with the croissants in her bag. Glancing at herself in the mirror above the sideboard, she remembered what Renato had said ... "*Verdammt!*" now she felt she had to change before meeting Carmen. Annoyed, she hurried into the bedroom and changed into summer jeans and a somewhat classier T-shirt. Then, after giving her hair a cursory brush, she slipped into her moccasins, and grabbing her bag and her keys, she left.

On the way to the hospital, she stopped at a flower shop and bought a mixed bunch of red roses and gyp, hoping that Carmen would like them even if the note and pendant had not been meant for her. At the hospital she found a parking space not too far from the entrance, and grabbing her bag and the bunch of flowers, she headed for the reception.

Relieved that Carmen had indeed been brought to this hospital, Ulrike went to search for the room number she had been given. As she finally found it, she knocked on the door and entered. There were six beds in the room, but only two were occupied, and in one of them sat Carmen, her right leg in plaster.

"*Guten Morgen,*" said Ulrike and closed the door.

It took Carmen a moment to sort out her memory, but before Ulrike could go on to introduce herself, her face changed into a look of joyous surprise, and she said, "You came!"

"Yep," said Ulrike and handed her the flowers. "I read about it in the newspaper. How are you doing?"

Burying her nose in the flowers, Carmen inhaled deeply, and turning her gaze back to Ulrike, she smiled and said, "So, you found my note and the gift."

Rummaging in her bag, Ulrike took out the *KaDeWe* bag and said, "Yes, I found it." And handing the bag to Carmen, she added a bit shyly, "I wasn't quite sure if it was meant for me, though."

Refusing to take the bag, Carmen said, "Of course it is meant for you. For whom else would it be?"

"How should I know?" said Ulrike.

"You haven't opened it?" asked Carmen astonished.

Ulrike blushed and admitted, "Uh, well, yes, I have opened it. It's beautiful."

Furrowing her brows, Carmen regarded Ulrike searchingly and asked quietly, "Have I misjudged you then? Did I misinterpret the rainbow sticker in your taxi?"

Ulrike smiled, and shaking her head, she said, "No, you haven't."

"Is there someone else?" asked Carmen hesitantly.

Looking down at the bag, Ulrike shook her head. "No."

"I still don't know your name."

Ulrike looked at her and smiled. "Ulrike ... Ulrike Hoffmann."

"Ulrike," said Carmen slowly as if to savour the sound and feel how it resonated within her. Smiling, she looked at Ulrike. "That's a nice name."

Slightly blushing, Ulrike reached for the flowers and asked, "Shall I put them in water?"

"Not yet, please," said Carmen, and instead of handing her the flowers, she took Ulrike's hand.

Stunned, Ulrike looked at their hands. Her own slightly tanned strong hand appeared white and rough against Carmen's dark and slender one.

Caressing Ulrike's hand with her thumb, Carmen said apologetically, "This isn't exactly the setting I had imagined for a romantic first date."

Squeezing Carmen's hand reassuringly, Ulrike said, "We can make up for it when you are well again."

"I'd like that," said Carmen smiling.

###

Thank you for reading this eBook!

Feedback is always welcome!

You can contact me via my website:

[www.sophiadeluna.com](http://www.sophiadeluna.com)

You can find more of my books on Smashwords, Barnes & Noble and other retailers, links are on my website.

My Smashwords author page: <https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/SophiaDeLuna>

Discover other titles by Sophia DeLuna:

**Taxi series:**

Taxi (Book 1)

Taxi - Trials (Book 2)

Taxi - Trauma (Book 3)

Taxi - Timing (Book 4)

Taxi - Talk (Book 5)

Taxi - Tuxedo (Book 6)

Taxi - Tactics (Book 7)

Taxi - Trip (Book 8)

**Fantasy short stories:**

Footprints in the Sand

Desert Wind

Fénya and Elynor

A Matter of Faith

An Unusual Gift

Alternatives

The Fool

**Other short stories:**

Summer Holidays (young adults, short story)

A Christmas to Remember (short holiday story)

Fire and Ice (short love story)

**Novels:**

Hidden Secrets (science-fantasy novel)

Laments and Liaisons (romance-mystery novel)

**Children's stories:**

Once upon a Dragon (children's fantasy story)

The Witch and the Fiddler (fairy tale, short story)

The Little Owl (children's and language learners' short story / English)

Die Kleine Eule (children's and language learners' short story / German)

A kis bagoly (children's and language learners' short story / Hungarian)