

My Children! My Africa!
Auditions October 22 & 23, 2024

Monologues

Mr M

Mr M: (Grudging admiration.) Oh, Thami...you learn your lessons so well!! The “revolution” has only just begun and you are word perfect. So then tell me, do you think I agree with this inferior “Bantu Education” that is being forced on you?

[Thami: You teach it.]

Mr M: But unhappily so! Most unhappily so! Don't you know that? Did you have your fingers in your ears the thousand times I've said so in the classroom? Where were you when I stood there and said I regarded it as my duty, my deepest obligation to you young men and women to sabotage it, and that my conscience would not let me rest until I had succeeded. And I have! Yes, I have succeeded! I have irrefutable proof of my success. You! Yes. You can stand there and accuse me, unjustly, because I have also had a struggle and I have won mine. I have liberated your mind in spite of what the Bantu education was trying to do to it. Your Mouthful of big words and long sentences which the not-so-clever Comrades are asking you to speak and write for them, your wonderful eloquence at last night's meeting which got them all so excited-yes, I heard about it!-you must thank me for all of that, Thami.

Be careful, Thami. Be careful! Be careful! Don't scorn words. They are sacred! Magical! Yes, they are. Do you know that without words a man can't think? Yes, it's true. Take that thought back with you as a present from the despised Mr M and share it with the comrades. Tell them the difference between a man and an animal is that man thinks, and he thinks with words. Consider the mighty ox. FOur powerful legs, massive shoulders, and a beautiful thick hide that gave our warriors shields to protect them when they went to do battle. Think of his beautiful head, Thami, the long horns, the terrible bellow from his lungs when he charges a rival! But it has got no words and therefore it is stupid! And along comes that funny little hairless animal that has got only two thin legs, no horns and a skin worth nothing and he tells the ox what to do. He is its master and he is that because he can speak! If the struggle needs weapons give it words, Thami. Stones and petrol bombs can't get inside those armored cars. Words can. They can do something even more devastating than that...they can get inside the heads of those inside the armored cars. I speak to you like this because if I have faith in anything, it is faith in the power of the word. Like my master, the great Confucius, I believe that , using only words, man can right a wrong and judge and execute the wrongdoer. You are meant to use words like that. Talk to others. Bring them back into the classroom. They will listen to you. They will look up to you as a leader.

Thami

Thami: I'm sorry to say but I can't do it anymore. I have tried very hard, believe me, but it is not as simple and easy as it used to be to sit behind that desk and listen to the teacher. That little world of the classroom where I used to be happy, there they used to pat me on the head and say Little Thami, you'll go far!...That little room of wonderful promises, where I used to feel safe, has become a place I don;t trust anymore. Now I sit at my desk like an animal that has smelt danger, and knows it must be very, very careful.

At the beginning of this year the inspector of Bantu Schools in the Cape Midlands Region, Mr. Dawid Grobbelaar - he makes us call him Oom Dawie -came to us Standard Tens his usual pep talk. He does it every year. We know Oom Dawie well. He's been coming to Zolile for a long time. When he walked into our classroom we all jumped up as usual but he didn't want any of that. "Sit, sit. I'm not a bloody sergeant major." Oom Dawie believes he knows how to tal to us, He loosened his tie, took off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves. It was a very hot day. "Dis better. Nou kan ons lekker gesels. Boys and girls or maybe I should say 'young men' and 'young women' now, because you are coming into the end of your time behind those desks...you are special! You are the elite! We have educated you because we want you to be major shareholders in the future of this wonderful Republic of ours. In fact, we want all the peoples of South Africa to share in that future...black, white, brown, yellow and if there are some green ones out there, then them as well." Ho! Ho! Ho!

I don't remember much about what he said after that because my head was trying to deal with that one word: the future! He kept using it..."our future," "the country's future," "A wonderful future of peace and prosperity." What does he really mean, I kept asking myself? Why does my heart hard and tight as a stone when he says it? I look around me in the location at the men and women who sent out into that "wonderful future" before me. What do I see? Happy and contented shareholders in this exciting enterprise called the Republic of South Africa? No. I see a generation of tired, defeated men and women crawling back to their miserable little pondocks at the end of a day's work for the white baas or madam. And those are the lucky ones. They've at least got work. Most of them are just sitting around wasting their lives while they wait helplessly for a miracle to feed their families, a miracle that never comes.

Those men and women are our fathers and mothers. We have grown up watching their humiliation. We have to live everyday with the sight of them begging for food in this land of their birth...all the way back to the first proud ancestors of our people. Black people have lived on this land for centuries before any white settler landed! Does Oom Dawie think we are blind! That when we walk through the streets of the white town we do not see the big houses and the beautiful gardens with their swimming pools full of laughing people, and compare it to what we've got, what we have to call home? Or does Oom Dawie just think we are very stupid? That in spite of the wonderful education he has given us, we can't use the simple arithmetic of add and subtract, multiply and divide to work out the rightful share of twenty five million black people?

Isabel

Isabel: It feels like it could be the beginning of something. I've met you and Thami and all the others and I would like to get to know you all better. But how do I do that? I can't just go after you chaps like...well, you know what I mean. Roll up and knock on your doors like you were neighbors or just living down the street. It's not as easy as that with us, is it? You're in the location, I'm in the town...and all the rest of it. So, there I was feeling more and more frustrated about it all when along you come with your "silly little" idea. It's perfect! Do I make sense?

[Mr M: Most Definitely. Make some more.]

Isabel: I've been thinking about it, you see. When I told my mom and dad about the debate and what a good time I'd had, I could see they didn't really know what I was talking about. 'Specially my mom. I ended up getting very impatient with her, which wasn't very smart of me because the

harder I tried to make her understand, the more nervous she got. Anyway, I've cooled off now and I realize why she was like that. Being with black people on an equal footing, you know...as equals, because that is how I ended up feeling with Thami and his friends...that was something that had never happened to her. She didn't know what I was talking about. And because she knows nothing about it, she's frightened of it.

Dialogue Sides

Mr M / Isabel

Mr M: Believe me, I can get very petty and mean if I'm not on the winning side. I suppose most bachelors end up like that. We get so used to having everything our own way that when something goes wrong...So there's my advice to you. Get married! If what I've heard is true, holy matrimony is the best school of all for learning how to lose.

Isabel: I don't think it's something you can learn. You've either got it or you haven't Like Thami. Without even thinking about it I know he's a good loser.

Mr M: Maybe

Isabel: No, No maybes about it. He'd never grab his hockey stick and take it out on somebody else if he didn't win.

Mr M: You're right. I can't see him doing that. You've become good friends, haven't you?

Isabel: The best. These past few weeks have been quite an education. I owe you a lot, you know. I think Thami would say the same...if you would only give him the chance to do so.

Mr M: What do you mean by that remark, young lady?

Isabel: You know what I mean by that remark, Mr Teacher! It's called freedom of speech.

Mr M: I've given him plenty of freedom, within reasonable limits, but he never uses it.

Isabel: Because you're always the teacher and he's always the pupil. Stop reaching him all the time, Mr M. Try just talking to him for a change...you know like a friend. I bet you in some ways I already know more about Thami than you do.

Mr M: I don't deny that. In which case tell me, is he happy?

Isabel: What do you mean? Happy with what? Us? The competition?

Mr M: Yes, and also his school work and...everything else.

Isabel: Why don't you ask him?

Mr M: Because all I'll get is another polite "Yes teacher." I thought maybe he had said something to you about the way he felt.

Isabel: (Shaking her head.) The two of you. It's crazy. But ja, he's happy. At least I think he is. He's not much of a blabber-mouth like me, Mr M. He doesn't give much away...even when we talk about ourselves. I don't know what it was like in your time, but being eighteen years old today is a pretty complicated business as far as we're concerned. If you asked me if I was

happy, I'd say yes, but that doesn't mean I haven't got any problems. I've got plenty and I'm sure it's the same with Thami.

Mr. M: Thami has told you he's got problems?

Isabel: Come on, Mr M! We've all got problems, I've got problems, you've got problems, Thami's got problems.

Mr M: But did he say what they were?

Isabel: You're fishing for something, Mr M. What is it?

Mr M: Trouble, Isabel. I'm sorry to say it but I'm fishing for trouble and I'm trying to catch it before it gets too big.

Isabel: Is Thami in trouble?

Mr. M: Not yet, but he will be if he's not careful. And all his friends as well. It's swimming around everywhere trying to stir things up. In the classroom, out on the streets.

Thami / Mr M

Mr M: Come to the school!

Thami: (Appears. Quietly.) Stop ringing that bell, Mr M>

Mr M: Why? It is only the school bell, Thami. I thought you liked the sound of it. You once told me it was almost as good as music...don't you remember?

Thami: You are provoking the Comrades with it.

Mr. M: No, Thami. I am summoning the Comrades with it.

Thami: They say you are ringing the bell to taunt them. You are openly defying the boycott by being here in the school.

Mr M: I ring this bell because according to my watch it is school time and I am a teacher and those desks are empty. I will go on ringing it as I have been doing these past two weeks, at the end of every lesson. And you can tell the COMrades that I will be back here ringing it tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and for as many days after that as it takes for this world to come to its senses. Is that the only reason you've come? To tell me to stop ringing the school bell?

Thami: No.

Mr M: You haven't come for a lesson, have you?

Thami: No, I haven't.

Mr M: Of course not. What's the matter with me? Slogans don't need much in the way of grammar, do they? As for these...(The stone in his hand.) No, upi don't need me for lessons in stone throwing either. You've already got teachers in those very revolutionary subjects haven't you. (Picks up his dictionary...the stone in one hand, the book in another.) You know something interesting, Thami...if you put these two on a scale I think you would find that they weighed just

about the same. But in this hand I am holding the whole English language. This...(the stone)...is just one word in that language. It's true! All that wonderful poetry that you and Isabel tried to cram into your beautiful heads...in here! Twenty six letters, sixty thousand words. The greatest souls the world has ever known were able to open the floodgates of their ecstasy, their despair, their joy!...with words in this little book. Aren't you tempted? I was. (OPens the book on the fly leaf and reads) "Anela Myalatya. Cookhouse. 1947" One of the first books I ever bought. (Impulsively.) I want you to have it.

Thami: (Ignoring the offered book.) I've come here to warn you.

Mr M: You've already done that and I've told you that you are wasting your breath. Now take your stones and go. There are a lot of unbroken windows left.

Thami: I'm not talking about the bell now. It's more serious than that.

Mr M: In my life nothing is more serious than ringing the school bell.

Thami: There was a meeting last night. SOmebody stood up and denounced you ans an informer.

(Pause. Tahmi waits. Mr M says nothing.)

Thami: He said you gave names to the police.

(Mr M Says s=nothing.)

Thami: Everybody is talking about it this morning. You are in big danger.

Mr M: Why are you telling me all this?

Thami: So you can save yourself. There is a plan to march to the school and burn it down. If they find you here...(pause)

Mr M: Go On (Violently) If they find me here what?

Thami: They will kill you.