

Scene 4

THAMI waiting. ISABEL arrives.

THAMI. Isabel.

ISABEL. (~~She is looking at her watch.~~) Hello, Thami.

THAMI. Thank you for coming.

ISABEL. (~~She is looking at her watch.~~) I wasn't going to. Let me tell you straight out that there is nothing in this world ... nothing! ... that I want to see less at this moment than anything or anybody from the location. But you said in your note that it was urgent, so here I am. If you've got something to say, I'll listen.

THAMI. Are you in a hurry?

ISABEL. I haven't got to be somewhere else, if that's what you mean. But if you're asking because it looks as if I would like to run away from here, from you! ... very fast, then the answer is yes. But don't worry, I'll be able to control that urge for as long as you need to say what you want to.

THAMI. (~~And she is looking at her watch.~~) I just wanted to say goodbye. ISABEL. Agam?

THAMI. What do you mean?

ISABEL. You've already done that, Thami. Maybe you didn't use that word, but you turned your back on me and walked out of my life that last afternoon the three of us ... (~~SHE can't finish.~~) How long ago was that?

THAMI. Three weeks I think.

ISABEL. So why do you want to do it again? Aren't you happy with the last time? It was so dramatic, Thami.

THAMI. (~~She is looking at her watch.~~) I wanted to see you because I'm leaving the town, I'm going away for good.

ISABEL. Oh, I see. This is meant to be a "sad" goodbye is it? (~~SHE is looking at her watch.~~) I'm sorry if I'm hurting your feelings but I thought you wanted to see me because you had something to say about recent events in our little community ... (~~Out-of-a-pocket a crumpled little piece-of-newspaper which SHE opens with unsteady hands.~~) ... a certain unrest related ... I think that is the phrase they use ... yes ... here it is ... (~~Reading.~~) ... unrest related incident in which according to witnesses the defenseless teacher was attacked by a group of blacks who struck him over the head with an iron rod before setting him on fire."

THAMI. Stop it, Isabel.

ISABEL. (~~Fighting herself for self-control.~~) Oh, Thami I wish I could! I've tried everything, but nothing helps. It just keeps going around and around inside my head. I've tried crying. I've tried praying! I've even tried confrontation. Ja, the day after it happened I tried to get into the location. I wanted to find the witnesses who reported it so accurately and ask them: ... why didn't you stop it! There was a police roadblock at the entrance and they wouldn't let me in. They thought I was crazy or something and "escorted" me back into the safekeeping of two now very frightened parents.

There is nothing wrong with me! All I need is someone to tell me why he was killed. What madness drove those people to kill a man who had devoted his whole life to helping them. He was such a good man, Thami! He was one of the most beautiful human beings I have ever known and his death is the ugliest thing I have ever known.

THAMI. (~~She is looking at her watch.~~) He was an informer, Isabel. Somehow or the other somebody discovered that Mr. M was an informer.

ISABEL. You mean that list of pupils taking part in the boycott? You call that informing?

THAMI. No. It was worse than that. He went to the police and gave them the names and addresses of our political action committee. All of them were arrested after his visit. They are now in detention.

ISABEL. Mr. M did that?

THAMI. Yes.

ISABEL. I don't believe it.

THAMI. It's true, Isabel.

ISABEL. No! What proof do you have?

THAMI. His own words. He told me so himself. I didn't believe it either when he was first accused, but the last time I saw him, he said it was true, that he had been to the police.

ISABEL. (~~Stunned disbelief~~) Mr. M? A police spy? For how long?

THAMI. No. It wasn't like that. He wasn't paid or anything. He went to the police just that one time. He said he felt it was his duty.

ISABEL. What do you mean?

THAMI. Operation Qhumisa ... the boycotts and strikes, the arson ... you know he didn't agree with any of that. But he was also very confused about it all. I think he wished he had never done it.

ISABEL. So he went to the police just once.

THAMI. Yes.

ISABEL. As a matter of conscience.

THAMI. Yes.

ISABEL. That doesn't make him an "informer," Thami! THAMI. Then what do you call somebody who gives information to the police?

ISABEL. No! You know what that word really means, the sort of person it suggests. Was Mr. M one of those? He was acting out of concern for his people ... you said so yourself. He thought he was doing the right thing! You don't murder a man for that!

THAMI. (~~Nonchalant indifference~~) Be careful, Isabel.

ISABEL. Of what?

THAMI. The words you use.

ISABEL. Oh? Which one don't you like? Murder? What do you want me to call it ... "an unrest related incident?" If you are going to call him an informer, then I am going to call his death murder!

THAMI. It was an act of self-defense.

ISABEL. By who?

THAMI. The People.

ISABEL. (~~Admiring speechlessness with outrage~~) What? A mad mob attacks one unarmed defenseless man and you want me to call it ...

THAMI. (~~Always going with the members of the police~~) ~~speaks with the quiet authority of the sergeant beside him~~ Isabel! ~~People~~ keep quiet now and listen to me. You're always saying you ~~want to understand~~ us and what it ~~means~~ to be black ... well if you do, listen to me carefully now. I don't call it murder, and I don't call the people who did it a mad mob and yes, I do ~~expect~~ you to see it as an act of self-defense ... listen to me! ... blind and stupid but still self-defense.

Mr. M ~~betrayed~~ us and ~~put~~ fight for freedom. Five men are in detention because of Mr. M's visit to the police station. There have been other arrests and there will be more. Why do you think I'm running away?

How were those people to ~~know~~ he wasn't a paid informer ~~who had been~~ doing it for a long time and ~~could~~ do it again? ~~They~~ were ~~defending~~ themselves against what they thought was a terrible danger to themselves. What Mr. M ~~did~~ to them and their cause is what your law ~~defines~~ as treason when it is ~~done~~ to you and threatens the safety and security of your comfortable white world. Anybody accused of it is put on trial in your courts and if

to ask about that. Now ...? (~~As if he were speaking to her~~) You know the most terrible words in your language, Isabel? Too late.

ISABEL. Ja.

THAMI. I'll never forgive myself for not trying harder with him and letting him know ... my true feelings for him. Right until the end I tried to deny it ... to him, to myself.

ISABEL. I'm sorry. I ...

THAMI. That's all right.

ISABEL. Are the police really looking for you?

THAMI. Yes. Some of my friends have already been detained. They're pulling in anybody they can get their hands on.

ISABEL. Where are you going? Cape Town?

THAMI. No. That's the first place they'll look. I've written to my parents telling them about everything. I'm heading north.

ISABEL. To where?

THAMI. Far, Isabel. I'm leaving the country.

ISABEL. Does that mean what I think it does?

THAMI. (*Nods.*) I'm going to join the movement. I want to be a fighter. I've been thinking about it for a long time. Now I know it's the right thing to do. I don't want to end up being one of the mob that killed Mr. M—but that will happen to me if I stay here.

ISABEL. Oh, Thami.

THAMI. I know I'm doing the right thing. Believe me.

ISABEL. I'll try.

THAMI. And you?

ISABEL. I don't know what to do with myself, Thami. All I know is that I'm frightened of losing him. He's only been dead four days and I think I'm already starting to forget what he looked like. But the worst thing is that there's nowhere for me to go and ... you know ... just be near him. That's so awful. I got my father to phone the

police but they said there wasn't enough left of him to justify a grave. What there was had been disposed of in a "Christian manner." So where do I go? The burnt-out ruins of the school? I couldn't face that.

THAMI. Get you father or somebody to drive you to the top of the Wapadsberg Pass. It's on the road to Craddock.

ISABEL. I know it.

THAMI. It was a very special place to him. He told me that it was there where it all started, where he knew what he wanted to do with his life ... being a teacher, being the Mr. M we knew. You'll be near him up there. I must go now.

ISABEL. Do you need any money?

THAMI. No. Sala Kakhule, Isabel. That's the Xhosa goodbye.

ISABEL. I know it. Asispumla taught me how to say it. Hamba Kakhule, Thami.

(*THAMI leaves.*)

Scene 5

ISABEL. (*Alone. SHE stands quietly, examining the silence. After a few seconds SHE nods her head slowly.*) Yes! Thami was right, Mr. M. He said I'd feel near you up here.

He's out there somewhere, Mr. M ... travelling north. He didn't say where exactly he was going, but I think we can guess, can't we?

I'm here for a very "old-fashioned" reason, so I know you'll approve. I've come to pay my last respects to Anela Myalaya. I know the old-fashioned way of doing that is to