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Master Harold . . . And the Boys

By Nicky Rebelo

[Seagulls crying]
[Surf pounding]
[Distant band music]
[Dog barking]
[Trumpet announcing
over radio]
(male announcer)
You're listening
to Springbok radio
and this is
the news at six.
The entire population
will be entered on
a central register
with separate classification
for whites, natives,
and coloreds.
Colored people are
also to be subdivided
into ethnic groups
including Indian
and Chinese.
(female voice)
Do you really like it?
It's beautiful.
I think it's
going to be better
than last year.
I want to finish it
today so that I can
practice in it.
Good idea.
(radio)
... 1957 and make
all central...
[kissing sounds]
You know I don't
stand for second best.
Me neither.
[Door opens
and closes]
(speaking foreign language)
(speaking foreign language)
[Flowing music]

with drums]
[Male voice singing
In foreign language]
(male voice speaking
foreign language)
[Rumble of thunder]
[Male reporter
over radio]
Rain Is expected...
(female voice)
Hally, are you up yet?
[Sighing]
(speaking in
foreign language)
Hey Sam, you ready to
bring home the title?
He's a dancer,
not a fighter.
[Chatter]
Did you hear
about Verwoerd's
new policy?
Policy?
It's on the wireless.
Hendrik Verwoerd wants
to give our children
Bantu education
so they'll never be
more than kitchen boys
and street sweepers.
[Approaching bus]
[Chatter]
(driver)
Hey wena, full
up! No more.
[Angry mumbling]
(Winston)
Hey, Willie!
[chuckling]
What about you, Willie?
You ready for the
big day?
Hey Willie, I
know one of the

ballroom judges.
He's from
Motherwell Township.
Does he drink whiskey?
Maybe you
can take him
a case, Willie.
Haaikona, gents.
New Brighton must
win this one fair
and square.
Then we can't
rely on Willie.
[Laughter]
[Flowing music resumes]
Don't worry
about that one.
Willie, just remember
what I told you
the secret
is to make
it look easy.
Ballroom must
look happy.
Like, like romance.
I've got no romance left
for Hilda anymore, Boet Sam.
Then pretend.
Imagine H ilda
is Ginger Rogers.
With no teeth?
You try.
[Horn honking]
[Bus door opening]
[Shouting]
[Music from radio]
Use one dab
of Brylcreem
just a little dab
makes your hair
look excitingly...
(Betty)
Hally, you're going
to be late again I

[exasperated sigh]
Brylcreem...
[singing]
Brylcreem,
a little dab'll do yah
Brylcreem, you'll
look so debonair.
Brylcreem, the gals'll
all pursue yah
they love to get
their fingers In your...
I'm going, mum.
Okay. Where's
my kiss?
Ah, you're not
even dressed.
Bye, Hally. Have
you got your lunch?
[Door slams]
[Jazzy music,
males voices
unintelligible]
[Skidding tires]
(speaking foreign language)
Kom, kom, jullepasse!
Let me see your passes.
Waar's jou pas?
Here, baas.
Baie dankie baas.
H urry up.
Yes, Boss, I think
I have it.
(Gwigl)
Hey, Sam I You dropped
It on the busl
May I, Boss?
Ja.
Sorry, Boss.
Semela?
Yes, Boss.
That's a Basutu name.
Yes, Boss.
So what are you doing here
on the Eastern Cape?

Working, Boss.
I've got Section 10.
The paper's in
the back, Boss.
Okay.
[Soft thud]
[Young man laughing]
(Langeveldt)
Hey, Ballard I
That's my boy I
Must be hard to stand
on three legs when
you're pissed, hey.
Whoa!
Whoa!
That's my boy I
[laughter]
For his speech titled
"The greatest
adventure show on earth...
a drop of pond water
under the microscope"
Harold Ballard
That's my boy!
[Boys laughing]
Aren't you having
another drink, Harry?
He wasn't pissed.
Oh, yeah,
I'm sure
he wasn't.
(short boy)
How do you
spell gimp?
Lost his legs in the
Great War, huh, Hally?
Yeah.
Stupid cripple.
(Willie)
It's true, Boet Sam.
Hilda Samuels
is a bitch!
Three nights now
she doesn't come

practice.

I wind up gramophone,
I get record ready,
and I sit and wait.
Ten o'clock I start
dancing with my pillow.

(Sam)

How's your pillow
with the quickstep?
Good! And why?
Because she's got no legs.
That's her trouble.
She can't move
them quick enough.
Struesgod, she doesn't
come tonight
I take back my dress,
my ballroom shoes
I find me
a new partner.
Size 26.

Shoe size 7.

Hey, Willie.

Ja, and now she's
making trouble for me
with the baby again.

Reports me to
child welfare
that I'm not
giving her money.

Haai boet Sam man.

She lies, Boet Sam.

Every week I am giving
her money for milk.

And how do I know
its my baby?

Only his hair
look like me.

[Clicks tongue]

Ach.

[Thunder rolling]

(Sam)

Good morning, Madam.

(Willie)

Good morning.
Morning. Did you
oversleep again, Willie?
Or are you going
to blame the bus
this time?
The bus was late, Madam,
and the police were
checking for passes.
Ja, every day
a new excuse.
It's true, M rs. Ballard.
It was easier when
we were allowed to
live here in town.
Ja, okay. H urry up now.
The water's not
even boiling.
And Willie.
Yes, Madam.
I want clean
tablecloths out.
Yes, Madam.
Come, come.
[Tuning radio]
The Population
Registration Act
and the Bantu
Education Act.
Music, Boet Sam.
Hendrik Verwoerd,
Minister of Native Affairs
was compiling
a curriculum...
Okay, Willie.
[Tunes to dancing music,
female sings foreign language]
[Chuckles]
[Indistinct]
[Mumbling]
[Loud music]
[Willie sings along]
Hey, hey, hey. This is
a tea room, not a sheen.

Sorry, Madam.

Sorry, Madam.

Come now,
you've got
work to do.

Sorry, Madam.

[Clicks radio off]

[Willie mumbling]

[Thunder crashing]

(male teacher)

I hope you've sharpened
those pencils.

I want to see the three
projections of the
clutch plate.

[Rolling thunder]

[Slow footsteps]

[Footsteps stop]

Ballard,

Ballard,

Ballard.

[Snickering]

Tell your parents you
want be a librarian.

(boy)

Yeah.

[Thud]

[Moaning]

Try and keep
it down, chum.

Can't we ask the nurse
for more painkillers?

Sorry, pal. I'd be
much better off if

I was back home.

It was a bad fall, chum.

It's for the best.

Dr. Colley's still got
tests to do and things.

(Betty speaking

In foreign language)

Sam, I have to go
to the hospital.

Tell Hally

I'll phone him.

(Willie)

Yes, Madam.

Tell Willie to
clean this floor.

Yes.

Bloody rain.

Make sure

Hally eats
some lunch.

Yes, Madam.

And tell Willie
no bugging around.

Yes, Madam.

So much for business.

I mean it.

Of course, Madam.

(Willie, singing)

D She was scandalizing
my name d

d She took my money

She called me honey d

d She called this love

She was playin' a game d d

Alright.

Oh.

[Humming]

Hey, Boet Sam,

I'm getting it.

The quickstep!

Look now

and tell me.

Show me again.

Count for me.

[Thunder]

Ready?

Ready.

And five, six,

seven, eight

And one, two,

three, four

five, six,

seven, eight...

Your shoulders!

Two, three, four,
five, six, seven, eight
Don't look down, Willie!
Two, three, four, five, six...
look happy I
No, Willie, relax.
I'm relaxed.
No, you're not.
Willie, relax!
- I am relaxed!
- Relax.
Breathe, and relax.
[Indistinct]
Boet Sam!
You make me
make mistakes.
No, you are too stiff.
You must try to glide
through it.
Glide?
Ja, give it more style.
You must look like you
are enjoying yourself.
I wasn't.
Exactly.
[Thunder rolling]
Willie... tell
me something.
When did you last
give Hilda a hiding?
Sunday night.
Aah, hiding
on Sunday night
then Monday, Tuesday,
Wednesday she doesn't
come to practice.
And you are
asking me why.
One day she's
going to leave
you for good.
So, she makes
me the hell in.
You had the same

trouble with Eunice.

Because she also

made me the hell

In, Boet Sam.

Willie...

She never got the steps

right, even the waltz.

Beating her up every time

she makes a mistake

in the waltz

no, Willie, that takes

the pleasure out of

ballroom dancing.

[Mumbles]

[Schoolyard chatter]

[Sigh]

Look and learn

don't worry about making

mistakes or the judges

or the other competitors.

It's just you, Hilda,

and the music.

And you are

going to have

a good time.

Okay, Sam.

What Count Basie

do you play?

U m, "You the cream

on my cupcake

you're the salt

in my soup."

[Humming]

Mm-hm, right, right.

Give it to me in

strict tempo.

Okay.

Ready?

Ready.

[Singing]

D And you're the

cream on my cupcake d

d You're the salt

in my soup d

d You will always
be right here for me d
d I'm a mess without
you, bam-bam I dd
Great, Boet Sam.
Bravo. No question
about it.
First place,
M r. Sam Semela.
Ohhh!
Howzit, chaps?
Okay, Hally.
At your service,
Master Harold.
Not long to the
big event, hey?
Two weeks' time.
You think you
stand a chance?
Let's just say I'm ready
to go out there and dance.
Ahhh.
Ahhh.
You look like it.
What about you, Willie?
He's got leg trouble.
Boet Sam!
Ah, sorry to hear
that, Willie.
Oh, God, what a
lousy bloody day.
Bad day for business,
chaps, but...
it leaves room for
a nice quiet afternoon.
Ah. Where's my
mom? Shopping?
The hospital.
But it's Thursday.
There's no visiting on
Thursday afternoons.
Is Dad okay?
I'm not sure, Halley,
the hospital phoned.

Maybe he's coming home.
What makes you say that?
Oh, I don't know,
I just heard your
mom talking.
She said
she'd phone you.
You want to eat?
Halley, do you want lunch?
Ja, just soup.
Kempston?
Mental pollution.
Take them away.
[Sighing]
They can't be
discharging him.
They said he'd need at
least another three
weeks of treatment!
No, Willie, Sam's
definitely made
a mistake!
H uh.
[Crashing thunder]
[Willie, humming]
[Stops humming]
So, Willie!
[Both imitating gunfire]
[Both groaning]
[Grunting]
[Both chuckling]
So, Willie, which
leg is sore?
Boet Sam is only
making jokes.
So you'll be
in the competition?
Only if I find
myself a partner.
What about H ilda?
She's the one
with leg trouble.
I think the lady's
gone a bit lame.

Boet Sam I
Have you taken her
to see a doctor, Willie?
I think a vet
would be better.
What the hell do you
think you're doing, Willie!
Act your bloody age!
Get on with your work.
You, too, Sam.
Stop fooling around.
No. Hang on. Tell me
exactly what my
mom said.
I have.
"When Hally comes,
tell him I've gone
to the hospital
and I'll phone him."
So she didn't say anything
about taking my dad home?
- No, it's just when she was...
- No, Sam, it's just...
We saw him last night
and he wasn't in
good shape at all.
And now suddenly
today he's better?
You've definitely
got it wrong.
Okay, Hally.
[Imitates gunshot]
(Sam)
Who is this
supposed to be?
(Hally)
Old fart-face Prentice.
Teacher?
He thinks
he is.
- Has he seen it?
- Ja.
Said I was no
Leonardo da Vinci

and that bad art
had to be punished.
Six of the best?
And his are bloody good.
With your trousers down!
No. He's not
quite that barbaric.
Ja. That's the way
they do it in jail.
Really?
Ja. When the magistrate
sentences you to "strokes
with a light cane."
Go on.
Come, Willie!
First you have
to lie on a bench
one policeman pulls
your trousers down
and holds your ankles.
(male voice)
It's not fair,
Is it, Hally?
Akafflr's black ass.
The other policeman pulls
your shirt over your head
and holds your arms.
[Willie laughing]
Thank you,
that's enough.
Then the one who's
about to give you
the strokes...
I've heard enough, Sam!
Jesus!
It's a bloody
awful world when you
come to think of it.
That's the way
it is, Hally.
Well, it doesn't
have to be.
You'll see, somebody's
going to get up one

of these days and...

They're called
social reformers.

My history book's
full of them.

So where is ours?

I don't know, Sam.

Napoleon and the
Principle of Equality.

[Sam, reading]

"Napoleon regarded all
people as equal under the law
"and wanted them to have
equal opportunities
for advancement.

All ves-ti-ges"...

All that's
remaining.

"All vestiges of
the feudal system
with its oppression of
the poor were abolished."

Aha! There's the social
reformer that we've
been waiting for.

No, sure, Hally.

He sounds like
somebody who is big.
big and important.

What would you call it?

A man of... magnitude.

Magnitude. Aha.

I don't know, Sam.

Well, who would
you say was?

(Sam)

Abraham Lincoln.

No, Sam, now
you're confusing
historical significances
with greatness.

Try turning it
the other way.

I know what

I'm doing.
[Grunts]
How did it happen?
Stop interfering
with my work, Sam.
Wait a minute... I got it!
Darwin! Charles Darwin.
The Origin of the Species.
Remember?
He's your man
of magnitude?
Ja, precisely. For his
theory of evolution.
Who's yours?
Jesus.
Oh, come on, Sam.
Jesus Christ.
(Sam)
The Messiah.
(Hally)
Sam.
The Savior!
Ja, but still...
No, Sam.
Don't let's get
started on religion.
I'm not going to waste
my time again arguing
with you
about the
existence of God!
You know perfectly well
I'm an atheist
and I've got
homework to do!
Okay, Hally,
okay, I take him back.
You have time
for one more name.
[Cheerful music
over radio]
Willie, what
are you doing?
Singing with God,

Master Harold.
Ohh.
Hally! I've got one.
I doubt it.
Think moldy
apricot jam.
Penicillin and
Sir Alexander Fleming!
Splendid, Sam! Splendid!
It's deeply gratifying
to know that I haven't
been wasting my time
in talking to you.
Tolstoy may have
educated his peasants
but I've educated you.
My first lesson
was geography.
Geography? God, ja, the
Jubilee Boarding House.
That's how it all started.
nothing but bloody
misery wherever you went.
Somebody was always
complaining about
the food
or my mother was
having a fight
with Micky Nash
because she'd caught her
with a petty officer
In her room.
Maude Meiring
was another one.
Do you remember
those two?
There were prostitutes,
you know. Ja.
Soldiers and sailors
from the troopships.
Bottom fell out of
the business when
the war ended.
God, the flotsam and

jetsam that life
washed up on
our shores, eh?
The memories
are coming back now.
Walking home from
school and thinking:
"What can I do
this afternoon?"
And tried a few ideas,
but sooner or later
I'd end up back in
there with you fellows.
Like that time
I barged in
and caught you
and Myriam... at
it. Remember?
[Moaning]
Hell, Sam, couldn't you
have waited until it
was dark?
No...
And if you
don't believe me
wait until
your time comes.
No, thanks.
Now, where was I?
Oh, ja, a gray little
room with a cold
cement floor.
Your bed was
against that wall.
And I now know why
the mattress sagged
so much!
[Chuckling]
Sam, your things neat and
tidy in a trunk right
next to your bed
and on it is a picture
of you and Myriam
In your ballroom clothes

your first silver cup
for third place
In a competition
and an old radio.

[Music]

Sam, do you want me
to teach you about
South Africa?

Sure, I'd like to learn
about South Africa.

right, repeat
after me, Sam.

Gold in the Transvaal.

Gold In the Transvaal.

Mealies in the Free State.

Mealies in the Free State.

Sugar In Natal.

Sugar in Natal.

Grapes In the Cape.

Grapes In the Cape.

Good. Okay, now once

more from the beginning.

Haai man, haai,

it's too late
for school.

What are you
doing in bed, Willie?

Hey, wena.

(Betty)

Williel

[gasps]

[Quick knocking]

(Betty)

Hally, are
you In there?

Sam, Willie... Is

he in here with
you boys?

Hally, will you come
out of there at once!

So much for
friendship, huh.

Hally, we couldn't lie
to her, she already knew.

Ha, it's more likely
your brain was
getting fried
and you wanted me
out of there
before I got
on to the rivers
and mountains.

No, Hally, I was happy
for the lesson.

But, come now, Hally,
it wasn't all so bad.

Ja, it was.

No, Hally.

Okay, maybe there
was one good day.

Only one?

Ja.

And?

Come on, Sam...

Tell us, Hally.

(Willie)

Please, Master Harold,
we want to hear.

[Sighs]

It started off
looking like another
of those useless
nothing to do afternoons.

[Distant train whistling]

I'd already been down
to Main Street looking
for adventure.

But nothing happened.

I didn't feel like
climbing trees
or pretending I was
a private eye and
following a stranger

so, as usual:

See what's cooking
in Sam's room.

[Whistling]

this time It was
you on the floor.
You had two
thin pieces of wood
and you were smoothing
them down with a knife.
It didn't look
particularly Interesting
but when I asked you
what you were doing
you just said
"Walt and see, Hally.
Walt and see..."
In that secret way of yours
so I knew there was
a surprise coming.
You teased me, you bugger,
by being deliberately slow
not answering
my questions!
And whistling
while you worked away I
God, It was Infuriating!
I could have brained you!
It was only when you tied
the two pieces of wood
together Into a cross
and put that down
on the brown paper
that I realized
what you were doing.
Sam's making a kite.
I mean, the sheer audacity
of It took my breath away.
Seriously, what the hell
does a black man know
about flying a kite?
I'll be honest with you, Sam,
I had no hope for it,
none at all.
No, if you think I was
excited and happy
you got another
guess coming.

I n fact, I was shit-scared
we were going to make
fools of ourselves.
Ja, I could see that.
I made it
obvious, did I?
You refused
to carry it.
Do you blame me?
Can you remember what
the poor thing
looked like?
Tomato-box wood,
brown paper
Flour and water
for giuel
And then two of my mother's
old stockings for a tall
and all those bits and
pieces of string
you had me tie together
so that we could fly It I
Hell, no, that was only
asking for a miracle
to happen.
No, Sam, that kite
will never fly.
Not without a
tail it won't.
[Betty, laughing]
Harold!
Hally!
[Gasps]
So what happened?
Come on, Sam, you
remember it as well
as I do.
I want to hear
it from you.
[Birds chirping]
When I let the
kite go, you run.
No, do you want me to
be a laughingstock?

Of who?
Come on now,
let's try it.
This is it, I thought
like everything else
In my life
here comes another fiasco.
Then you shouted,
"Go, Hally, go!"
Ready... and go.
And I started to run.
Faster, Hally! Faster!
I don't know how
to describe it, Sam.
Jal Ja, the miracle happened.
I was running, waiting
for It to crash to the
ground behind me
but Instead I felt
something alive at
the end of the string
tugging at It as If
It wanted to be free.
You shouted to me
to let it have
more string
and I did, until there
was none left
and I was just holding
that one piece of wood
we'd tied to it.
And I looked back
and I still can't
believe my eyes.
It was flying!
Looping around
and trying to
climb up
even higher
Into the sky.
(Hally)
It works, Sam, It works!
We've done It I
And we had. I was

so proud of us.
It was the most
splendid thing
I'd ever seen.
And you came up and joined me.
You were laughing.
[Sam, laughing]
She's beautiful, Sam.
That she is.
The part that
scared me, though
was when you showed me
how to make it dive
to the ground
then just on
the point of crashing
swoop it up again.
You didn't
want to try it.
Of course not.
God, I'd have been suicidal
if anything had happened
to it
watching you do it
made me nervous enough.
I was quite happy
just to see it
up there
with its tail
fluttering behind it.
Who's laughing
at you now?
You left me after
that, didn't you?
You explained how
to get it down
we tied it to the bench
so that I could sit
and watch it
but then you went away.
I wanted you
to stay, you know.
I was a little scared
about having to look

after it by myself.
I had work to do.
[Thunder rolling]
Why'd you make
that kite, Sam?
I can't remember.
Truly?
Too long ago, Hally.
It's time for
another one, you know
wouldn't be
a good day to
fly it, though.
No, you can't fly
kites on rainy days.
Strange, isn't it?
What?
You and me
a little white boy
and a black man
flying a kite.
Not every day
you see that.
But why strange?
I don't know.
Would have been
just as strange,
I suppose
had it been
me and my dad.
A crippled man
and a white boy.
Nope!
No, there's no chance
of me flying a kite
without it being strange.
There's a nice little
story in that, you know.
"The Kite-Flyers."
But we'd have to
find a twist in
the ending.
Twist...?
Yes, something unexpected.

I mean, the way it
ended with us was far
too straightforward...
me on the bench
and you going
back to work.
There's no drama in that.

[Phone ringing]

(Sam)

St. George's Park

Tea Room.

Yes, Madam.

He's here.

Hally?

It's your mother.

Hello Mom?

Hally, I'm bringing

Daddy home.

[Thunder rolling]

Oh, God!

But how can

he get better

so suddenly?

He's not really better

it's just... he wants

to come home.

Well, well, then

very obviously you

must say no!

Be firm with him, Mom.

Say Dr. Colley wants

more X-rays of his stump.

Or bribe him. We'll sneak

double tots of brandy

in future.

But Daddy's already up

and ready to go, Hally.

Well, order him to get

back into bed at once!

If he's going to behave

like a child, treat him

like one.

No, Hally I Nol

Okay, Mom I

I was just
trying to...
You know how
much he loves you.
I'm sorry.
That's not good, Hally.
I said I'm sorry.
Walt, my tickey-box
Is running out.
Tell the boys when they're
finished with the floors
they must clean
the windows.
Okay, Mom, just
listen to me carefully.
All it needs is for
you to put your
foot down.
Do you hear me?
I'll see what
I can do.
[Slam]
My mom says that when
you're finished with
the floors
you must do the windows.
Don't misunderstand
me, chaps
all I want is for
him to get better.
And if he was, I'd be the
first person to say,
"Bring him home"
but he's just not.
So don't just stand there!
Get on with it!
(Hally, off)
What about when
he's home?
Do you want me to pass
my exams at the end of
the year or don't you?
Agh, Hally, don't
start with that talk.

I'm supposed to be
fresh for school
and I spend half the
night massaging
his gammy leg.
Hally, respect!
I'm not being
disrespectful
I'm just sick and tired
of changing his stinking
chamber pots
full of phlegm and piss.
No, you don't.
I do. When you're
not there he asks
me to do it.
Why do you think I've
got no appetite
for my food?
You're not eating?
There's a lot of
things you don't know.
For your information, I still
haven't got that science
textbook I need.
Well, I gave
you the money.
Yes, and he
borrowed it.
For what?
Why do you
think, Mom?
Booze.
All I can say
is fick-it-all.
I'm sure he'll
listen to your mom.
Please, Sam. He'll
tie her up in knots.
I suppose he
gets lonely there.
With all the nurses
and patients around?
Regular visits from

the Salvation Army. Balls!
It's ten times worse
for him at home.
I'm at school and my
mother's here all day.
At least he's
got you at night.
And we've got him!
It's just a plain
bloody mess, this is.
And people are fools.
They bloody well deserve
what they get.
(Sam)
All right,
Hally, all right.
What homework
do you have?
(Hally)
Bullshit as usual.
Write 500 words
describing an annual event
of cultural or
historical significance.
Well, that should be
easy enough for you.
Please, Sam I
Just leave me.
I'm not In
the mood for games.
And remember, you're
to help Willie with
the windows.
Come on, now. I don't
want any nonsense.
All right,
all right.
[Scoffs]
[Sighs]
[Cheerful music]
Scary enough?
It could've been
scarier, chum.
Yes, the music

was creepy.

Really creepy.

How about when
the woman went
into the church?

We saw the dark
shadow following her?

That's when you first
grabbed my arm, right?

Right.

(Hally)

If you didn't lose
your leg in the last war
you would be there,
wouldn't you, Dad?

Fighting Hitler?

I didn't lose my leg
in the war, chum.

I fell down the
ship's gangway
on the trip over
from South Hampton.

I never got
to the war, Hally.

[Sighs]

[Rain falling]

(Willie)

One, two, three, one...

One, two, three, one...

One, two, three.

(Sam)

Much better.

Just a little
quick on the turn.

See what happens
when you relax and
enjoy yourself.

[Laughs]

But I don't have
a partner, Boet Sam.

Maybe Hilda will
turn up tonight?

No, I gave her
a good hiding.

You mean a bad one.
Good bad one.
They'll refund you
If you withdraw now.
No! I wait too long
and I practice too hard.
Then find Hilda.
Tell her that
you are sorry
and that you promise
not to beat her again.
No.
Then withdraw.
No!
Then I give up.
Haaikona, Boet Sam,
you can't.
What do you mean, I
can't? I'm telling
you, I give up.
No! It was you who start
me ballroom dancing.
So?
Before that, I
used to be happy.
Are you blaming me?
Yes.
Hey Willie... Willie?
And now all you
do is make jokes?
You wait. When Myriam
leave you, it will be
my turn to laugh.
Ha! Ha! Ha!
If Myriam leaves me tonight
I know what to do.
Uh-huh?
May I have
the pleasure?
D I'm just a fellow
with a pillow d
Sam!
D Dancin' like a willow
I n the autumn breeze d

Boet Sam I Boet Sam I
I swear, I don't know...
For Christ's sake,
you two! Sam, Willie!
[Grunt]
How the hell am I
supposed to concentrate?
He start doing...
Shut up, Willie.
Get on with
your work.
You too, Sam.
Do you want
another one, Willie?
Willie.
Suppose a customer
had walked In then?
Or the park superintendent?
That would have
been the end of
my mother's license
and your jobs!
[Thud]
Well, from now on
there will be no more
of your ballroom
nonsense in here.
It's a harmless
pleasure, Hally.
It's also a rather
simple one, you know.
You reckon so?
Have you ever tried?
You're not asking
me to take ballroom
dancing serious, are you?
Yes.
Oh, well, so much for
trying to give you a
decent education.
What's wrong with admiring
something that Is beautiful
and then trying
to do it yourself?

I'm sure the word
you mean to use is
entertaining.

No. Beautiful.

And if you want proof
come to the Centenary Hall
In New Brighton In two
weeks' time.

Please, Sam, I've seen the
two of you prancing around
in here often enough.

Look, this is not the real
thing, Hally... We're just...

So? I can use
my imagination.

And?

I see lot of people
dancing around and having
a so-called good time.

(Sam)

We're getting ready
for the championships, Hally
not just another dance.

Yes, there will
be a lot of people
and yes, they will be
having a good time
but those are
only spectators.

It's just the competitors
out there on the
dance floor.

Party decorations and
fancy lights all
around the walls.

And the ladies in beautiful
evening dresses!

My mother's got
one of those, Sam
and quite frankly it's
an embarrassment every
time she wears it.

And your imagination
left out the excitement.

(Sam, off)
One of those
couples will be
the 1950
Eastern Province Champions.
And your imagination
left out the music.
[Jazzy music]
(Willie)
M r. Elijah
Gladman Guzanna
and his
Orchestral Jazzonians!
[Jazzy music]
[Music continues]
[Music ends]
[Cheering and clapping]
And finally,
your imagination
left out the climax
of the evening.
(Sam, off)
The dancing Is finished
and the judges have
stopped whispering
among themselves.
The Master of Ceremonies
collects the scorecards
and goes up to the stage
to announce the finalists.
Okay. And you say it
takes place every year?
Every year, Master Harold.
But only every third
year in New Brighton.
Which, I guess,
makes it an even
more significant event.
Our "occasion" is now
a "significant event."
I wonder.
"Write 500 words describing
an annual event of cultural
or historical significance."

You going to write
about it, Master Hally?
Shall we give it a go?

I'm ready.

Me also.

Right. To build the tension
and suspense, I need
facts, Sam.

(Willy)

Give him facts,
Boet Sam. Facts!
What you called
the climax... how
many finalists?

(Sam)

Six couples.

Go on. Give
me the picture.

(Sam)

The six finalists go
onto the dance floor
and take up
their positions.

The Master of Ceremonies
goes to the microphone.

[Feedback squeals]

[Excited chatter]

(emcee)

Ja... sh... we know how
to make a noise, hey?

[Loud cheering]

But that's okay, it
means we know how to
enjoy ourselves.

And isn't that
what we're here for!

Ladies and gentlemen.

My, my, my.

Aren't they looking
absolutely beautiful?

(several voices)

Yes! Yes!

No, I'm not talking
about our judges

I'm talking
about our finalists.
[Short drum roll]
[Laughter]
That's a good
touch... a joke.
Creating a relaxed
atmosphere which
will soon change
to one of tension and
drama as the climax
is approached.
[Clears throat]
Ladles and gentlemen
we've now come
to the great moment
that we've been
waiting for this evening.
The finals of the 1950
Eastern Province Open
Ballroom Dancing Championships.
[Wild cheering]
Let me introduce
the finalists!
M r. And M rs.
Welcome Tchabalala
from King William's town!
[Burst of music]
Mr. Mulligan Nkikelane
and Miss Nomhie Nkonyeni
of Grahamstown.
[Burst of music]
M r. Fats Bokolane
and M iss Dina Plaatjies
from East London.
[Burst of music]
[Whistling
and wild cheering]
Whoa, whoa, whoa.
Down, boys. Down, boys.
[Cheering]
[Whistling
and wild cheering]
M r. Willie Maiopo

and Miss Hilda Samuels!

Me?

[Laughs]

Hilda!

[Crowd chatter]

Relaxed and
ready to romance.

Okay, here we go.

Take It away, boys.

[Soft music]

[Music continues]

(Willie)

One, two, three.

One, two, three.

One, two, three.

One, two, three.

Good, that's good.

Keep it up, Willie!

Okay, now how are
the points scored?

(Sam)

A maximum
of 10 points each
for Individual style,
deportment, rhythm
and general appearance.

And penalties?

Penalties?

Ja. For doing
something wrong.

Say you stumble
or bump Into somebody.

Hally...

What?

Willie.

What?

He wants to know
what happens
if me and Myriam
bump into you
and Hilda.

[Laughter]

Why? What did I say?

Hally, there are no

collisions out there.
That's what that
moment is all about.
To be one of the
finalists out there on
that dance floor is like...
like being in a dream
about a world in which
accidents don't happen.
Jesus, Sam!
That's beautiful.
Ja, it is, Master Hally.
It's beautiful because
that's what we want
life to be.
But instead,
like you, Hally
we're bumping
into each other
all the time.
None of us
know the steps
and there's no
music playing.
And it doesn't
just stop with us.
America is bumping
into Russia
England is bumping
into India
rich man
into poor man.
Those are
big collisions.
People get hurt
and we're sick and
tired of it now.
Are we never going
to get it right, Hally?
Learn to dance
life like champions
instead of always
being just a bunch
of beginners at it.

You've got a vision, Sam.
Not just me.
Everybody's got it.
[Soft piano music]
That's why there's only
standing room left at
the Centenary Hall.
For as long
as the music lasts
we are going to see
six couples get
it right
the way we want
life to be.
Is this the best
we can do, Sam?
Dream about the way
it should be?
Without the dream
we won't know what
we're going for.
Oh, when you come
to think of it
that's what the United Nations
boils down to...
a dancing school
for politicians!
Hmmm. Let's hope
they learn, Hally.
All right. This is a lot
bigger than I thought.
So what have we got?
Our title. "A World
Without Collisions."
"A World Without
Collisions. " Beautiful.
Subtitle, "Global Politics
on the Dance Floor."
Eh.
Nah, a bit heavy, hey?
How about " Ballroom
Dancing as a Political Vision"?
[Phone ringing]
[No sounds except phone]

Saint George's
Park Tea Room.
Yes, Madam.
Hally, it's your mom.
[Sighing]
(Sam)
Hally, she's waiting.
[Distant clock
chiming softly]
Hello, Mom.
I've brought
Daddy home, Hally.
Hally.
Hally, are you there?
Well, I just hope you
know what you've let
us in for.
Give him
a chance.
Please?
Okay, Mom I
But just remember to start
hiding your bag away again
because he'll be at your
purse before long, for
money, for booze.
I don't want to
hear you talking
like this.
Then don't complain to me
when he starts his
old tricks.
When do I ever
complain to you?
Yes, I get it from you one side
and him on the other
and it makes
life hell for me.
I'm warning you now
when the two of you
start fighting again
I'm leaving home.
Oh, Hally,
how can you...

Mom, if you start crying,
I'm going to put down
the receiver.
That's enough now.
We're all going to try
to do our very best.
Okay, Mom.
Aren't we, Hally?
Okay, Mom.
I heard you.
Do you want
to say hello?
No! I'll see him
when I get home!
He wants to
talk to you.
Mom! I don't
want to!
No, Mom. No, Mom,
I don't want to!
No! Mom I
Hello?
Welcome home, chum!
Sorry to spring
this on you, chum.
I bet the last thing
you need right now
is your old man
back home fouling
everything up.
Don't be silly, Dad.
You being home is just
about the best news
in the world.
Hell, man, I'm
happy to be out
of that place.
I bet you are.
Bloody depressing there
with everybody going on
about their ailments, hey.
like a bunch
of old women.
So how you feeling?

Fighting fit, chum.

Good.

How're things
with you, pal?
Everything's just
hunky-dory on my
side, Dad.

Good. So... what's up?

Oh, well... well,
to start with
there's a nice pile
of comics for you
on the counter.

Batman and Robin,
Submariner... just
your cup of tea.

Ahhh I

I'll bring them home.

Good. I've got some
great new jokes to
tell you, chum.

Ja, sure, we'll spin
a few yarns tonight.

Ja.

[Fly buzzing]

That's for sure.

All right then, chum,
I'll see you in a
little while.

You won't be late?

No, I promise. I'll
come straight home.

Okay, I'm handling you back
to the commanding officer.

[Inhales and exhales deeply]

Hally, now don't
forget to bring home
Daddy's brandy.

Yes, I'll put it
in my bag now, for
God's sake. Bye.

[Slam]

That sounded like
quite a bump, Hally.

[Sniffing]

M ind your

own business, Sam.

I'm sorry. I didn't

mean to Interfere.

Shall we

carry on? Hally?

Boet Sam, tell him

about when they're

giving out the cups.

Jal That's

another big moment.

The presentation of the

cups after the winner

has been announced.

The presentation

of the cups.

You've got to put

that In there,

Master Hally.

[Growl]

[Grunt]

So much for a bloody

world without collisions.

We did say it

was only a dream.

Life's a fick-up and

it's never going

to change.

Maybe that's true.

There's no maybe about it.

All we've done this

afternoon is waste

our time.

Not if we get

your homework done.

I don't give a shit

about my homework!

H urry up now and

finish your work.

I want to lock up

and get out

of here.

And go where?

Home-sweet-freaking-home.

Jesus, I hate that word.

[Footsteps]

[Growl]

Do you want to know

what's really wrong

with your lovely

little dream, Sam?

It's not just that

we're all bad dancers

there's more

to it than that.

'Cause you left

out the cripples.

Hally.

Jal Ja, they're also

out there dancing...

like a bunch

of broken spiders

trying to do the quickstep.

I mean It's bad

enough on two legs

but one and a

pair of crutches!

That's guaranteed to turn

that dance floor into

a shambles.

For once this afternoon let's

use our imaginations

sensibly, right?

There's no music,

nobody knows

the steps

and the cripples are always

out there tripping

everyone else up

and It's called

the All-Comers-

How-To-Make-a-Fickup-

of-Life Championship.

And guess who I think

is going to be this

year's winner?

(Sam)

Now, Hally, stop!
That's your father
you're talking about.
So?
Take back those words
and ask for forgiveness!
It's a terrible sin
for a son
to mock his father
with jokes like that.
Hally, I understand
how you are feeling,
but even so...
No, you don't!
I think I do.
And I'm telling
you, you don't!
Nobody does!
It's your turn to
be careful, Sam.
Very careful!
Just leave me and
my father alone!
I'm not the one saying
terrible things
about him.
What goes on between me
and my dad is none of
your business!
Okay, then don't
tell me about it.
All that concerns
you in here, Sam
is to try and do what
you get paid for.
[Sniff]
Keep the place clean
and serve the customers.
My mother's
always warned me
about allowing you
to get too familiar.
[Sniff]
You're only

a servant In here
and don't forget it.
And as far as my
father's concerned
all you need to remember
is that he is your boss.
No, he isn't. I get
paid by your mother.
He's a white man and
that's good enough
for you.
I'll try to forget
you said that.
Don't.
Look, Hally...
You're right.
If we're not careful,
somebody is going
to get hurt.
I don't know what
you're talking about.
Yes, you do.
Jesus!
I wish you'd stop
trying to tell me
what I do and
what I don't know.
Come, Willie,
let's finish up.
Don't turn your
back on me!
Don't do that!
All right.
I'm listening. What
do you want to say
to me?
Well, to start with
why don't you start
calling me Master Harold
like Willie.
Do you mean that?
Why the hell do you
think I said it?
If I don't?

You might just
lose your job.
If you make me
say it once
I'll never call you
anything else again.
So? Is that meant
to be a threat?
Just telling you
what will happen.
You must decide
what it means to you.
Well, I have.
It's good news.
Because that's exactly
what Master Harold
wants from now on.
Think of It as
a little lesson
In respect, Sam
that's long overdue.
My dad agrees with
my mom, you know.
[Sniff]
"You must teach
the boys to show you
more respect, my son."
So now you can stop
complaining about
going home.
Everybody is going
to be happy tonight.
That's perfectly correct.
You see
[sniff]
You mustn't
get the wrong idea
about me and my dad, Sam.
We also have our
good times together.
Some bloody
good laughs.
Want to know what
our favorite joke is?

He gives out
this big groan,
you see, and says
"Oh, it's not fair,
is it, Hally?"
Then I have to ask,
"What chum?"
And then he says,
"A kaffir's ass."
We both have
a good laugh.
Oh, what's... what's
the matter, Willie?
Don't you catch
the joke?
It's what's
called a pun.
You see, fair means
both light in color
and to be just
and decent.
I thought you
would catch it, Sam.
I catch it all right.
But it doesn't appeal
to your sense of humor?
Do you really laugh?
Of course.
To please him? To
make him feel good?
No, for heaven's sake!
I laugh because I think
it's a bloody good joke.
You're really trying
hard to be ugly,
aren't you?
And why drag
poor Willie
into it?
He's done nothing but
show you the respect
that you want so badly.
And that also is not "fair"
and this time I mean

just or decent.
Sam, It's all right.
Leave it now.
Why didn't you just
say "Sam's ass"?
That's the ass you're
trying to kick.
Anyway, how do you
know it's not fair?
You've never seen it.
Do you want to?
[Rustle of fabric]
[Gasps]
There. Have
a good look.
A real Basuto ass.
Look at my ass!
Satisfied?
Now you can make
your dad even happier.
Tell him I showed
you my ass and yes,
he is right.
It's not fair.
Come, Willie,
let's finish up.
Sam...
(Willie)
Leave it, Boet Sam.
[Wind blowing outside]
It's all right, Willie.
Well, you've done it...
Master... Harold.
I'll start calling
you that from now on.
It won't be
difficult anymore.
You just hurt yourself.
I saw it coming
I tried to warn you,
but you wouldn't listen.
So now you just
hurt yourself bad.
And you're a coward,

Master Harold.
The face you should
be spitting in is
your father's
but you used mine,
because you think
you are safe
Inside your fair skin I
[shout]
[Grunt]
No, Boet Sam.
You don't know all
of what you've
just done...
Master Harold.
Not only have you made
me feel dirtier
than ever I've ever
been in my life.
But how do I wash
off yours and your
father's filth?
A long time ago
I made a promise
to myself
but you've
just shown me,
Master Harold...
I've failed.
I've also got
a memory...
of a little white boy
in short trousers
and a black man
but they were
not flying a kite.
It was the old
Jubilee days
after dinner one night.
You came Into my room
and stood against
the wall
looking down
at the ground.

[Soft music
over radio]

[Tum-tum-tum]

Ahh.

What is it, Hally?

And only after

I'd asked you

I don't know how
many times, "What
do you want?"...

Hally, what's wrong?

... did you finally speak
and so soft I could
barely hear you.

Come now.

"Sam, please help
me fetch my Dad. "

Do you remember?

He was dead drunk
on the floor of the
Central Hotel Bar.

They phoned your mother,
but you were the only
one home.

You went in first
and asked
permission for
me to go In.

[Female laughter]

[Music and
light chatter]

Wat soek jyhler?

(bartender)

You better take him home,
he's pissed himself.

[Male voice snickers]

You mean, pissed again.

Come, M r. Ballard.

(Sam, off)

I loaded your
dad on my back
and I carried
him like a baby.

(woman in blue)

Poor thing.
(female voice)
What a disgrace.
[Groaning]
[Heavy breathing]
Get me some water
from the basement.
[Gagging]
We have to
clean him up.
Don't let them take
my other leg, Hally.
Promise, you won't
let them take my
other leg?
I won't.
[Heavy breathing]
[Water trickling in basin]
(Sam, off)
I felt for
that little boy...
[deliberate tone]
Master Harold.
I felt for him.
I love him, Sam.
I know you do.
That's why I tried to stop
you from saying those things.
You love him... but you
are ashamed of him.
You are ashamed
of so much!
And now that's going
to include yourself.
That's the promise
that I made to myself
to try to stop that
from happening.
You didn't do
anything wrong
but for days
you went around
as if you owed
the world an apology

for being alive.
I didn't like
seeing that.
That's not the way
a boy grows up to
be a man!
But the one who should
have been teaching you
what It means
was the cause
of your shame.
And If you really
want to know
that's why I made
you that kite.
I wanted you to look up
to be proud
of something
of yourself...
and you certainly were
that when I left you
up there
on the hill
with the kite.
[Sniffing]
Something else?
If you ever do write
a short story
about it
there was a
twist in the ending.
I couldn't sit and
stay there with you.
It was a
"White's Only" bench.
You were too young,
too excited to notice.
But not anymore.
And If you're not careful,
"Master Harold..."
you will be sitting
up there by yourself
for a long time to come
and there won't be

a kite in the sky.
[Door opens
and closes]
Willie...
Will you lock up for me
and look after the keys?
Okay.
You forgot the comics.
[Thunder rolling]
Hally...
I've got no right
to tell you what it
is to be a man
if I don't behave
like one myself.
Should we try again?
Try what?
Fly another kite,
I suppose.
You can't fly kites
on rainy days, remember?
So what do we do?
Hope for better
weather tomorrow?
I don't know.
I don't know
anything anymore.
You sure of that, Hally?
Because it would be
pretty hopeless if
that were true.
Anyway, I don't believe you.
I reckon there's
one thing you know.
You don't have to sit
up there by yourself.
You know what
that bench means now.
And all you have
to do is stand up...
and walk
away from it.
Come inside, Boet Sam.
It's going to be

okay tomorrow.
[Deep sigh]
Boet Sam, you're right.
I think about it
and you're right.
Tonight I find Hilda
and say I'm sorry.
And promise not to
beat her no more.
You hear me, Boet Sam?
I hear you, Willie.
Then we practice.
Then I relax
and romance with her
from beginning to end.
Non-stop!
You watch, Boet Sam!
Two weeks' time,
"First prize for
promising newcomers
M r. Willie Maiopo
and M iss H ilda Samuels."
[Coin clinking]
[Humming and clicking]
[Clicking]
[Jukebox clacking]
[Soft music]
How did you
say it, Boet Sam?
Let's dream.
You lead, I follow.
[Thunder rolling]
[Music continues]
[Music ends]
[Slow melancholy music]