

*Chapter 4*

# THE WIDOW OF MARABASTAD

Illustrated by Dada Khanyisa



9 AUGUST 1956

MARABASTAD,  
PRETORIA

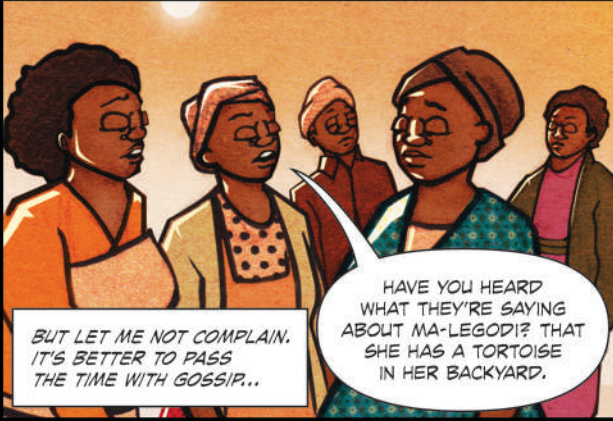
SO MUCH WATER  
IN THE SEAS,  
BUT NONE IN  
MARABASTAD...



...HERE IN THE CITY'S  
OLDEST LOCATION WE  
DO A LOT OF WAITING.

WE WAIT FOR TRANSPORT,  
WE WAIT FOR PASSES,  
BUT MOST OF ALL WE  
WAIT FOR WATER.





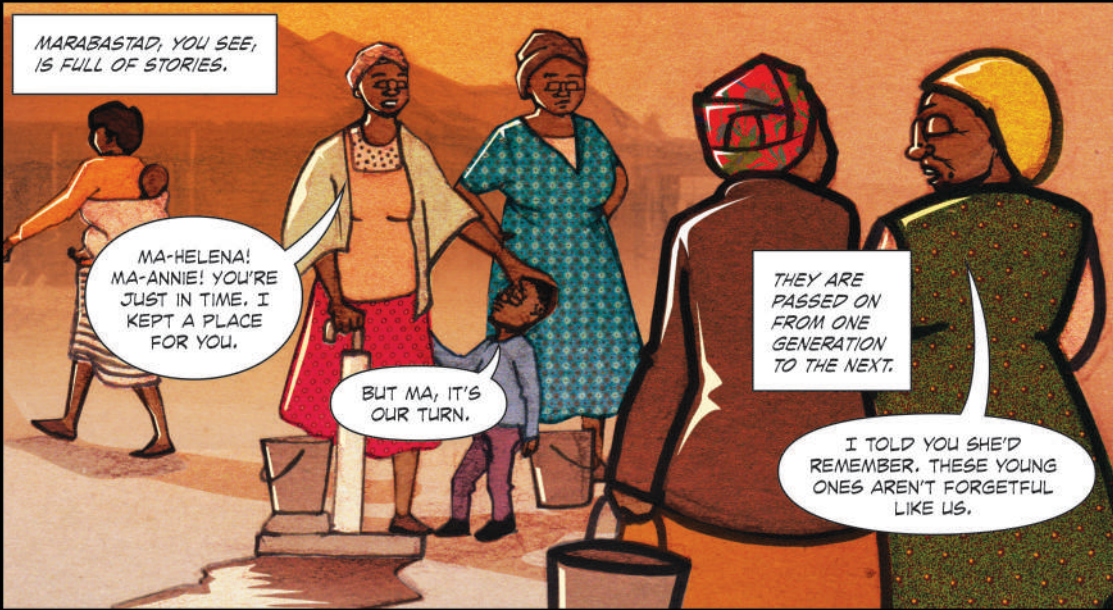
BUT LET ME NOT COMPLAIN. IT'S BETTER TO PASS THE TIME WITH GOSSIP..

HAVE YOU HEARD WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT MA-LEGODI? THAT SHE HAS A TORTOISE IN HER BACKYARD.



SHOH, THAT WOMAN AND HER DARK WAYS.

NEXT SHE'LL BE SEEN RIDING A BABOON DOWN THE STREET IN THE DARK.



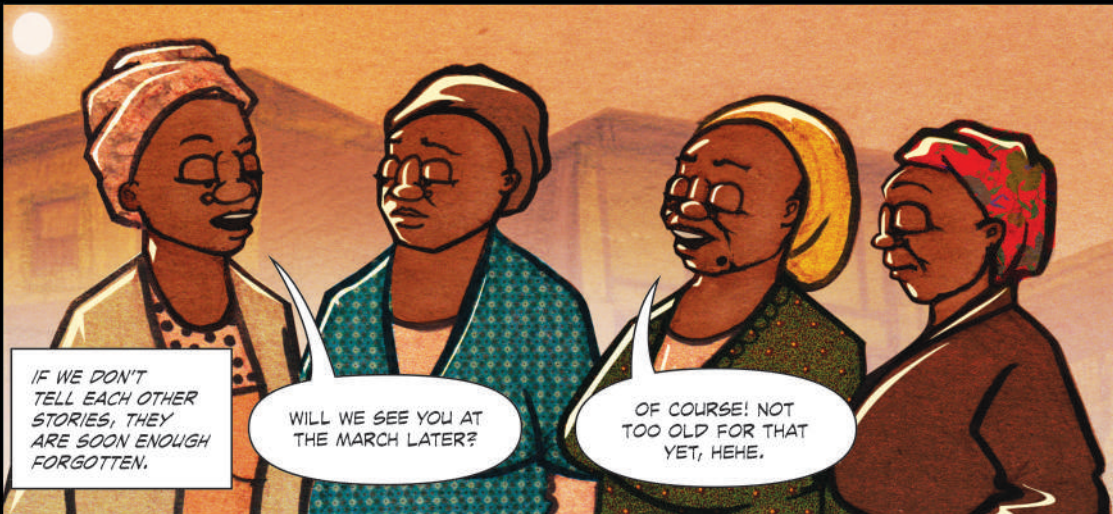
MARABASTAD, YOU SEE, IS FULL OF STORIES.

MA-HELENA! MA-ANNIE! YOU'RE JUST IN TIME, I KEPT A PLACE FOR YOU.

BUT MA, IT'S OUR TURN.

THEY ARE PASSED ON FROM ONE GENERATION TO THE NEXT.

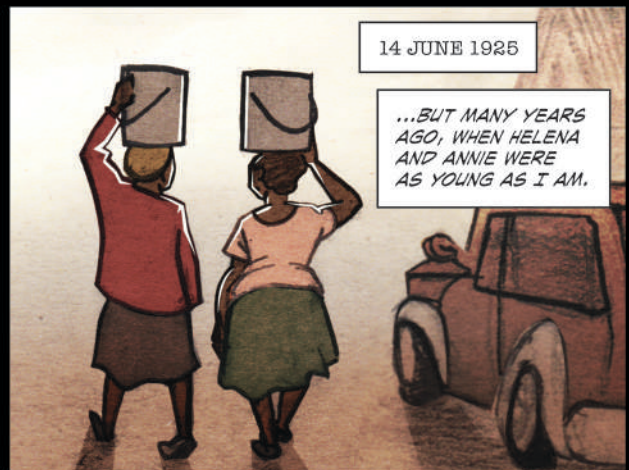
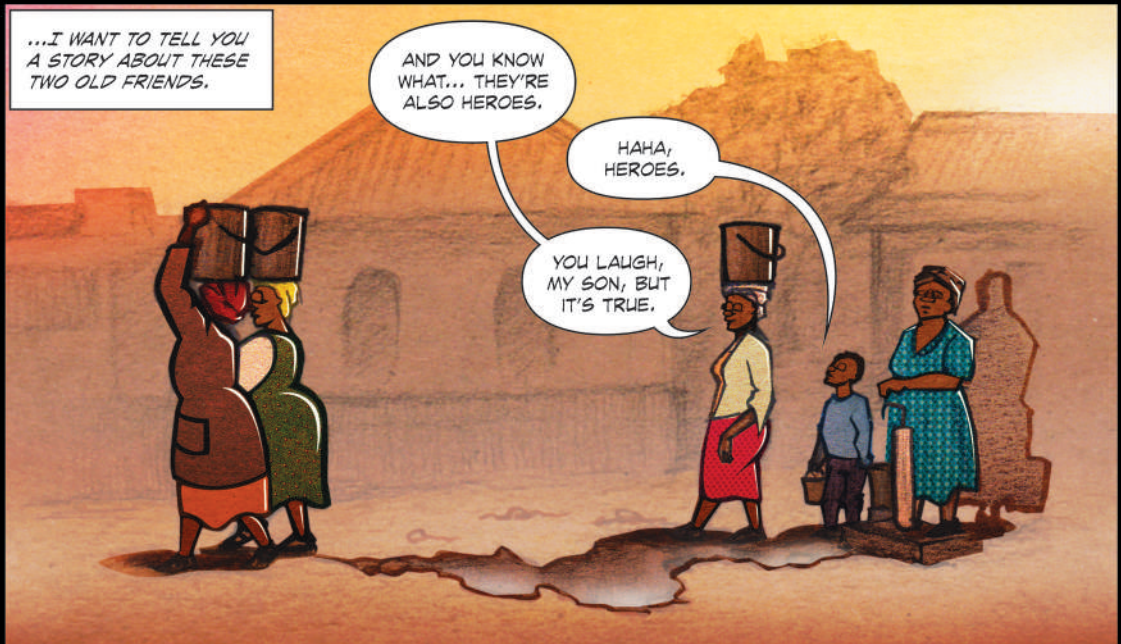
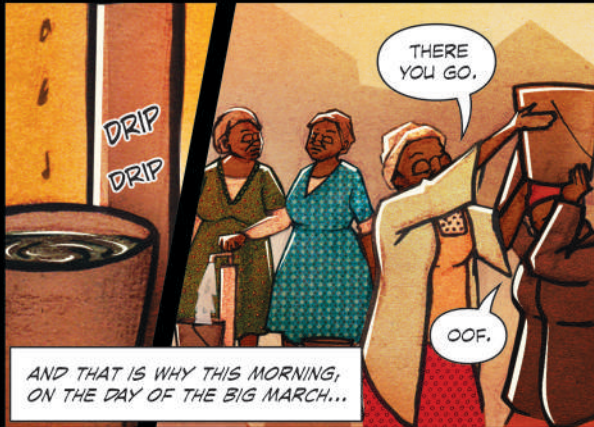
I TOLD YOU SHE'D REMEMBER. THESE YOUNG ONES AREN'T FORGETFUL LIKE US.

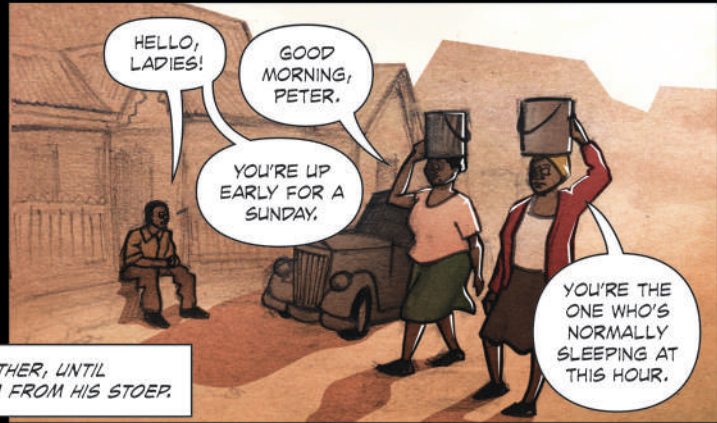


IF WE DON'T TELL EACH OTHER STORIES, THEY ARE SOON ENOUGH FORGOTTEN.

WILL WE SEE YOU AT THE MARCH LATER?

OF COURSE! NOT TOO OLD FOR THAT YET, HEHE.





THE DAY HAD BEGUN JUST LIKE ANY OTHER, UNTIL PETER MATSEKE CALLED OUT TO THEM FROM HIS STOEP.

HELLO, LADIES!

GOOD MORNING, PETER.

YOU'RE UP EARLY FOR A SUNDAY.

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO'S NORMALLY SLEEPING AT THIS HOUR.

HE WAS THE CHAIRMAN OF OUR LOCAL BRANCH OF THE TRANSVAAL AFRICAN CONGRESS...



HEHE... WELL THERE'S LOTS TO DO IF WE'RE GOING TO STOP THIS NEW NIGHT PASS LAW.

BUT IT ONLY AFFECTS US WOMEN. WHY DO YOU CARE?

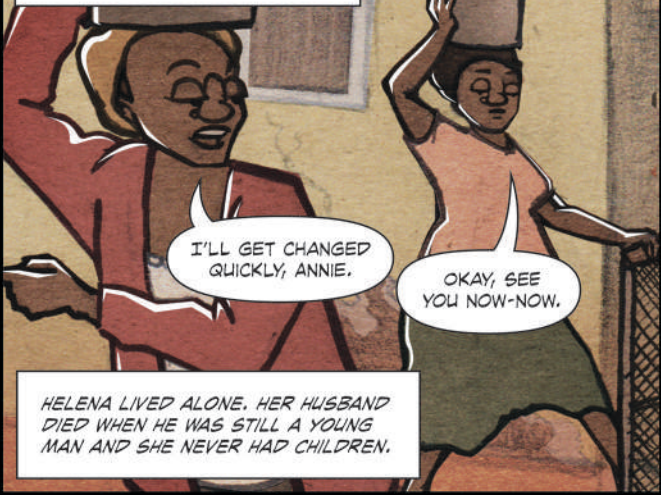
...WHICH WAS ONE OF THE FIRST GROUPS TO FIGHT FOR AFRICAN PEOPLE'S RIGHTS IN THE PROVINCE.



WHAT AFFECTS YOU AFFECTS ALL OF US. COME TO THE MEETING LATER AND I'LL TELL YOU WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT.

OKAY, WE'LL SEE YOU AFTER CHURCH.

HELENA AND ANNIE LIVED NEAR ONE ANOTHER ON FIFTH STREET.



I'LL GET CHANGED QUICKLY, ANNIE.

OKAY, SEE YOU NOW-NOW.

HELENA LIVED ALONE. HER HUSBAND DIED WHEN HE WAS STILL A YOUNG MAN AND SHE NEVER HAD CHILDREN.

ANNIE, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAD A FAMILY.



I WIN!!

BATHONG!! YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO BE DRESSED FOR CHURCH ALREADY!



FOR WESLEYANS LIKE THEM, SUNDAY WAS MEANT TO BE A DAY OF REST.

UGH, PLEASE HELP ME WITH THIS, BAHELE.



I TAKE IT YOU'RE NOT COMING TO CHURCH.

HM, NOT TODAY, MY WIFE. I LEFT THE IRON ON THE STOVE FOR YOU, THOUGH.



DURING THE WEEK, ANNIE'S HUSBAND WORKED IN A FACTORY, WHILE ANNIE AND HELENA MADE A LIVING BY HAND-WASHING AND IRONING WHITE PEOPLE'S CLOTHES.

FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, IT'S BEEN ONE OF THE FEW WAYS A BLACK WOMAN CAN EARN A SAFE AND HONEST LIVING IN PRETORIA.



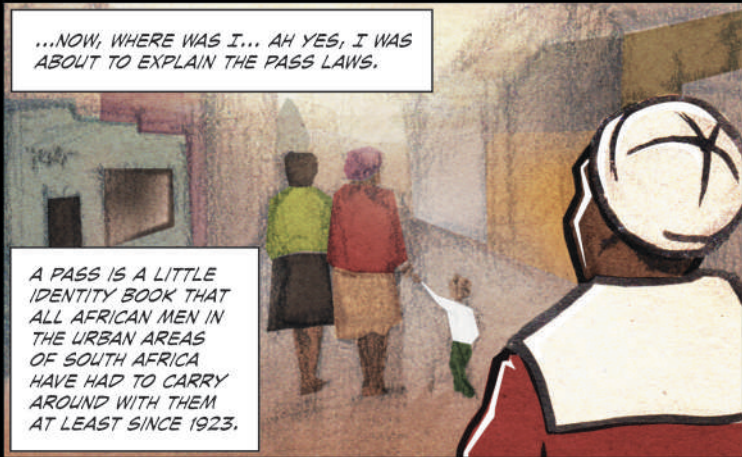
OOPS, I THINK I DROPPED THE KEY AT THE TAP. WILL YOU RUN BACK AND LOOK FOR IT?

AY, NO MA, PLEASE! I DON'T WANT TO WALK AGAIN.



HEHE, YOU ALWAYS FALL FOR THESE JOKES. BE CAREFUL OR THEY'LL TEASE YOU AT SCHOOL.

NOW WHAT AM I GOING TO FEED THIS HUNGRY BOY.



THE TRANSVAAL GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE WAS TO WIPE THE DUST OFF AN OLD RULE BOOK AND ENFORCE A LAW\* THAT HAD BEEN FORGOTTEN FOR 23 YEARS.



JAIL?!

UH-HUH.

IT SAID THAT IF AN AFRICAN WOMAN WAS CAUGHT WITHOUT A PASS IN THE WHITE AREAS AT NIGHT, SHE COULD BE ARRESTED ON THE SPOT.

OUR PEOPLE WERE ANGRY. SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE TO RESIST THIS LAW, OR ELSE WHERE WOULD IT END?

IMPORTANT LEADERS CAME FROM FAR AND WIDE TO SPEAK IN CHURCHES AND COMMUNITY HALLS.



FRIENDS, IN DIFFICULT TIMES LIKE THESE WE MUST TURN TO PRAYER...



..THROUGH JESUS, GOD'S GRACE MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO DO THINGS THAT WE COULD NEVER DO ON OUR OWN.



MPHO, DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY YOUR MA SAID THOSE WOMEN ARE HEROES?

I WANT TO KNOW WHERE MA-LEGODI GOT HER TORTOISE.



TAKE A LOOK AT THESE.

AH...

...MY MOTHER USED TO CUT OUT PHOTOS OF THE PASS PROTESTS.

\* Section 3, Transvaal Ordinance 43 of 1902.

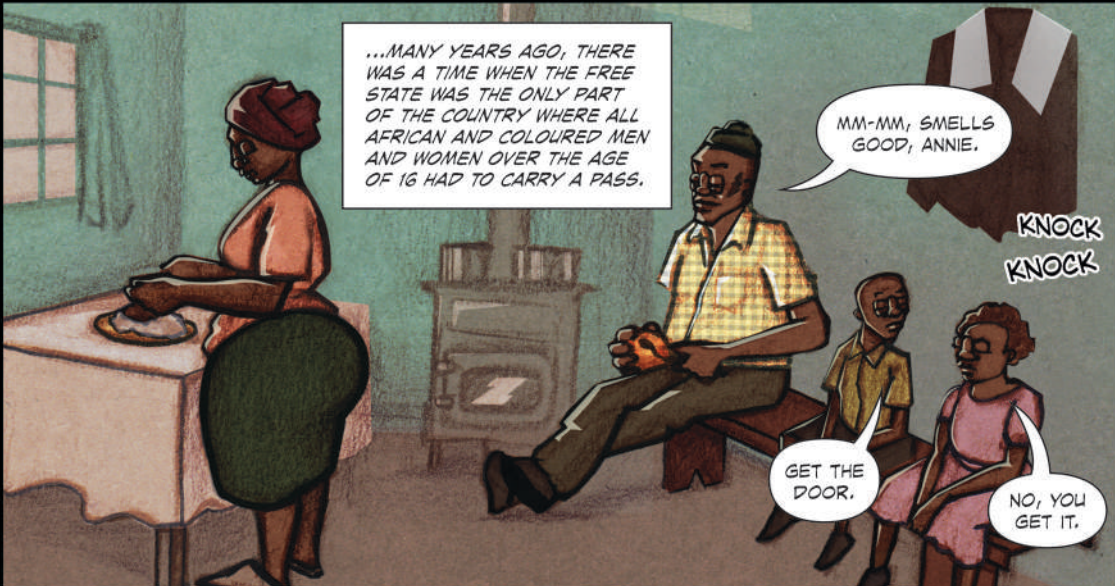




SHE TAUGHT ME THAT WOMEN HERE IN MARABASTAD WEREN'T THE FIRST IN SOUTH AFRICA TO RESIST THE PASS LAWS...



THAT WAS IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE.



...MANY YEARS AGO, THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THE FREE STATE WAS THE ONLY PART OF THE COUNTRY WHERE ALL AFRICAN AND COLOURED MEN AND WOMEN OVER THE AGE OF 16 HAD TO CARRY A PASS.

MM-MM, SMELLS GOOD, ANNIE.

GET THE DOOR.

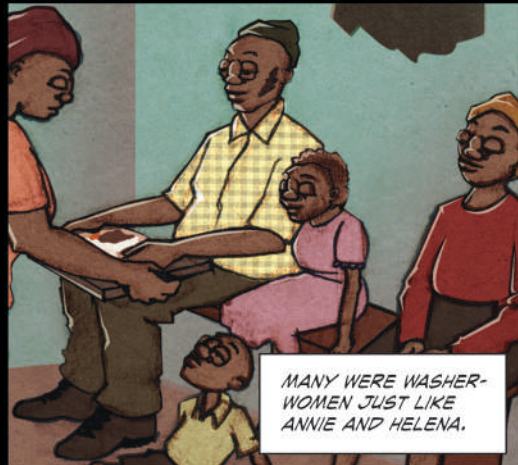
NO, YOU GET IT.

KNOCK KNOCK

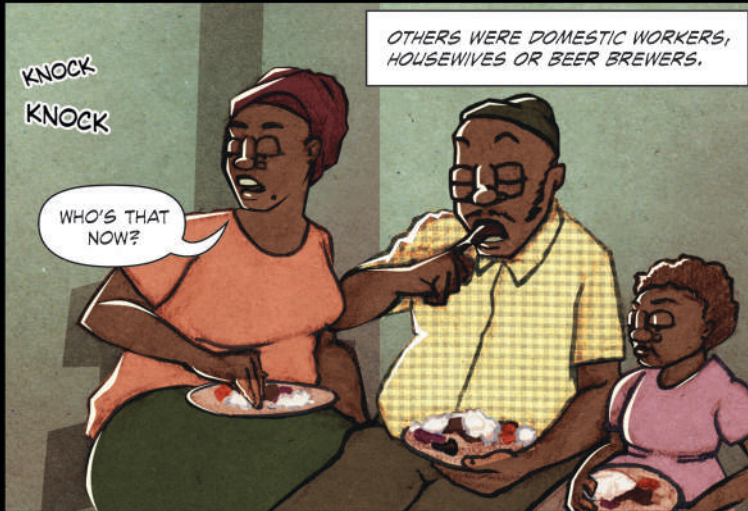


BUT THEN IN 1913 A GROUP OF BRAVE WOMEN IN THE CITY OF BLOEMFONTEIN MARCHED TO A POLICE STATION AND TORE UP THEIR PASSES.

I HOPE YOU'RE HUNGRY, HELENA.



MANY WERE WASHER-WOMEN JUST LIKE ANNIE AND HELENA.



KNOCK  
KNOCK

WHO'S THAT NOW?

OTHERS WERE DOMESTIC WORKERS,  
HOUSEWIVES OR BEER BREWERS.



DUMELANG!  
MA-ANNIE,  
PLEASE CAN  
I BUY SOME  
BEER?



YOU KNOW THE  
HIDING PLACE, SON.  
GO GRAB STARRY  
SOME SKOKIAAN.

THEIR PROTEST SPREAD  
TO OTHER FREE STATE  
TOWNS AND MANY  
WOMEN WERE ARRESTED  
AND THROWN IN PRISON.  
FOR YEARS THE  
GOVERNMENT DID  
NOTHING, BUT THEN IN  
1923 A NEW LAW WAS  
PASSED.\* IT SAID THAT,  
IN TOWNS AND CITIES  
ACROSS SOUTH AFRICA,  
RESIDENCE PERMITS  
WERE COMPULSORY  
ONLY FOR "NATIVE MEN"  
—NOT WOMEN.



THANKS, I  
OWE YOU!



CLEARLY THE  
GOVERNMENT  
HAD LEARNT A  
LESSON IN THE  
FREE STATE.

BUT NOW THEY  
WERE TRYING  
AGAIN WITH THE  
WOMEN OF THE  
THE TRANSVAAL.

ANNIE,  
WE'D BETTER GO  
OR WE'LL BE LATE  
FOR PETER'S  
MEETING.

\* The Natives (Urban Areas) Act, Act No. 21 of 1923.

THAT AFTERNOON, HELENA AND ANNIE JOINED HUNDREDS OF OTHERS AT THE COMMUNITY MEETING. AS THEY ARRIVED, SAM MAKGATHO, THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS, WAS SPEAKING.



THEN CAME CHARLOTTE MAXEKE, WHO HAD TRAVELED THE WORLD AND SEEN WOMEN CAMPAIGNING FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE.



MA-MAXEKE WAS A FIERY SPEAKER.



BUT WHEN SHE SANG IT WAS WITH THE VOICE OF AN ANGEL.



FINALLY, IT WAS PETER'S TURN TO LAY OUT THE PLAN OF ACTION. UNLIKE IN THE FREE STATE, THIS TIME CONGRESS HAD DECIDED TO RESIST THE WOMEN'S PASS LAW THROUGH THE COURTS.



MY FRIENDS, LAST NIGHT, FIVE OF OUR BRAVE SISTERS IN JOHANNESBURG WENT OUT AFTER 10:30 TO GET ARRESTED.

ALL WERE CHARGED UNDER THE NIGHT PASS LAW THEN RELEASED ON BAIL.



TOMORROW NIGHT, WE NEED FOUR WOMEN TO DO THE SAME IN PRETORIA.

AH, I SEE THE WIVES OF MAKGATHO AND MATHIBA FROM EERSTERUST HAVE VOLUNTEERED. THANK YOU, MY SISTERS.



WE NEED TWO MORE.

WE SHOULD VOLUNTEER WITH THEM, ANNIE.

US?! THOSE TWO PROBABLY DON'T HAVE JOBS, HELENA.



