

The bicycle clatters over a rut in the road, shimmying wildly. The front wheel bucks and twists, a wild creature with a will of its own. Refiloe fights to hang on to the handlebars, the seat wobbling beneath her. Gripping tighter, pedaling harder, she steers the silver beast onto a smooth patch of street, heaving a sigh of relief as it steadies, feeling triumphant as it picks up speed.

Breeze glides over her skin as she surveys the neighbourhood: small low-slung houses with swaying clotheslines; four brown chickens pecking in a yard; an old man seated on an upturned bucket; two women walking along the street's edge; a taxi careening around the corner. She scans for anything out of the ordinary—a uniform, a white face, a parked car with a driver still in it. If there is anything suspicious, she must immediately ride by Tata Michael's, ringing the handlebar bell three times in rapid succession. Then she must continue on toward the school, ringing the bell occasionally, meandering as she goes. As if she is riding only for fun, as if she has not seen anything at all.

Refiloe Simelela, at ten, is learning to become an activist like her father. She too was born to stand up for freedom. That is the actual meaning of the surname he bequeathed her: Simelela. To stand up. It's been seven months since his arrest, four since he died in detention. A suicide no one believes was a suicide. Because Moses Mpilo Simelela would never abandon the struggle. He'd never willingly leave his wife and daughter alone to fend for themselves.

Today, nothing appears amiss. But she circles back to be sure, eyes swallowing more details: a half-deflated soccer ball in the Kunenes' yard; curtains drawn against afternoon sun—probably someone ill; a white plastic bag tumbling through the gutter like a small, lonely ghost. Only the curtains to report. Satisfied, she speeds up, thighs pumping, the township slipping by faster and faster. So far, she's never had to use the bell. But just thinking about it makes her pulse race, her skin tightening against the small moon-shaped scar in the hollow of her throat.