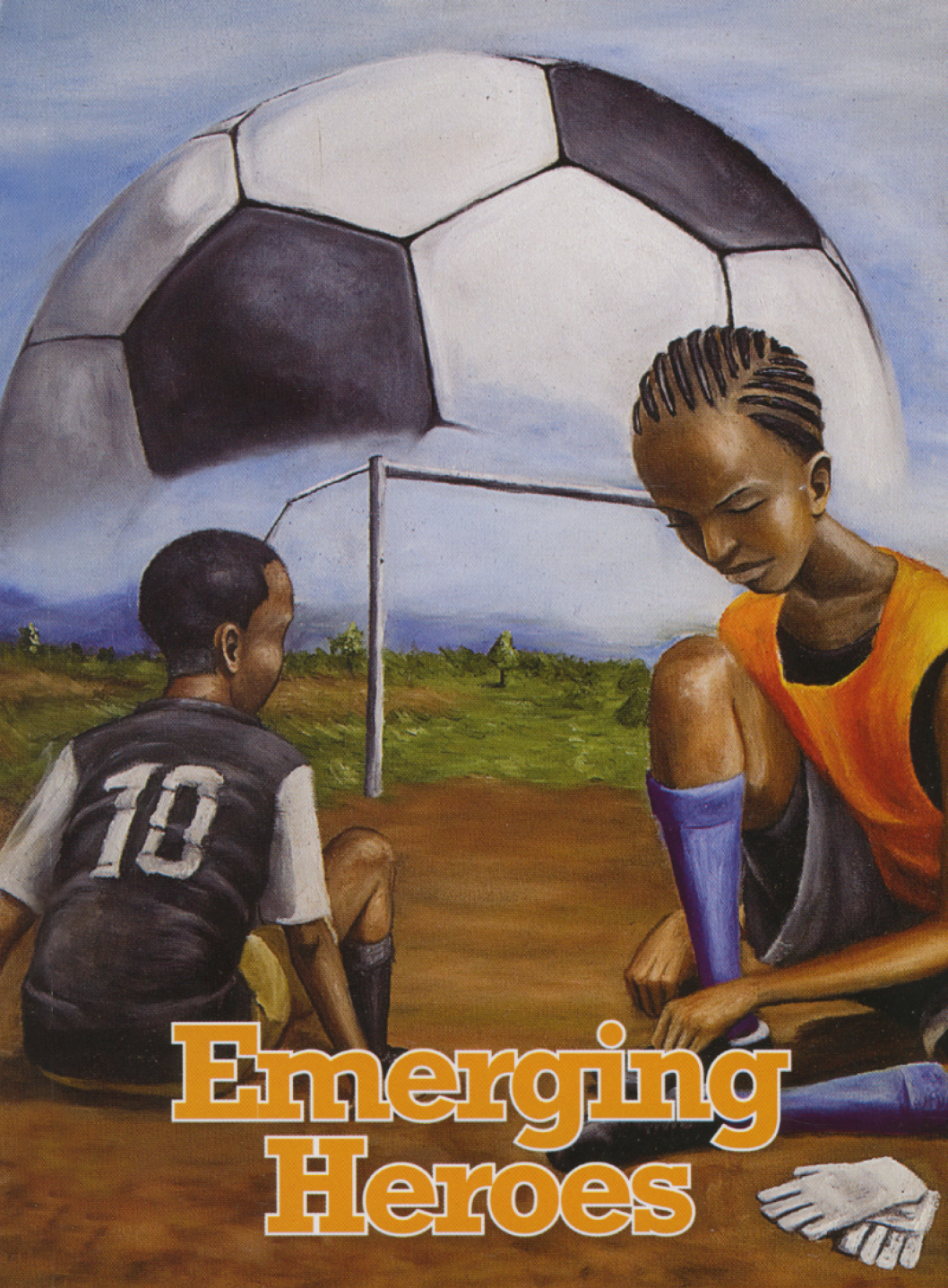




Muthal Naidoo

Illustrations by Malose Pete

*I have within me
the power to be
the very best
that I
can possibly be*

EMERGING HEROES

Muthal Naidoo

Illustrated by Malose Pete



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1. Khanyisa George, 8A

'I liked the house became a home because when Khazamula didn't want to move in, it's reminds me when first move in I didn't want to but I ended up enjoying it just like Khazamula did.

And this story is really something that happens to our family's. I would really like to read more of these stories for example Khanyisa she wanted to play for Banyana Banyana. Khazamula and Khanyisa were really brother and sister. Khanyisa never wanted to see Khazamula worried about something even as black children because we are black that does not mean we can't have a truly bright future. We are the teachers, doctors, presidents of tomorrow. The writer of the story really rocks. He must keep up the good work one day I would like to write a story like him. You rock again."

2. Portia Ngxande

Yes I would like to read more books because I learned a lot in this story of Khazamula. The part that I like in this story is the part of the boy from Malawi, because that boy has no place to go so the family of Khazamula they took him to stay with them. This part told me that when someone get a problem I must help him or her.

It was most gratifying to learn from these pupils that they identified with the characters and situations. That is exactly why these stories were written: so that children could see themselves in the stories. Black children are usually subjected to stories that are not about themselves and, even though they appreciate stories about others, they stand outside such stories as observers. They see others as people for whom things happen and who make things happen. But they are either not in the picture, or are in secondary roles and that is disempowering.

Black children need stories in which they see themselves as people with control over their circumstances. That is why the stories in this book are written in a realistic style and why Malose Pete's illustrations are representational. Fairytales and magical stories have their place, but they should not be the only kind of literature for children. Children also live in the real world.

I am deeply grateful to Pauline Brown, George Kleinhans, Khanyisa George and Portia Ngxande for helping me in this endeavour.

A special thank you to Oniks Manganyane who helped me with all kinds of information about life in Limpopo Province.

Muthal Naidoo
August 2011

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I

The House that became a Home

One day, when Khazamula was helping to bring in the cows, he saw, he saw his uncle's lorry coming along the road. His father was leaning out of the window and waving.

Khazamula left the cows and ran after the lorry.

When he arrived home, he saw the lorry parked outside the family huts. His sisters, Khanyisa and Misaveni, were clambering onto the back. Papa called to him, 'Hurry up. Uncle is taking us to the township. I have a surprise there for you.' Papa swung Khazamula onto the back and got into the cab beside Mother.

Uncle drove them to a plot in the township. Men were digging up the soil and pushing wheelbarrows. It was such an ugly place but Papa was smiling. 'Well, what do you think, eh? These builders are laying the foundation for our new house. We are going to be living here.'

'Oh, that's wonderful!' said Mother.

Misaveni laughed with excitement. 'Then we won't have to walk so far to get to school.'

Khanyisa, Khazamula's older sister, pinched his cheek. 'Next year, when you go to school, it will be easy for you too.'

But Khazamula looked at the hole in the ground and said nothing. He frowned. He couldn't understand why everyone was so excited. He loved his village and their family compound of huts. His grandmother had painted a beautiful design of red, blue, yellow and white triangles on the low wall that enclosed the huts in a circle. His friends lived nearby, also in family compounds with thatched huts and beautifully decorated walls. He and his friends played together everyday. In the afternoons, the bigger boys sometimes let him help them bring home the cows. He loved running alongside the cows and listening to their merry bells.

Papa took them to the township again when the walls were going up. Papa, Mani and his sisters laughed with happiness but Khazamula was upset. It was a broken place. The walls were rough and there were no doors.

They went again just before the roof went up. Papa could see that Khazamula really hated the house. 'Come with me, Khazamula, I want to show you your room.' Khazamula went with him into a small, square area with rough, grey walls. It looked so ugly. It was not like the big hut that he and his cousins shared.

'Aren't you pleased? You will have this room all to yourself. You won't have to share with your cousins.'

Khazamula just frowned. He thought, 'I won't stay here. I will stay with my cousins.'

His parents saw how upset he was and did not take him to see the house any more. He was glad. He did not want to go there anyway.

Weeks went by and he heard nothing more about the house. He laughed and thought, 'They must have changed their minds. They are going to stay in the village after all.'

Then one day, his mother started packing all their things. 'We are moving tomorrow,' she said. Khazamula was shocked.

'Hooray,' shouted his sisters.

'Hey, Khazamula, don't look so sour.' Misaveni, the younger of his two sisters, pinched his cheek. 'We are going to move into our new house.' He couldn't believe it. He thought they had forgotten all about the house.

The next day his uncle came in his lorry to help them move. While everyone was busy packing the lorry, Khazamula ran away and hid near the river. He lay in the grass and cried. He was there for a long time and he thought they had forgotten all about him.

Then he heard Papa calling, 'Khazamula, where are you?' He saw his father coming toward him. 'There you are, Khazamula. Come on, son. Why did you run away? It's getting late. We have to go.'

'I don't want to go. I don't like that broken house,' Khazamula sobbed.



‘There, there now. It’s not a broken house. Anyway, you can’t stay here. Who will look after you?’

‘But I don’t want to go. I’ll stay with grandmother, grandfather and my cousins.’

‘Look,’ Papa said, ‘come and see the new house. If you don’t like it, I promise I’ll bring you back and you can stay here.’

They said goodbye to all their relatives and friends and drove off to their new home in the township. When they arrived, Khazamula looked for the broken house but he could not see it. They stopped in front of a beautiful house. His father took him inside. There were bright curtains on the windows, carpets on the floor and lovely pictures on the walls.

‘Papa, what are we doing here? Whose house is this?’

His father took him into a room. It had a little bed, a bookshelf, a lamp and a radio. On the wall was a large poster of Lucas Radebe, his favourite soccer star.

‘Papa, what are we doing here? When are we going to our house?’

‘Son, this is our house. This is your room. We are home.’

Khazamula couldn’t believe his eyes: there were doors and windows, no broken walls. Everything was clean and beautiful. This wasn’t a broken house; this was their home.

And there was Lucas Radebe smiling down at him. Suddenly Khazamula shouted, ‘Hooray, I love our home,’ and ran outside to help unpack the lorry.



Hamburgers that Vanished

When the Chauke family, Papa, Mani, Khanyisa, Misaveni and Khazamula, moved from the village, they came to live in Section D in Mangombe. Khanyisa and Misaveni were pupils at Sukhani Primary School. Every day when they came home from school, they went straight to the kitchen where Mother had snacks ready for them on the kitchen table.

One day when they came home from school, they did not find their snacks on the table. They looked in the refrigerator, on the stove, in the oven and even in the cupboards but could not find them.

They called out, 'Mani, where are our snacks?'

Their mother called back, 'On the table.'

'No, they aren't.'

Mother came into the kitchen and was surprised to see that there was nothing on the table.

'I put two hamburgers on a plate, right here on the table.'

Then they heard a munching noise under the table.

Misaveni shouted, 'That must be Khazamula; he's taken our hamburgers.'

They looked under the table and there was a strange little boy, sitting on the floor, munching on a hamburger.

'Who are you?' asked Khanyisa.

'Who are you?' asked Mother.

The boy got such a fright at seeing Khanyisa and her mother that he dashed out of the kitchen without a word.

‘Hey, come back,’ called Khanyisa, but he disappeared like a flash. ‘Mani, he took the hamburgers.’

‘Poor boy. He must be from the squatter camp. Never mind, Khanyisa; never mind, Misaveni. I’ll make more. Misaveni, you get hamburger patties from the refrigerator. Khanyisa get the buns, cut them in halves and smear each half with margarine.’

Misaveni handed Mother the hamburger patties and she fried them. Khanyisa prepared the buns and asked, ‘What shall we do next, Mani?’

‘Cut a tomato into slices, cut two thin slices of onion and wash some lettuce leaves.’

Khanyisa sliced the tomato and onion while Misaveni pulled off some leaves from the head of lettuce and washed them. She put the lettuce leaves on one half of each bun. Mother put the hamburger patties on the lettuce, then a thin slice of onion and a slice of tomato. Lastly she spread mayonnaise over the tomato. Then Khanyisa put the other half of the bun on top and the girls had their snacks again. They picked up their hamburgers with both hands and took big bites.

‘Hmmm! Delicious!’

And they ate them all up!

Misaveni's Picture

Khanyisa and Khazamula dribbling, trying to get possession of the ball, were chasing each other around the yard. Misaveni, who was sitting in Mani's little hut, could see them running and shouting. She shook her head. What on earth did her sister and brother see in football? She was glad to be here in Mani's special place. Dad had built it for Mani soon after they had moved to Mangombe. This hut was where her mother sat embroidering beautiful pictures of animals and trees. Misaveni watched for a moment as Mani's fingers pushed the needle into the black cloth and pulled the thread out making fine chain stitches. Mani was making a picture of a lion. And it was beautiful; a painting in red, blue, yellow, white and green stitches. Many people came to buy Mani's embroidered cloths so this hut was also her little shop.

Papa had put in a little desk for Misaveni, who liked to sit here with Mani, drawing pictures. Today, Misaveni was making a picture for a story her teacher had told them. It was the story of The Fox and the Stork. Her teacher had made a little play of the story and Misaveni was going to take part in it. She was very excited.

While she was drawing she could hear Khazamula shouting out to Khanyisa. 'Are you ready? Here I come.' She looked out of the door and saw that Khanyisa was standing between two bricks that she and her brother had set up as goalposts. Khanyisa was the goalie and Khazamula was getting ready to shoot the ball at her. Misaveni watched, saw Khazamula run up, kick the ball and Khanyisa dive at it. She shook her head. How can Khanyisa play soccer; she's always getting scratched and so dirty? It was much better to be sitting here with Mani drawing beautiful pictures.

Mani stood up. 'I have to go and get dinner ready. Misaveni, will you lock up when you have finished in here?' Misaveni nodded and Mani went off. In the yard, she could see Khazamula dribbling the ball around her mother as she made her way to the house.

In the kitchen, Mani took out meat and vegetables and began preparing them for a hearty stew. While she was busy, Papa came in with his newspaper and sat at the kitchen table.

‘What’s for supper?’

‘Stew and pap. Just pass me the mealie meal, Jabu. It’s in the cupboard behind you.’

Papa stood up and got the mealie meal out of the cupboard.

‘I went to see Freddy, today.’

‘Oh, how is he? Is he still depressed after the accident? That was a terrible thing to have happened to him.’

‘Yes, he is still depressed. What a thing to happen to a champion soccer player! To lose both his legs like that!’

‘How does he get around now?’

‘He is in a wheelchair but he just stays home and mopes. I think he needs to get back into football.’

‘How can he? He’s crippled and in a wheelchair!’

‘I have a plan.’ He points to the newspaper. ‘I have been reading about this Dreamfields Project. I think that is the answer to his troubles.’ And Papa buried his head in his newspaper again. Mani frowned, shrugged and went back to her cooking.

Misaveni came running in, waving her picture. ‘I finished it! I finished it! Look Mani! Look Papa!’ Papa put his newspaper down and Misaveni ran up to him. She put her picture down in front of him and Papa put his arm around her and kissed her.

‘Why, that’s a beautiful picture, my darling. You are getting to be an artist like your mother.’

Misaveni grabbed the picture and ran over to Mani at the stove. ‘Mani, Mani, see my picture.’

Mani was in the middle of stirring the pap. ‘Not now, Misaveni. I’m busy.’

‘But Mani, just look.’ Misaveni waved the picture at Mani.

‘Not now, Misaveni, not now.’ Misaveni stood there with a cross face. ‘Don’t just stand there, Misaveni, set the table.’

Misaveni pulled a tablecloth over the table. She reached into a cupboard for glasses. One fell out of her hands and broke on the floor.

‘Oh, look what you have done, clumsy girl. Now get the dustpan and sweep that up.’ Misaveni just stared at her mother. ‘Sweep that up, Misaveni.’

But Misaveni burst out, ‘No, I won’t. I hate you. I hate you,’ and she ran out of the kitchen. Papa went to the door and called after her but she ignored him. Papa came back into the kitchen, took the dustpan and swept up the splinters of broken glass. Then he set the table.

When supper was ready Mani called the children.

‘Hmm, that smells good, Mani.’ Khazamula sat down. ‘I’ll say grace.’

Khanyisa laughed. ‘Hey, Khazamula, if you eat too much, you’ll get fat like Uncle Makwanga. Then you won’t be able to play football anymore.’

‘Wait Khazamula, you can say grace when we’re all at the table. Where’s Misaveni?’

‘I thought she was here in the kitchen. Didn’t she come to show you her picture?’ Khanyisa asked.

Khazamula shouted, ‘I saw her picture. It has birds and animals and trees.’

Papa got up. ‘She’s probably in the garden. I’ll find her. You go ahead with supper.’ Father went out through the kitchen door.

Khazamula said a quick grace, ‘Thank you, Lord, for what we are about to receive and for a mother who is such a good cook.’ Then he tucked in. ‘Mani, you are the best cook in the world.’

Khanyisa laughed. ‘Someone is really hungry.’

Father came back with Misaveni. He pulled out her chair for her to sit. Mother dished out for Misaveni. ‘Here we are, Misaveni.’ She put the plate in front of her daughter but Misaveni sat with a sulky face and wouldn’t eat. She



was still clutching her picture.

‘I don’t want to eat.’

Father put an arm around Misaveni. ‘Come on, Misaveni. This stew is good.’

Khazamula, with a full mouth, spluttered, ‘If you don’t want it, you can pass it to me.’

Khanyisa grinned. ‘Watch it, Khazamula. You are beginning to sound like Uncle Makwanga.’

Khazamula pulled a face. ‘I will never be like him. He’s so greedy and fat ...’

Papa gave Khazamula a warning look. ‘That’s enough, Khazamula.’

Then Mani turned to Misaveni. ‘Misaveni, come here.’ With a lip stuck out, Misaveni went to Mani. ‘Now tell me what’s wrong?’

With eyes downcast, Misaveni complained, ‘You didn’t look at my picture.’

Mother apologised, ‘I’m sorry. Where is it?’ Misaveni gave her mother the picture. ‘Oh my, this is a pretty picture. Papa, have you seen this picture?’

Father smiled, ‘Oh, yes. I had a good look at it.’

Mother smiled too. ‘Why, what lovely trees, with two little huts. And here’s a dog ...’

Misaveni suddenly laughed. ‘No, Mani, that’s a fox.’

Mother opened her eyes in surprise. ‘Of course, it is. And this bird with a long beak?’

Misaveni laughed again. ‘That’s a stork.’ She pointed at the picture. ‘And this is the Fox’s cook and this is the Stork’s cook.’

Mother opened her eyes in surprise again. ‘Oh, this is the story of ‘The Fox and the Stork.’ I know that story very well. My teacher told it to us when I was a little girl like you.’

Misaveni became quite excited, ‘Yes, Mani, my teacher told us the story too.’

And we are going to act it out. I am going to be one of the trees in the play.'

Khazamula laughed at Misaveni. 'A tree? How can you be a tree? You don't have branches and leaves.'

Misaveni tossed her head. 'We are going to have leaves and branches. Just wait and see.'

Mother nodded. 'Of course you are.' She hugged Misaveni. 'And as for this picture, it's quite beautiful.'

Khanyisa looked over Misaveni's shoulder. 'Yes, Mani, it's like one of your embroidered pictures.'

Mother's eyes opened wide again. 'So it is. My goodness!'

Khazamula disagreed. 'No, it's not. Mani's pictures are all sewing with those round stitches. Misaveni's picture is all paint.'

Khanyisa pinched her brother. 'But like Mani's pictures it has animals and trees.'

'But it's all paint.' Khazamula was ready to argue.

Mani cut him short. 'You know what. This is such a beautiful picture that I am going to embroider one just like it. What do you think, Misaveni?'

Misaveni threw her arms around her mother. 'Oh, Mani!'

4

It's coiled around

Snake in the Bathroom

‘Mani! Papa!’ Khazamula shouted as he ran in through the gate followed closely by his sisters, Khanyisa and Misaveni. ‘We won. We won. And I scored two goals.’ Khazamula was very excited. His school had beaten the neighbouring school in a soccer match and he was the hero.

‘You should have seen him, Papa, he played just like Lucas Radebe,’ Khanyisa laughed.

‘That’s great, Khazamula,’ his father said. ‘So you scored two goals.’

‘Papa, he scored the winning goal!’ Misaveni called out excitedly.

‘Yes, Papa. We were two goals all and there were five minutes left. Then Themba headed the ball to me and I dribbled all the way past the defenders and scored. The goalie didn’t know what was happening to him.’ His parents laughed. They were very proud of him.

‘I think you’re ready for Bafana Bafana, Khazamula,’ his mother teased.

Father laughed. ‘We have to celebrate our son’s success.’

‘I know, let’s go to Khazamula’s favourite restaurant for dinner,’ said Mother.

‘Great, Mani, I’ll get ready.’ Khazamula dashed off to the bathroom to shower. He turned on the shower taps, then took his toothbrush and toothpaste to brush his teeth. When he bent down to rinse his mouth, he heard a strange hissing sound. It was coming from under the washbasin.

Khazamula was about to look under the washbasin when something suddenly flashed at him. He jumped back in fear when he saw that it was the head of a snake. He moved back cautiously towards the door, dashed out and slammed the door closed.

‘Papa! Papa! Come quick. There’s a snake in the bathroom!’

und the pipes

‘What!’ cried Father as he, Mother and the girls came rushing out of their rooms. ‘Where is it?’



'I closed the door. It's in there, under the sink.'

They all rushed outside and Papa looked through the bathroom window.

'Look for it under the washbasin, Papa,' shouted Khazamula.

'Oh my, it's a mamba. It's coiled around the pedestal under the washbasin,' said Father.

'Thank God, it didn't bite you,' Mother was quite agitated.

'I want to see! I want to see!' yelled Misaveni who was too short to look through the window. Father picked her up and when she saw the snake, she screamed, jumped out of Papa's arms and ran to the edge of the garden.

Khanyisa looking through the window laughed, 'Look out Misaveni, it's coming for you.' Misaveni screamed and ran to Mother.

'Stop that now, Khanyisa. Papa, what are we going to do?'

'We can't leave it in there. Let me see.' He went round to the side of the house and came back with a long pole. 'Get the shaving cream from my room, Khazamula.' Khazamula dashed off to get the cream.

'Why do you need shaving cream?' Mother was puzzled.

'If I can push this pole right up to the pipe, the snake may crawl along it and out of the window. If I put shaving cream on the pole we'll be able to see whether the snake crawled up the pole or not when we come back.'

'You mean we're going off and leaving that thing in there!' Mother exclaimed.

Misaveni howled, 'We'll never be able to use the bathroom again!'

'Oh, shut up, Misaveni.' Khanyisa was cross because she too was getting worried. 'Are we really going to leave the snake in there, Papa?'

'What else can we do?' Papa took the shaving cream from Khazamula, smeared it on the pole, pushed the pole through the window and carefully lowered it under the washbasin.

Then they went off to the side of the house and watched. Nothing happened.

‘Let’s not wait. This will take a long time,’ Papa said. But just as they were about to go, Khazamula caught his father’s sleeve.

‘Look, I think it’s coming out,’ he whispered.

They turned to look and saw the snake’s head emerging from the window.

‘I’ll get a stick,’ said Papa as he ran off toward the garage.

‘Be careful, Jabu. That’s a green mamba.’ Mother was afraid.

Papa came back with a big stick. Just as the snake’s head touched the ground, he raised the stick and brought it down with a crashing blow. The snake’s head was smashed to a pulp. Its body twisted violently and then fell limp. The snake was dead. Papa pulled the rest of it out of the window. It was very long, almost two meters.

Papa smiled with relief, ‘Well, that’s that.’

‘And it’s not too late. We can still go out to dinner to celebrate Khazamula’s soccer victory,’ Mother reminded them.

‘We mustn’t forget that,’ said Papa. ‘Khazamula hurry up and change.’

Khazamula went into the bathroom. He looked around carefully to make sure that there was nothing under the sink, in the bathtub or in the shower. The shower taps were still running and Khazamula undressed quickly and took his shower.

When he was ready, the family set out for the restaurant. But they forgot all about Khazamula’s two goals. All they could talk about was the snake in the bathroom.

‘I’m sorry I killed it,’ Papa said. ‘I was so afraid of it, I didn’t even think.’

Buried in the Garden

Papa was very proud of his garden. Even though he lived in Limpopo Province where it rained very little, he had a beautiful garden. He knew exactly what trees and flowers to plant. He did not put in plants from other countries that need a lot of water. He planted only indigenous trees and flowers that need very little water.

His neat, attractive garden was green all year round. But there was one spot in the garden where nothing would grow. Papa tried many ways to get something to grow there. He turned over the soil, bought fertilizer, planted the toughest plants but nothing would grow there.

‘Papa,’ Khazamula said, ‘that spot is bewitched. Some evil witch has planted something in that spot. That is why nothing will grow there.’

‘Where did you learn such nonsense?’ his father asked. ‘There are no such things as witches. Only fools believe in witches.’

Khazamula felt very angry. His friend, Themba, had told him about a witch who had planted something in a neighbour’s garden and bad luck had come to that family. Khazamula decided to ask Themba to help him dig up that spot when Papa was not at home. He wanted to get rid of the evil thing that was planted there.

But Themba was afraid. ‘Only an Inyanga can do that. If we try, the evil witch will come for us and terrible things will happen.’

Khazamula became even angrier. ‘I am not a coward. If you won’t help me, I will do it alone.’

That night, when everyone was asleep, Khazamula crept out of the house, went into the garden shed, found a spade and began to dig in the dead spot. He dug and dug and dug. He grew tired and sweaty. He was on the point of giving up when he suddenly felt a hand on his shoulder. He jumped and shrieked in terror. He thought the witch had got him. But it was Papa.

‘Khazamula, what are you doing here at this time of night?’

‘Papa, you gave me such a fright. I thought you were a witch.’

‘I told you, there are no such things as witches,’ his father said. ‘Now I am going to prove it to you. You think something evil is buried here. I’ll help you to dig and show you that you are quite wrong.’

Papa began digging and the hole grew bigger and bigger and began to look like a grave. Khazamula became very frightened.

After a while the spade hit something hard. It made a clinking sound. ‘You see,’ Khazamula yelled, ‘there is something bad there. Come on, Papa, let’s leave it. Something terrible will happen to us.’

But Papa continued digging

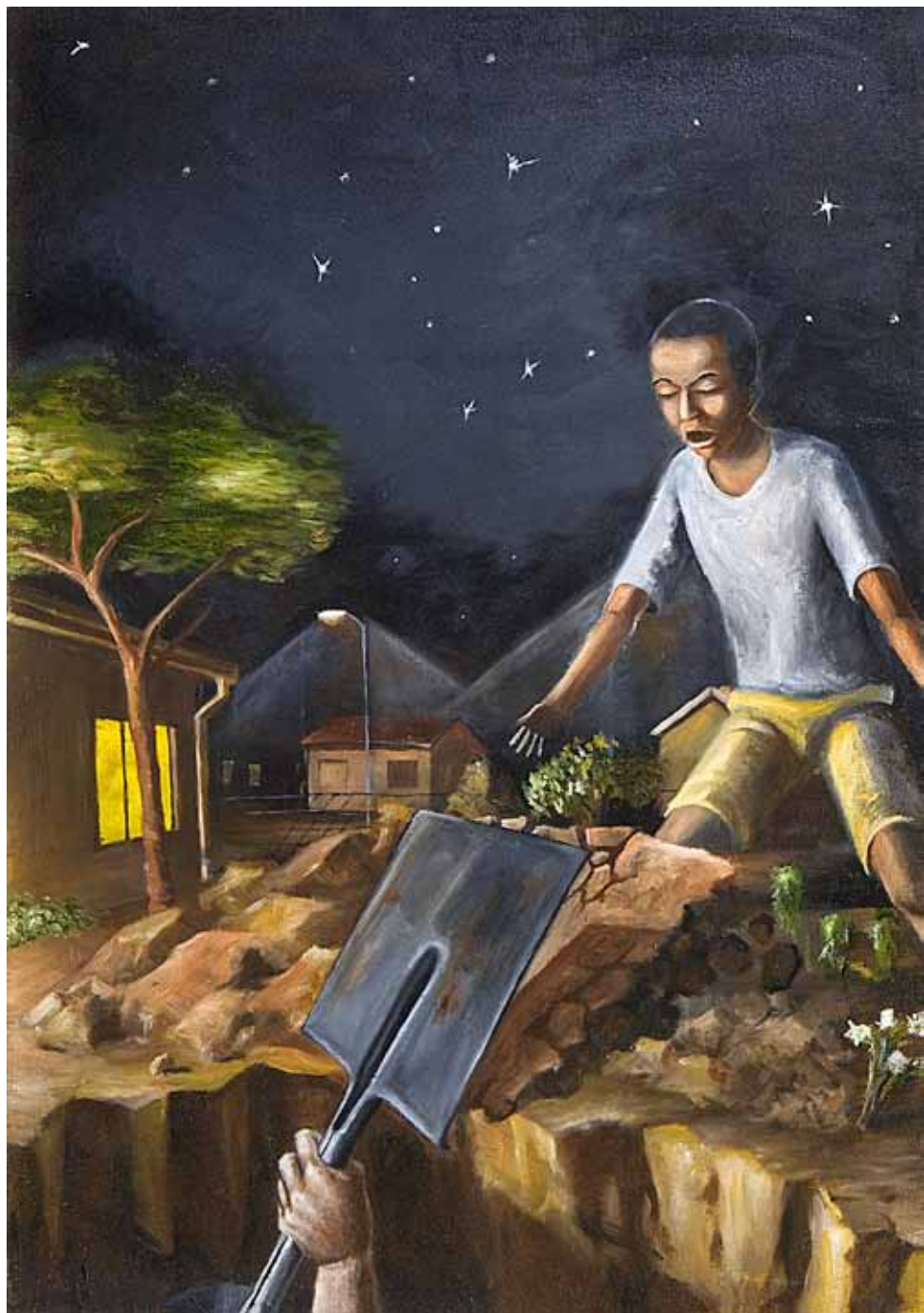
‘Papa, Papa! Stop!’ cried Khazamula. Papa did not. Suddenly, it seemed as if the hole had swallowed him up. Khazamula fell back in fear. Then he crawled to the edge of the hole. He looked in and saw his father struggling with something. Then Papa emerged from the hole dragging an old iron box. It was very rusty.

‘You see, Khazamula, this is the cause of our problem. Now let’s see what’s inside.’

‘No, don’t do that Papa. You will be bewitched,’ Khazamula screamed as he tried to pull his father away from the box. But Papa pushed Khazamula off and broke the lock on the box with his spade. When he opened the box, he found some old papers. He picked them up and began to read.

‘Wonderful,’ he exclaimed. ‘This is wonderful. Do you know what this is, Khazamula? This is the history of the Chauke family. My father was writing our history and he hid the box a long time ago when we were not safe from the police. Afterwards, he could not remember where he had hidden it and we have been searching for it ever since.’ He gave Khazamula a big hug. ‘Thanks to you we have found it. Now we can read the history of our family and understand the proud tradition that we come from.’ Suddenly Papa laughed, ‘I wonder what your grandfather will say when I tell him you thought he was a witch.’

‘Oh Papa, please forgive me.’



‘No, my son, I thank you. If it hadn’t been for you, we never would have found this box.’

‘Papa, why do people believe in witches?’

‘Many people believe in witches because it is an easy way to explain their troubles. Looking for the real cause is too hard.’

‘But we know better, don’t we, Papa?’

‘Yes we do, my son. Now let’s go to bed. We’ve had enough excitement for one night.’

Carrying the box very proudly, Khazamula marched into the house ahead of his father.

Lucky Numbers

Khazamula, pushing the trolley, was running ahead of his mother in the supermarket. When he got to the aisle with household cleaning materials, he did not wait for his mother and began loading products: tile cleaners, stain removers, liquid soap for dishwashers and shower gels. Then he stopped and looked around for his mother. She was waiting for him at the end of the aisle.

When he pushed the trolley up to her, she shook her head. 'I don't need any of these things. Put them back on the shelves.'

'But Ma,' he protested, 'you have to buy these. They may have lucky numbers.'

'I don't care about lucky numbers.'

'It's my chance, Ma. If I find a lucky number, I can send it in and then I stand a chance of going to a football camp. Don't you want me to become rich and famous like Lucas Radebe and Benni McCarthy. Please Ma, you have to buy these products.'

'You and your football. Don't you see this is a just a way to make people buy these products. You don't know whether you will be chosen even if you find a lucky number.'

'Oh Ma, aren't you going to help me. You know I am the best striker in the school district. They will have to pick me. Please Ma. Please. Please.'

'All right. You can choose one of these items but you must put the rest back.'

'Two, Ma. Two.'

'No, Khazamula, just one. Now choose.'



Khazamula looked through the items in the trolley, picked out a box of cleaning powder and reluctantly put the rest back on the shelves. 'If this box doesn't have a lucky number, you will be to blame if I never become a great footballer like Ronaldinho.'

Mother frowned, 'Ronaldinho? Who's that? Does he play for Bafana Bafana?'

Khazamula laughed out loud. 'Oh Ma, what you know about football is dangerous.'

'Oh, come along now. Let's get this shopping done.' Ma marched off to the meat counter and Khazamula trudged along behind her.

At the meat counter, he saw Themba with his mother. 'Hey Themba, look what I have.' He held up the box of cleaning powder.

Themba ran over to Khazamula. 'Why did you buy that? I think the lucky numbers are in the soap. That's what I have.'

'I tried to get other items, but Mani says it's just a gimmick to make us buy stuff.'

'My mother said the same thing.' They looked over to their mothers who were standing there laughing over Themba's box of soap. Themba shook his head, 'Mothers just don't understand.'

When they got home after shopping, Khanyisa, Khazamula's eldest sister came running up to help carry the groceries into the kitchen. Khazamula made sure he had the bag with the cleaning powder. He pulled it out and when Khanyisa saw it she ran over and tried to grab it out of his hands.

'Let go, let go. Ma bought this for me.'

'No, no,' said Khanyisa, holding fast to the box, 'it doesn't belong to you. I want to see if it has a lucky number.'

'The lucky number is mine. I chose this box. Ma, tell her to let go. Tell her it's mine.'

'Now, Khanyisa,' Mother shook her head, 'he wanted it for his lucky number. Something to do with soccer. Let him have it. What do you want it for?' Khanyisa put the box on the table and Khazamula began to look for the lucky number.

‘Ma, if you get a lucky number, you can send it in and then you stand a chance of going to a soccer camp. I want to go to the soccer camp.’

‘But you’re a girl.’

‘Girls play soccer too, Ma. How many times have I told you that I play in our soccer team.’

Mother looked alarmed, ‘You play with the boys!’

‘No Ma, we have a boys’ team and a girls’ team and a junior team. Khazamula is in the junior team. Ma, haven’t you heard of Banyana Banyana, the women’s soccer team. One day I will be in the Banyana Banyana squad.’

Mother raised her eyes to heaven. ‘What’s happening to this family? All mad about soccer. At least Misaveni is sensible. She is going to be a great artist like Gerard Sekoto.’

Khazamula looked up from his box. ‘Who? Is that a teacher at the school?’

Mother smiled. ‘No, he’s a world famous artist. Khazamula, you know they don’t teach art at school. That’s why Misaveni attends Mr Jackson Shongwe’s art classes in Siyandani.’

Khazamula frowned. ‘That madman! He paints those funny pictures.’

Mani shook her head. ‘People come from all over to see his paintings. He even has paintings in an art gallery in Jo’burg.’

Suddenly, Khazamula was jumping up and down and running around in the kitchen. ‘I found it. I found it. The lucky number.’ Khanyisa came to see but he pulled away from her. ‘I am going to send this in and then I will be on my way to a soccer camp. When they see me play, SAFA officials will definitely pick me for the special training weekend in July. And do you know who is coming down in July to do the training? Sundowns’ and Manchester United Soccer Schools’ coaches! Then, like Tyroane Sandows, who went to Brazil, I’ll be on my way to Old Trafford and I’ll be playing in a professional club!’

Khanyisa tossed her head. ‘Well, there are other lucky numbers and I am going to make sure I get one.’

Khazamula, Themba and Khanyisa all found lucky numbers in one or other product and sent them off. They waited impatiently for several weeks and

eventually a letter came. It was not for Khazamula. It was not for Themba. Khanyisa was the lucky one who was invited to join a training camp in Polokwane. The two boys sat in the garden grumbling about how unfair the world was.

‘Girls’ soccer is stupid. They can’t run, dribble and kick like we can.’

‘Why can’t they stick to netball? That’s their game.’

But Khazamula was not about to give up on his dream. He knew he was good; he knew he could become an international player. After South Africa won the 2010 FIFA World Cup bid, many things were happening. There was now an organisation called Sport Coaches’ Outreach (SCORE) that brought out volunteer coaches from all over the world to train children. Last year, a Brazilian soccer star came to Mangombe and spent a year training students and teachers. Khazamula, Themba and Khanyisa had all been involved in the training. At the end of the year, they were chosen for the senior and junior soccer teams and they travelled to Cape Town for the Cup of Heroes Tournament. Even though their teams did not win, Khazamula, in the under twelve squad, became very popular with the crowds.

And Khazamula made up his mind there and then that soccer would be his life. Nothing was going to stop that; he would continue to search for opportunities.

Misaveni's Painting

Khazamula was sitting at the kitchen table with the newspaper. He was looking through advertisements and articles on the 2010 World Cup; he was looking for opportunities for young football players. In his mind, he could see himself in the Amaglug-Glug team. He had already written to SASOL to find out how he could become part of the under-23 squad. They wrote back advising him to join a training camp, or to apply to a professional club that offered training to youngsters. At eleven, he was too young to be considered for Amaglug-Glug.

While he was searching through the paper, he saw an advertisement for a 2010 competition. One of the big sponsors of the FIFA World Cup was holding an art competition and offering huge prizes for pictures that depicted the spirit of 2010. Khazamula shook his head in frustration. He was a soccer player not an artist. Why weren't they offering him something?

Just as he flung the paper down, Misaveni came into the kitchen to get a glass of juice. 'What's wrong with you?'

'Look at this stupid advert. Why aren't they offering sponsorships to training camps? What's this got to do with playing the game.' Misaveni picked up the paper and began to read. Suddenly, she was whooping, shouting and running around the kitchen like a mad girl.

'This is not for you. This is for me. You think only football players should be involved in 2010. But we are all involved. Now I too can make a contribution. I am going to paint a big picture and enter this competition.' She grabbed the kitchen scissors and cut out the advertisement, which included an application form. Then she ran off shouting to tell Mani, Papa and Khanyisa.

Khazamula was morose, 'Everybody is benefitting from 2010 except me.'

Misaveni's excitement was infectious. Everyone in the family, except for Khazamula, became involved in her project. Papa cleared out the shed for her to use as a studio. Ma drove her to Polokwane to buy the special paints and the canvas that she needed. And Khanyisa helped her to drape the national

flag over one wall in the shed and lent her the soccer ball that she wanted to put in the painting. Then Misaveni needed a model and asked Khazamula if he would pose for her, but he refused. He had no time for such nonsense; he was applying to all organisations and soccer clubs looking for training opportunities that would lead to professional soccer.

Misaveni asked Khanyisa if she would pose for her and Khanyisa was delighted. Khanyisa was the goalkeeper of the school's girls' team. Misaveni made drawings of Khanyisa standing between the goal posts, of Khanyisa's face, of Khanyisa about to kick the ball, of Khanyisa flying through the air to deflect a goal kick. Then she went out to the soccer field and drew the pitch with its stands on either side, the fence and beyond the fence, the houses and trees in the background.

She spent a great deal of time making these preliminary sketches. Finally she was ready to begin. She had decided on the national flag as the background to the whole picture. While she was busy in the shed, Papa would come in from time to time to admire her efforts, Mani would come in with juice and biscuits and Khanyisa would come in to see where Misaveni was going to put her in the picture.

After Misaveni had painted the flag, she put in the soccer stadium as background. There was a tiny covered stand filled with people, a tiny fence surrounding the field, and tiny houses and trees in the distance. Mani and Papa came to look.

Papa said, 'But you're covering up the flag.'

'No, she's not,' said Mani, 'you can see it clearly behind the field. It's like the sky in the painting.'

'Oh yes, now I see.' Papa was quite surprised. 'That's why you made the flag so soft and shadowy. That's very clever Misaveni'

Then Khanyisa came to look. 'Aha, I see where you are going to put me. Right there in the front, flying through the air to save a goal.' Misaveni simply laughed.

Then one day Misaveni closed the shed and didn't let anyone in.

'Why, Misaveni? Why can't we come and look.'

'Papa, it's a surprise. You will all have to wait until I have finished.'

Mani, Papa and Khanyisa waited impatiently for two weeks while Misaveni locked herself in the shed each day after school. Mani would knock on the door at dinnertime and insist that Misaveni come out to eat. Sometimes she came. At other times, Mani would have to leave her food in the oven. One night it was really late and she was still in the shed. Papa went out, made her stop working and go to bed. Khanyisa took to peering through the little window to try to see the painting but with Misaveni in front of the easel, she couldn't see much.

Then on a Saturday afternoon, Misaveni came out of the shed and plumped herself at the kitchen table. 'I'm hungry,' was all she said and Mani put a hamburger and chips in front of her.

While she was devouring the food like a starving prisoner, Khanyisa hovered around her. 'Well, is it finished? Can we see it now?' Misaveni was too busy to answer. After she had eaten, she went off to her room, lay down and fell fast asleep.

'Well, how do you like that,' Khanyisa was indignant. 'I am going to have a look.'

'Khanyisa, shouldn't we wait for her?' Mani was frowning.

'I am just as curious as Khanyisa,' said Papa. 'Come on, let's have a look. We can pretend afterwards that we didn't see it.'

'Oh no, that's not right.'

'If you don't want to come, Ma, you don't have to. But I am going,' and Khanyisa was out of the door.

'Wait for me! I'm coming too,' and Papa rushed after her.

'Oh, all right,' and Mani rushed out too.

At the shed, Khanyisa turned to Mani and Papa. 'You see, she didn't lock up. That means it's okay.'

They went into the shed and there it stood.

Mani gasped. Papa's eyes opened wide and Khanyisa stood searching the canvas.

'Oh my. The soccer field seems to be flying on the flag. How did she do that? Our daughter is a real artist. What a beautiful painting.'

'And look at the hero of the match. What a strong footballer, so proud, so confident, so handsome.'

'Look at the football in the foreground! Look at the football! Look at the football!' Khanyisa was jumping about in excitement.

Mani and Papa looked carefully, hugged Khanyisa and all three of them jumped up and down together. The football, like a mirror, reflected a dream face, the face of bright-eyed Khanyisa. Mani, Papa and Khanyisa stood there laughing and crying. It was so thrilling. And to think it was their Misaveni who had painted such a picture.

'But we have to find Khazamula,' Mani said. 'He has to see the painting. Go Khanyisa, see if you can find him.'

Khanyisa found Khazamula in front of his computer searching all the soccer websites. 'Come on, Khazamula. You have to see Misaveni's 2010 painting.'

'Don't waste my time. A painting for 2010! What nonsense!'

'You must see it. Come on! Come on! It's a very special painting!'

'Yes, I know, featuring Khanyisa, the future Banyana Banyana star goalkeeper.'

'Come and have a look. You will be surprised.' Khanyisa put her arms around her little brother, pulled him out of his chair and carried him squealing and kicking out to the shed.

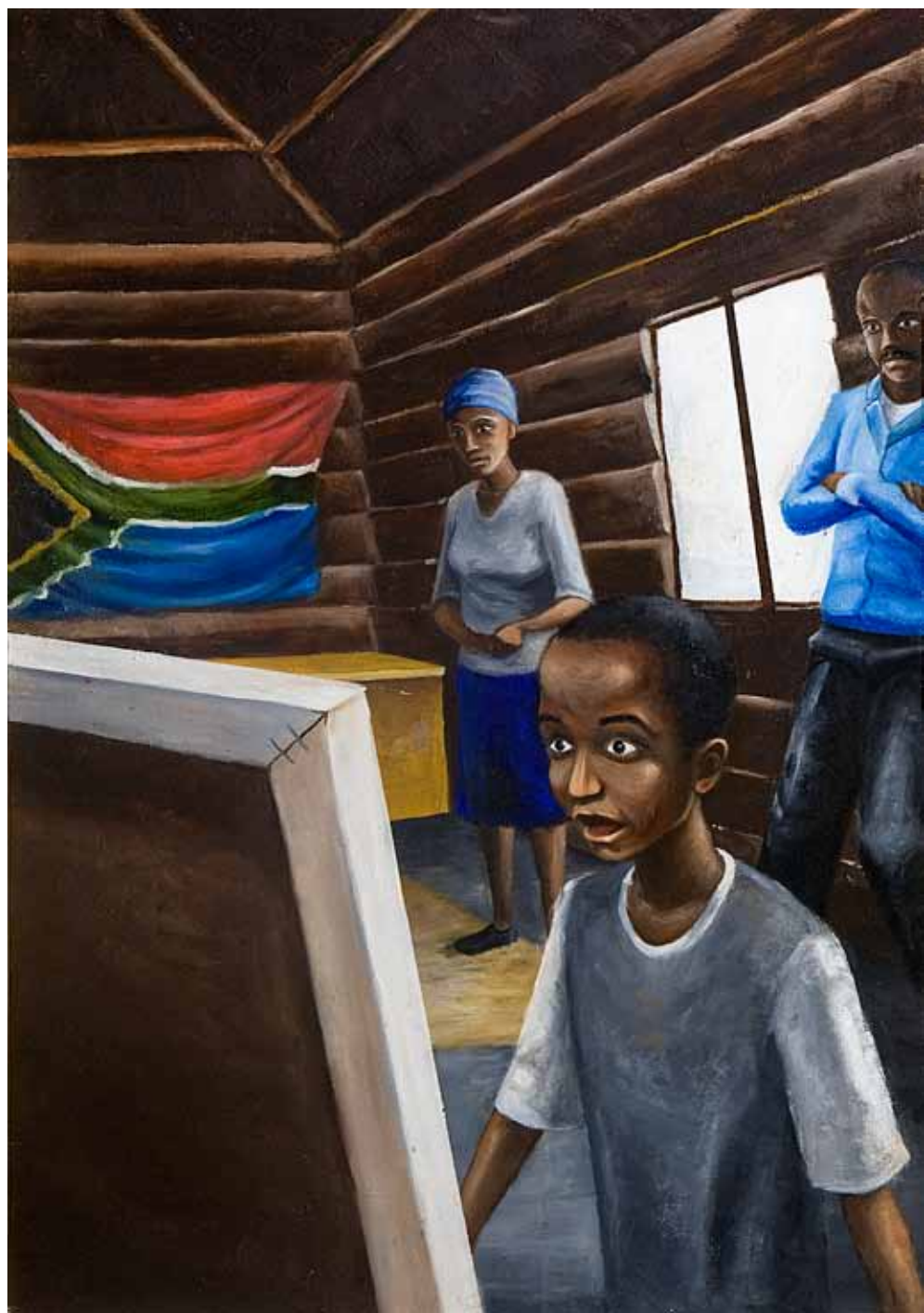
'Come, Khazamula, you have to see this painting.'

'I don't want to see any stupid painting. I am a football player.'

'So am I.' Khanyisa put him down in front of the painting but he had his eyes closed.

'Come on, Khazamula,' said Mani. 'Take a look.'

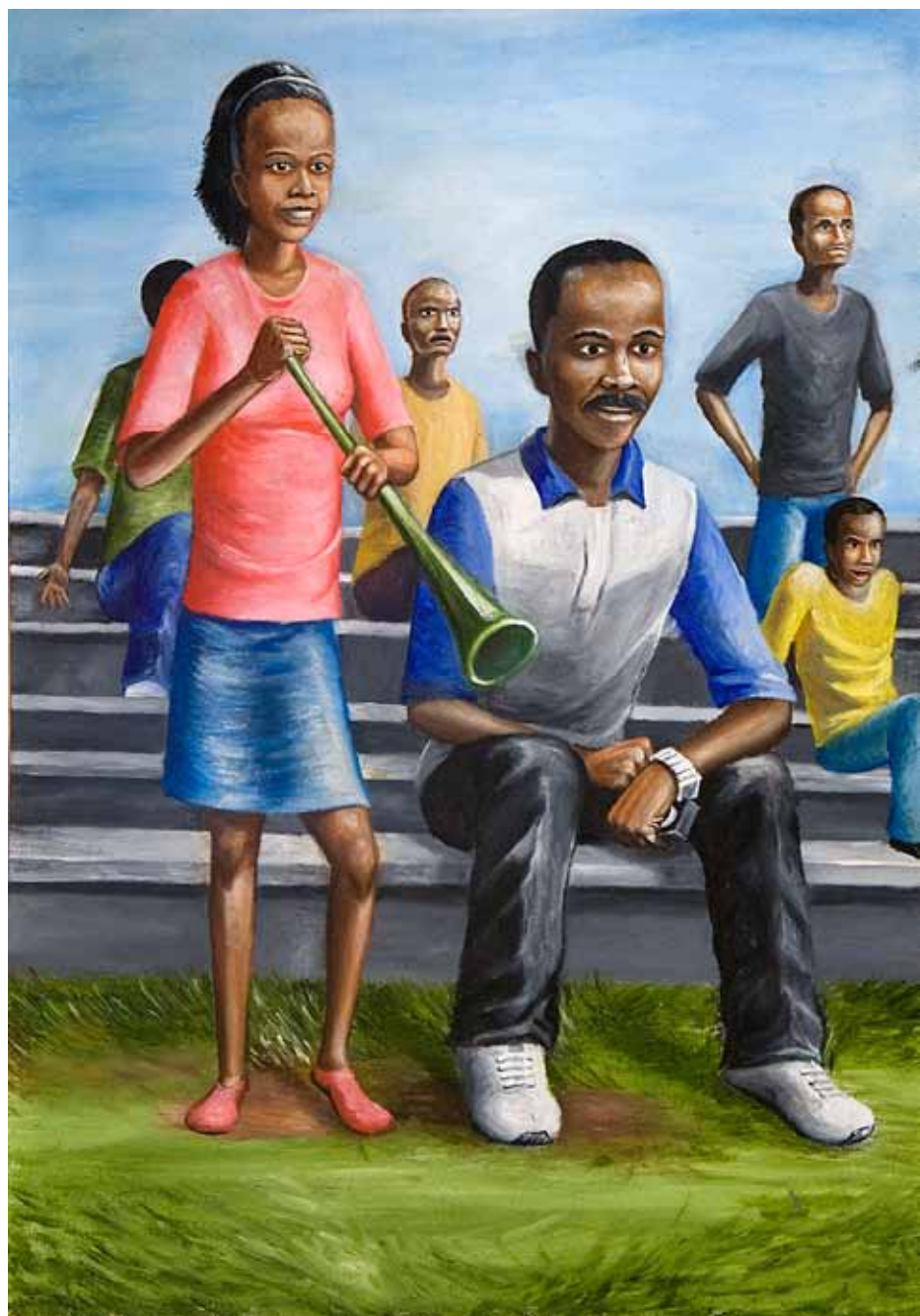
Papa nudged Khazamula. 'Open your eyes, Khazamula, look at this painting. I bet you, you will like it.'



‘A bet? How much?’

‘Ten rand.’

Khazamula opened his eyes slowly and looked at the painting. Then his mouth fell open; he couldn't take his eyes off the picture. He stared at the hero in the middle of the field. It wasn't Lucas Radebe; it wasn't Aaron Mokoena. It was ... he couldn't believe it! He was looking at himself. He, Khazamula, was the hero in the middle of the field.



Penalty Shoot Out

One day, Mrs Chauke received a phone call from Sekhunyanane. Her sister was ill and needed her help. When she told Papa, he agreed that she should go to Sekhunyanane to look after her sister. When Ma was ready to leave, she called for Khanyisa but Misaveni said she wasn't home. 'Why isn't she home yet? Where is she? I'm going to be away a few days and she will have to do the cooking.'

'She's still at school, Ma. She's at soccer practice.'

'Oh soccer again! She'll have to give that up while I'm away and take care of the family like a good daughter.'

'But Ma, she can't cook.'

'Nonsense. She's fifteen. She can cook.'

'No, she can't. We're going to starve.'

Just then Khanyisa came in and went straight to the refrigerator to get some juice.

'Khanyisa, you are going to have to give up your soccer for a few days,' Ma began.

'Oh no, Ma, I can't do that. We are getting ready for the schools' tournament which begins on Saturday and I need all the practice I can get.'

'I'm sorry Khanyisa, but you are my eldest child and you have to take care of the family while I am away.'

'Ma, you can't go away now. The tournament...'

'Your aunt, Nyeleti, is ill and needs me. I am leaving now. I have made a menu for you so you will know what to cook everyday.'

‘But Ma ...,’ Khanyisa protested.

‘You’re a big girl. You have responsibilities in the house. If you don’t learn now, you will never learn?’ Then Ma went outside to where Papa was waiting in the car.

When Papa came back after dropping Ma off, Khanyisa appealed to him. ‘Papa, Ma says I can’t go to soccer practice and the tournament starts on Saturday. She says I must stay home and cook.’

Khazamula who had come into the kitchen exclaimed, ‘Cook! You cook! Oh no, Papa, please save us from that.’

Misaveni chimed in, ‘Save us! Save us!’

Papa laughed. ‘All right. Now listen to me Khanyisa, I will take care of the cooking but you must promise me that when the soccer tournament is over you will learn to cook.’

Khanyisa threw her arms around her father. ‘I promise. I promise. Thank you, Papa. Thank you.’

And Misaveni and Khazamula chimed in, ‘Thank you, Papa. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.’

Papa shook his head and laughed.

The next afternoon, Khazamula and his friends were in the empty plot kicking the ball around. Khazamula could see Khanyisa with her teammates at the other end. While the other girls were kicking and passing, Khanyisa, who kicked very well and with both feet, was doing high jumps over a rope held by two of her teammates. She was working on gaining height. As a goalkeeper, she needed to be able to jump and dive to stop balls going into the net. And she trained hard. When she wasn’t on the field, she went off to the College gym to work with weights. Khazamula admired her because she was a good goalie but he wished she would be like other girls and learn to cook instead. He didn’t realize that Khanyisa was as determined as he was to make soccer her career.

On Saturday morning, Papa dropped Khazamula and Khanyisa off at Edwin Ndhambi High School, the only school in Mangombe with a soccer pitch. They were both nervous and excited. Khanyisa was playing in the senior girls’ division and Khazamula in the junior boys’ division. As there was only the one football field, the fixtures would take more than a week to complete. They

needed the whole of the Easter Holiday for the tournament. They didn't play on Good Friday but the finals would be on Easter Monday.

As they got out at the gate, Khazamula asked, 'Papa, are you coming back to watch?'

Papa looked at him with a mock serious expression, 'Oh no, I won't be able to. I have to stay home and do the cooking.'

'Oh Papa.' Khanyisa gave him a little punch on the shoulder.

Papa grinned, 'Of course, I'll be back. How could I miss a tournament in which the future Bafana and Banyana stars are playing? Good luck,' Papa called out as he was driving off, 'I hope you make it to the finals.'

And they did. Khanyisa's team had had no real opposition but they knew that they would face a strong team in the final. Khazamula's team had had one or two close calls, but they made it to the finals as well. The junior boys' division final would be the first of the matches to be played on Easter Monday morning. That would be followed by the girls' final and lastly the senior boys' game. Papa was very proud of his son and daughter. When he boasted to his friends, some of them frowned. 'How can you let your daughter play football? She should be learning our traditions instead.'

Papa laughed, 'Well, that is our family tradition. My sister plays football with the men in her village and she introduced Khanyisa to the game. From the time she was a little girl, Khanyisa has wanted to be a goalie like her aunt.'

On Monday morning, Khazamula and Khanyisa were up early. Khanyisa had to drag Misaveni out of bed. She wasn't interested in going to the grounds but Papa insisted. She had to be there to support her brother and sister. 'It's going to be boring,' she grumbled.

'No, it won't be. I want you to take photographs of the occasion and then put them all together in an album so Mother can see what she missed.'

Misaveni sighed, 'Okay, Papa.'

At the grounds, Papa and Misaveni took their places on the open stand. Misaveni had a store of chocolates, sweets, chips and juices to compensate for being there. She pulled out the camera and began to look at the crowd through it. Just as she turned towards the covered stand, she saw the junior boys' teams coming through the tunnel. She took a picture and when Khazamula came

running in, she zoomed in on him. During the match, she kept the focus on her little brother and whenever he got possession of the ball, she jumped up and began yelling, 'Look out, Khazamula, a defender is going to tackle you.' When he lost the ball, she collapsed on her seat, 'I warned him, Papa. I warned him.' Papa smiled quietly to himself. Then suddenly Khazamula was streaking along the sideline towards the goal box. Misaveni, with camera in hand, jumped up and kept the focus on her brother.

Defenders tried to tackle him but he dribbled around them, fooled them and entered the scoring area. The goalie came out and tried to grab the ball off his feet but Khazamula, too quick for him, smashed the ball into the back of the net. Misaveni jumped about screaming with enthusiasm. 'That's my little brother! That's my little brother!' Khazamula repeated his feat twice more and Misaveni was delirious with excitement. Khazamula was the hero of the game.

Papa laughed, 'Calm down, girl. Save something for your sister's match.'

But Misaveni had become a raving fan and during the girls' match, she grabbed a vuvuzela and made the biggest din each time Khanyisa stopped an attempt at goal. The girls' teams were evenly matched and at the end arrived at a goalless draw. That meant a penalty shoot out. When Misaveni saw Khanyisa standing alone in the goal mouth facing the striker from the rival team, she screamed, 'That's not fair. Papa, why are they doing that to her?'

'It's the only way to decide the winner. Each goalkeeper has to face five goal kicks and the one who saves the most, wins the match for her team.'

Misaveni sat frozen watching Khanyisa face the first goal kick. Papa had to take the camera from her. Khanyisa stood there concentrating on the ball; she wasn't going to let the striker fool her with tricky movements. The striker stepped back, ran forward and shot the ball towards the left corner. Khanyisa was ready for her and as the ball flew up, she dived to her left and pushed the ball away. Misaveni, tears running down her cheeks, grabbed somebody's vuvuzela and made a huge din. Then the other goalkeeper stepped into the goalmouth for her first turn. She too saved the first goal. Then it was Khanyisa's turn again. 'Papa, I don't think I can watch this.' Misaveni covered her head with her arms. She looked up only when there was a general shout as Khanyisa caught the ball that was coming straight at her. As the goalkeepers took their turns, Misaveni became so tense that Papa had to put his arm around her and hold her close. When the other goalkeeper didn't save the fourth ball, Misaveni shouted, 'Yay, we win.'

'No Misaveni, each side still has one more try.'

Khanyisa took her place in the middle of the goalmouth and she watched as the opposing striker placed the ball, moved back, ran up and kicked. Khanyisa could see the ball flying high to the right. It was out of reach. It would defeat her but her eyes flashed with anger. 'You are not going to get away ball,' she shouted and threw herself with all her might at the flying missile. Her fingers just touched it but it was enough to deflect its flight and it flew over the bar. Misaveni fell back against Papa, 'I saved it, Papa. I saved the goal.'

After the games, Papa took them to a restaurant to celebrate. When Khanyisa asked Misaveni how she had enjoyed the day, she just shrugged. 'Soccer is so boring.'

The Flag Crew

The only time Khanyisa switched on the TV was to watch football matches. Today she was going to watch Black Leopards playing in a Nedbank Cup fixture. She had wanted to go to Venda where the match was being played but Papa didn't have time to take her. He was visiting Freddy Mathebula, who had been involved in an accident some years before and had been confined to a wheel chair ever since. Freddy Mathebula had been the most outstanding player of his time but the accident, which had paralyzed him from the waist down, had brought a sudden end to his runaway success.

While she was waiting for the match to begin, Khanyisa went into the kitchen to get some juice. Khazamula was sitting at the table poring over his album of soccer stars.

'Hey Khazamula, Black Leopards are playing today. Don't you want to watch,' Khazamula shook his head. 'Oh come on, you know you can pick up tips watching games. Today I will keep my eyes fixed on Posnet Omony, Black Leopards' goalie. I think he's great. You coming?' Khazamula shook his head again. 'Oh, come on, cheer up. Why are you moping?'

'I wish I were living in a different country. I don't have a chance here in Limpopo. Look at Federico Macheda. He's only seventeen and he is playing for Manchester United. In their last two matches, he scored the winning goals. Man U discovered him and brought him from Italy to Manchester. They brought his whole family too.'

'Khazamula you are only eleven. You are a talented player. Just work hard and you will make it. Come on, now. Come watch the game with me.' But Khazamula just sat there dejectedly paging through his album. Khanyisa shrugged and went back to the living room. Just as she was about to sit down, she saw that the TV commercial calling for volunteers for the Confederations Cup Flag Crew was on. It was Khazamula's favourite commercial and she called out to him to come and watch. He ran in from the kitchen and stood in front of the TV.

First the Confederations Cup flag came rolling out at him and then the picture widened to show children holding it. More children came on carrying flags of different countries. They were shown marching onto the field. The next shot was of football stars singing a national anthem. Then came the great Brazilian footballer, Ronaldo, running, smiling and wagging his finger as he always does when he scores a goal. But Khazamula was waiting for the last shot. He stood watching with bated breath. Then he jumped up in excitement and laughed as his hero, Ronaldinho, the world's number one striker came on the screen, hoisting the Cup above his head.

'Ah, if I could be in the flag crew, I could see Ronaldinho in person. But I am not lucky. I won't get a chance.'

'You will next year, when you are twelve. Then you can apply to be in the flag crew.'

'It won't make a difference.'

'Really Khazamula, I thought you were a fighter. Why are giving up?'

'Being twelve won't make a difference. I know I won't get in.'

'You won't if you don't try.'

'It won't make any difference. Don't you see, kids like me don't stand a chance?'

'That's nonsense. Why do you say that?'

'They don't want Black kids. Didn't you see? All the kids in the advertisement are white.'

'Oh man. That's just an advertisement. The advertising agency chose those children for the advertisement. That is not the real flag crew that you see there.'

'But they show Black kids in other advertisements. Why not this one? White kids don't like soccer. Why did they choose them?'

'It's just a stupid mistake. It doesn't mean you can't apply.'

'That's what you say.' Khazamula stamped off to the kitchen. Khanyisa shrugged and turned to the football match.

When Papa came home that evening, Khanyisa asked him to explain to Khazamula about the flag crew. But Khazamula did not believe him either. 'Just watch the advertisement Papa and you will see.' So Papa sat down with Khazamula and watched.

'All right, my boy, you have made your point.'

'So I'm right. It's useless for me to apply.'

'We'll see about that. I am going to write to the sponsors and tell them what that advertisement is saying to you. I am going to tell them that you want to know why you cannot be in the flag crew.'

'Tell them I want to be there so I can see Ronaldinho. Maybe I can get his autograph.'

During the weeks that they waited for a reply from the flag crew sponsors, Papa would look impatiently through the post and then shake his head in disappointment. But Khazamula knew there would be nothing. He just said, 'Don't waste your time, Papa. I told you they don't take black children.'

Then one day there was a letter in the postbox with the logo of the sponsoring company. Khanyisa, on her way back from school, was the one to find it and she flew into the house like a goalie diving for the ball. 'Papa, Papa,' she shouted, 'a letter from the flag crew sponsors.'

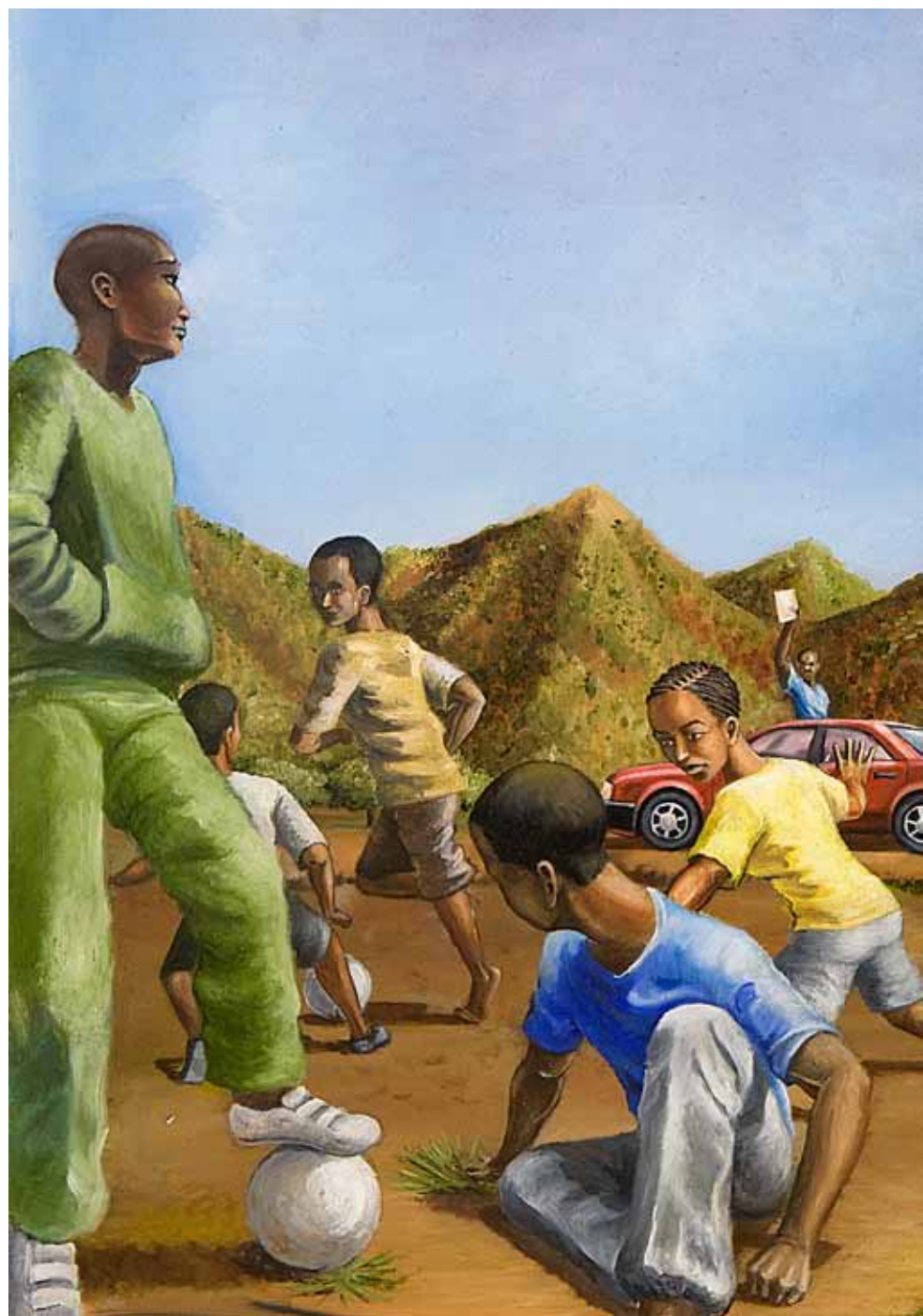
Mani came out of the kitchen, 'Papa hasn't come home yet. What's all the excitement?'

'It's the letter about the flag crew.'

'Flag crew? What's that? What flag?'

'Oh Ma!' Mother was just like Misaveni. She took no interest in soccer. She spent all her time sewing embroidered pictures of animals, trees and flowers. Khanyisa couldn't understand how she could sit for hours stitching away, and by hand too. Khanyisa couldn't sit still like that. How could Mother and Misaveni spend so much time sitting and poring over cloth or canvas? It would drive her crazy. Then she saw Khazamula at the gate, and ran out to show him the letter. 'See, you didn't believe Papa and me. But here it is – the letter about the flag crew.'

'So what does it say?'



‘I didn’t open it. It’s for Papa. I wish he would come home now.’

Khazamula pushed past Khanyisa. ‘I am sure the letter will tell Papa to mind his own business. They can choose whoever they want for the flag crew.’

It was getting late and Papa still wasn’t home. Mother asked Khanyisa to set the table for supper. ‘Papa phoned to say he will be late and we should not wait for him.’

‘Where is he Mani? What’s going on?’

‘He went to visit his friend, Freddy Mathebula.’

‘Uncle Freddy! Oh no! Then he won’t be home for hours.’

‘Your Papa is planning something with Freddy.’

‘What Ma? Mr Mathebula is a paraplegic. What can they do together?’

‘I don’t know, Khanyisa. Something about dreams. Dreaming or something?’

‘Ma, that doesn’t make sense. Never mind, Ma, you live in your own world of dreams.’

When it was time for bed, Papa still wasn’t home. Khanyisa tried to wait up for him but when Mani found her fast asleep on the sofa, she sent her off to bed.

In the morning, when the children went into the kitchen for breakfast, Khanyisa looked for Papa but he wasn’t there. ‘Mani, didn’t Papa come home last night.’

‘Yes, he did. But he was out again early this morning. He seems to be very excited about something.’

‘Was it the letter?’

‘Letter? What letter?’

‘Oh Ma, didn’t you tell him about the letter?’ She dashed into the living room and there was the letter still unopened lying on the coffee table. Khanyisa sighed and went back into the kitchen.

After school that afternoon, Khazamula and Khanyisa were at the grassy plot that they used as their football field. Khazamula was working with the other forwards, passing in formation. Khanyisa, at the side of the field, with two friends and a rope, was practising the high jump. A car pulled up nearby and hooted. When Khanyisa turned around, she saw Papa getting out of his car. He called and waved excitedly. He was holding the open letter in his hand. Khanyisa started to run towards him but Papa shouted, 'Get Khazamula. Tell him to come too.'

Khanyisa darted across the ground, grabbed hold of Khazamula and dragged him to where Papa was waiting. Papa was beaming. He took hold of Khazamula's hand and shook it vigorously.

'Congratulations, my boy, you did it. You did it.' He picked Khazamula up and gave him a big hug.

Khanyisa was jumping up and down beside them. 'What happened, Papa? What does the letter say? Papa, Papa!'

Papa set Khazamula down, took out the letter and pointing to it said, 'The sponsors say they are very sorry about the advertisement. They did not mean to give the impression that you could not be part of the flag crew.'

'You see, Khazamula, I told you,' Khanyisa was laughing.

'But wait, that's not all. They say they are very grateful to you for pointing out their mistake.'

'Oh, wow, Papa!' Khanyisa grabbed Khazamula and hugged him. 'You see, you see.'

'Wait Khanyisa, I haven't finished,' Papa said. 'To show you how grateful they are, they have decided that next year when you are twelve, you will be on the list for the flag crew of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.'

Khazamula's eyes opened wide. He couldn't speak. All he could see was the image of Ronaldinho, laughing, holding high the Confederations Cup Trophy.

A Superhero

One Saturday, Khazamula and his friends were playing a game of football in the long grass on their rough field. Khanyisa and some of her teammates were playing with them. Khanyisa was standing between two small piles of stones that were the goalposts. Khazamula, who had possession of the ball, was running up along the imaginary sideline with two defenders in hot pursuit but he snuck past them and was approaching the imaginary goal box. Watching him hurtling towards her, Khanyisa was poised for the attack. Just as her little brother drew up opposite her, she hurled herself at his feet, grabbed the ball and flung it over his head to her striker. Khazamula stared in astonishment for a moment and then streaked off down the field to be in position for a pass.

One of the defenders passed the ball to the other goalie who kicked it high over the sideline. It landed on the road and was almost squashed by an approaching car, Papa's car. Papa stopped alongside the field and the players saw that there was someone in the passenger seat. Papa got out, opened the boot, pulled out a wheelchair and took it around to his passenger, Freddy Mathebula, former star of Gama Gama, FC.

'What are they doing here?' Khanyisa wondered. 'Papa has been visiting Uncle Freddy a lot in the last few months.'

Uncle Freddy rode his wheelchair into the middle of the field and Papa motioned to all the players to come up around them and sit. He said that he and Uncle Freddy had a plan that involved all of them and he wanted to know what they thought of it. He told them that they had applied to the Dreamfields Project to help them provide proper soccer grounds and training for the children of Mangombe. All the little soccer players cheered. Khazamula almost jumped up to give his Papa a big hug.

Khanyisa suddenly remembered what Ma had said about dreams and dreaming and laughed to herself. Ma was a dreamer herself and never got anything right about soccer. Khanyisa put up her hand.

'Yes, Khanyisa,' Papa smiled.

‘What is the Dreamfields Project, Papa?’

‘It is a plan that a journalist, John Perlman, came up with to make the dreams of people like us come true. The Dreamfields people are helping communities like ours by building sports grounds and providing sports equipment and uniforms.’

Then all the players were shouting at once. ‘Are we going to get real soccer boots? Will we have jerseys? A proper soccer field? Proper training?’ Papa and Uncle Freddy, who were just as excited as the youngsters, laughed heartily.

‘And will we have a proper coach?’ Khazamula who had been involved with SCORE, which brought out overseas coaches, was hoping that Ronaldinho would come to Mangombe to coach them.

‘Yes,’ Papa said. ‘You will have a famous soccer star to train you. It took me a long time to convince him but he finally agreed.’ All the children looked eagerly at Papa but Khanyisa’s eyes were filled with suspicion. When Papa turned to Freddy, Khanyisa knew. Papa said, ‘Children, let me introduce you to your new coach, the fabulous Freddy Mathebula, former world-class striker, and star of Gama Gama, FC.’

The children looked at Uncle Freddy, their eyes full of uncertainty. ‘But Uncle Freddy is crippled,’ Khazamula burst out, ‘how can he coach us?’ Uncle Freddy’s face fell. He looked upset and turned his wheel chair to go.

Papa stopped him. ‘Khazamula, you apologize to Uncle Freddy at once.’

‘But Papa...’

Uncle Freddy put his hand on Papa’s arm. ‘It’s all right, Jabu. I understand. I told you it wouldn’t work.’

‘No, Freddy,’ Papa said, ‘this project won’t work without you. You are the inspiration behind it. I would never have approached Dreamfields if it hadn’t been for you.’ Then Papa turned to Khazamula. ‘So you think that Uncle Freddy is not good enough to be your coach. Why? Because he is in a wheelchair? Do you know what that is? It’s discrimination. It’s like saying that because you are black, you cannot be in the flag crew for the FIFA World Cup.’ Khazamula hung his head but he still couldn’t see how a person in a wheelchair could be a coach.

'Haven't you seen our wheelchair basketball players? Haven't you seen Oscar Pistorius, who has no legs, running in races and winning? Open your eyes children. Heroes don't let anything stand in their way. They still take part in sport even when they lose one limb, two limbs, they don't give up. That is what you call heroic. They are powerful people. They believe in themselves and do not give up when they face tremendous challenges. But I know some people, people who have both their legs,' he looked straight at Khazamula, 'who give up when things are not going their way.' Papa stopped to look at each and every child there. 'Now, are you prepared to work with a hero who knows more about soccer than all of us put together? Are you smart enough to take advantage of that? Or are you going to cling to your prejudices and lose someone who can make this club, the Mangombe Eagles, a truly great soccer club?'

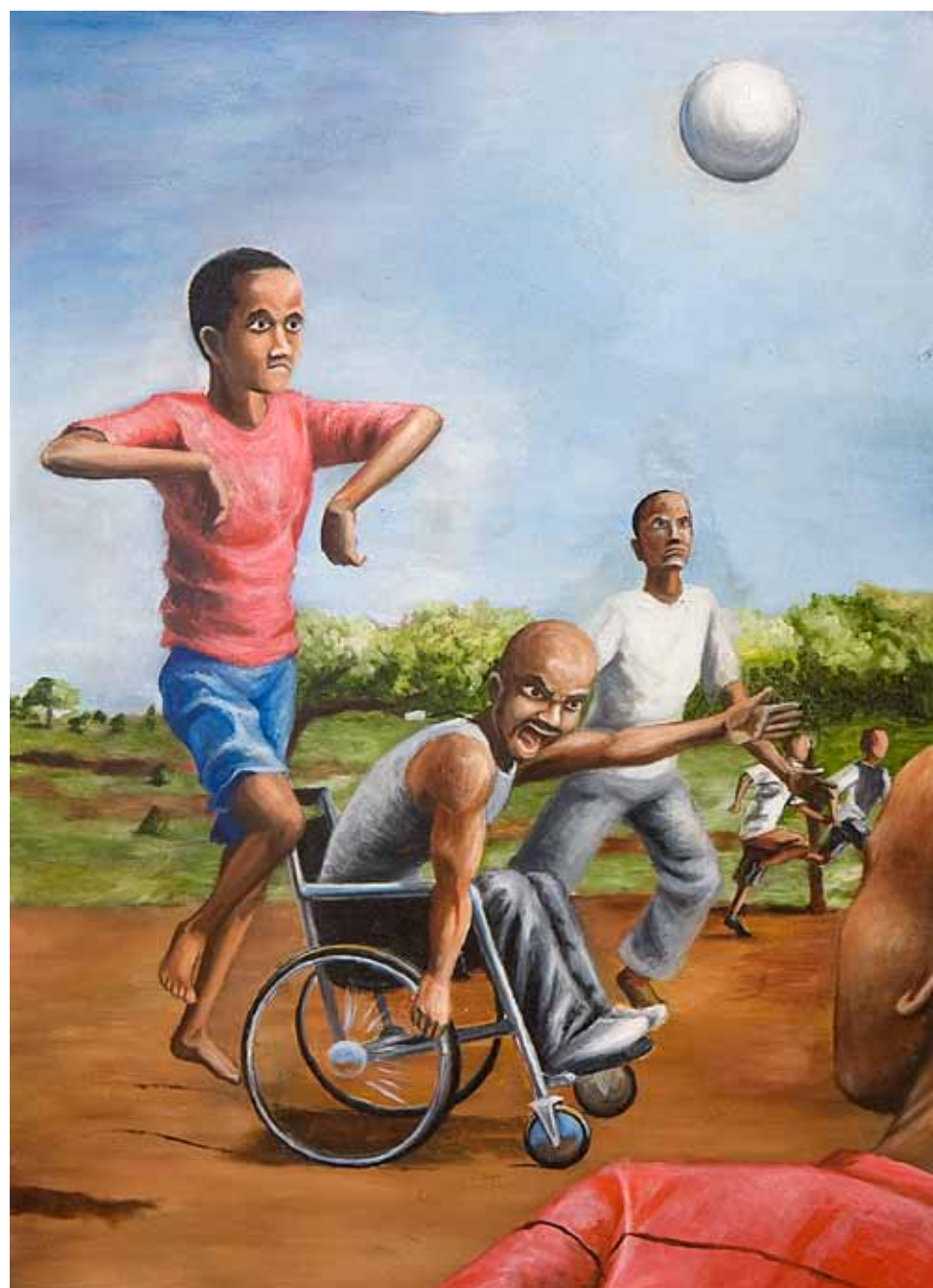
Khanyisa spoke up. 'Uncle Freddy, please forgive us for our doubts. I think you will make a wonderful coach. I want to learn from you.'

The other children were not sure but when they thought of a proper football field and all the football equipment, they agreed to accept Uncle Freddy. But Uncle Freddy could see that they didn't really want him.

Papa said quietly to Uncle Freddy, 'Please brother, give us a chance. I am depending on you.' Freddy looked at him uncertainly and then gave a small smile. Papa shook his hand heartily. 'Thank you, brother. Thank you. Thank you. Your wonderful talent should not go to waste.'

In the next few weeks, after the Dreamfields people had turned the grassy plot into a proper football field, the training began. Some of the children did not turn up, the ones who didn't believe in Uncle Freddy. Those who stayed with him were put through a vigorous training programme. Uncle Freddy's wheelchair could be seen moving swiftly over the field as he explained what he wanted, corrected mistakes and challenged them to aim higher and higher. The children soon learned that Uncle Freddy wasn't a useless cripple, he was a most demanding coach and as they began to feel their bodies growing stronger and their skills improving, they realised that they were very lucky to have him as a coach. The teachers who had coached them before, couldn't compare.

Even Khazamula had to admit that somebody like Uncle Freddy must have trained Ronaldinho when he was a boy. And Khazamula wanted to cry with happiness. He knew now, really knew, for the first time that he was going to make it. One of these days, people would be speaking of him as they speak of Federico Macheda and Tyroane Sandows. He felt ashamed that he had doubted Uncle Freddy.



One afternoon, Papa took Ma to watch the Mangombe Eagles training. Ma, of course, didn't know what was going on but she could feel the joy in Papa. And as she watched Uncle Freddy's wheel chair flying over the field, she saw again the superstar of Gama Gama, FC. She smiled. She had a wonderful idea for a new embroidered picture.

II

Foreigners

One Saturday, Mani, Khanyisa and Khazamula were at the supermarket buying groceries. Khazamula was pushing the trolley and Khanyisa was loading it with items that Mani was reading and ticking off on her list.

When they got to the meat counter, Khazamula perked up. 'Ma, are you going to buy sausages?' Mother nodded. 'Oh good! Can we have sausages for supper tonight?'

'No. Tonight I am teaching Khanyisa to cook chicken.'

'Can't you teach her to make sausages instead?'

'No, I already have the chicken defrosting in the fridge. We have to cook it tonight. Don't worry,' Ma said, 'we will have sausages tomorrow and I will teach you how to cook them.'

'Me, Ma? But I'm not a girl. Why should I learn to cook?'

'Because you eat.'

'But men don't cook, Ma.'

'Papa cooks,' Khanyisa said. 'When Ma went away and we were in the schools' tournament, Papa cooked for us.'

'That's okay, Khazamula. If you don't want to cook, we can put the sausages back.'

'No Ma, don't do that.'

'It's no use buying food that nobody wants to cook.'

'All right, Ma. You can teach me to cook.'

‘Uncle Freddy cooks too. He says that when he played for a club in England, he had to learn to cook. They don’t eat pap and vleis like we do. He says his first attempts were terrible. The pap was too thin and he burnt the meat. But he met some South Africans in London who taught him how to cook. Even now he cooks for his family at least twice a week.’

Mani smiled. ‘I see, Khanyisa. So that’s why you have suddenly become interested in cooking.’

‘If I go overseas like Uncle Freddy, I have to be able to cook too.’

‘Yes, me too!’ Khazamula was nodding vigorously.

After they had paid for the groceries, Khazamula pushed the trolley out into the parking lot where Ma was parked. Just as Ma opened the boot, a boy suddenly rushed out from nowhere, grabbed Mani’s bag and ran off. Khanyisa and Khazamula chased after him and just as he got to the entrance, Khanyisa dived at the boy and brought him down. Khazamula took the bag from him and Khanyisa pulled the boy up.

‘I am taking you to the security guard. He will call the police and you will go to jail.’

Ma came up at that moment. ‘Wait a minute, Khanyisa. What’s your name boy?’ The boy did not say a word. He just stared at them sullenly.

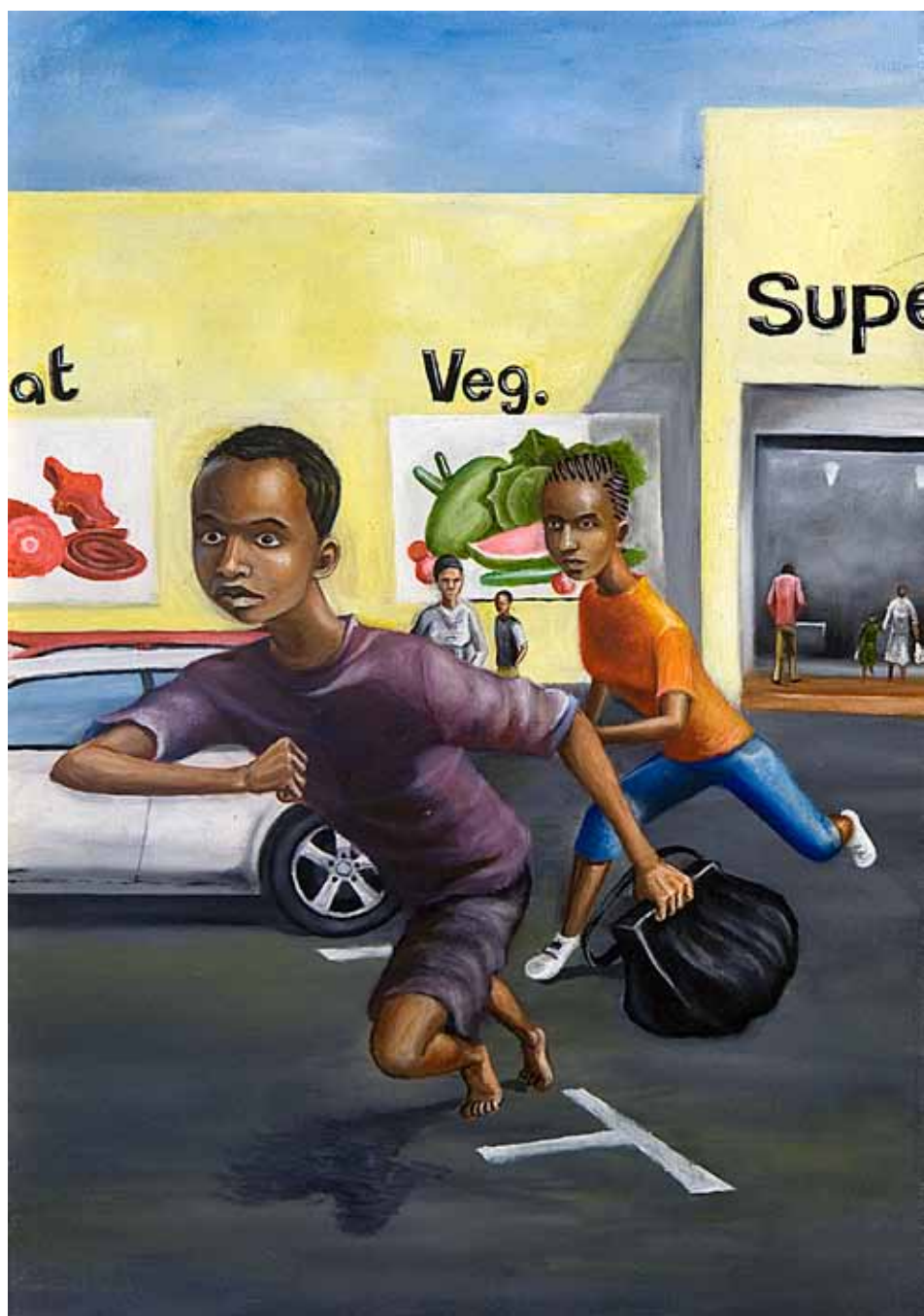
‘Ma, this boy is from Hlupekani, the squatter camp near our soccer field. I have seen him many times. He comes to watch us playing.’ Khazamula turned to the boy, ‘What’s your name? If you don’t tell us, we’re taking you straight to jail.’ The boy stared defiantly at Khazamula.

‘Are you from Zimbabwe?’ Ma asked. No answer. ‘Where are your parents?’ No answer.

Khanyisa was angry. ‘What do you want with this boy, Ma? These people don’t belong here. They leave their country, come here, beg and steal and expect us to look after them.’

‘Yes, and they take away our jobs,’ Khazamula added.

‘Look at this boy Khanyisa, Khazamula, a poor starving boy with no parents, no one to look after him. How would you like to be on your own like this?’ She turned to the boy. ‘You are coming with me. Bring him to the car, Khanyisa.’



‘Are you taking him home, Ma? You can’t do that. He is so dirty and he stinks.’

‘So would you, if you didn’t have any one to take care of you.’

When they got home, Papa had to come and help them get the boy out of the car. He wouldn’t budge and then when they got him out he tried to run off. Eventually, Papa got him into the bathroom and put him in the tub. He screamed and yelled while Papa was scrubbing him down and there was water all over the bathroom.

Meanwhile, Mother had gone to look through Khazamula’s clothes. The strange boy was about the same size as her son.

‘What are you doing, Ma. You can’t give him my clothes.’

‘Why not? You never wear these pants and this T-shirt.’

She looked through Khazamula’s underwear, socks and shoes. Khazamula was right behind her, yelling, ‘No, not my underpants. Ma, not those socks. Those shoes!’

Ma took no notice of Khazamula. When she had a complete outfit, she took it to the bathroom where Papa helped the boy into the clothes. When Ma came into the kitchen, Khanyisa was standing there with her arms folded. ‘What are you doing, Ma? Are you going to adopt that boy?’

‘I don’t know, Khanyisa. I haven’t thought that far. All I know is that he is hungry and he needs a meal. So get out the chicken from the refrigerator. It must have thawed completely by now. And cut it up as I showed you last week. I am going to get the other ingredients ready. As soon as you have cut up the chicken, I will show you what to do next.’

Khanyisa was cross but she got busy. You couldn’t argue with Ma.

When the little boy came out of the bathroom, clean and neatly dressed, Papa brought him into the living room and put him down in front of the TV. The boy sat there stiff, with eyes downcast. Just then Misaveni came back from her Saturday art lesson with Jackson Shongwe. She was surprised to see the little fellow. ‘Hello, who is this?’

Khazamula was just about to raise his voice to complain but Papa cut him off. ‘A friend.’ Behind Papa’s back, Khazamula was making all kinds of signs

at Misaveni so she went off into the kitchen to find out from Khanyisa. Then Papa switched on the TV to watch a football game. As soon as the boy heard the sounds of vuvuzelas and people chanting, he took a furtive look. Black Leopards were playing Platinum Stars. 'Hey, Khazamula,' Papa asked, 'is that a new defender in the Leopards' team?'

'I don't know, Papa.'

Papa saw that the strange boy was staring at the TV. Papa called for Khanyisa. Misaveni came back from the kitchen. 'Khanyisa is busy cooking, Papa. Can I help?'

Khazamula burst out laughing. 'What do you know about football?'

'Oh, is it about football? Khanyisa won't be long, Papa. Supper is ready; she is setting the table.'

'Oh, what did she cook? It smells good.' Papa glanced at the little boy who was listening to every word even though his eyes were glued to the TV.

'Chicken stew and pap. Next week, Mani is going to teach me to cook too.'

'No, she is going to teach me to cook sausages,' Khazamula called out. The strange boy looked up eagerly but looked down again when he caught Papa's eye.

'Oh, so you're going to learn how to cook too? I thought that was for girls.'

'No Papa, Uncle Freddy cooks. All great football players cook.' Papa laughed.

Khanyisa came into the living room. 'Supper is on the table.'

'Khanyisa, just come and see if you can tell me who that Black Leopards' defender is. No 30, oh, he's off screen now. He is a master. I am glad he's in our team.' The little stranger looked up and wanted to speak but he caught Papa's eye again and turned his head to the TV.

Khanyisa was staring at the set, 'I can't think of his name. I know he's from Malawi.'

'And they also have two midfielders from Malawi.' Khazamula added.

Papa could see a little smile on the strange boy's face. 'Malawians, eh?'

'Oh, I know who that defender is,' Khanyisa said, 'it's Robert Ngambi.'

'No,' a voice rang out from the chair opposite the TV. Everyone turned to look at the little stranger. He dropped his eyes immediately and tried to squeeze himself into the back of the chair.

'No?' Papa said. 'Not Robert Ngambi?' Papa looked at the stranger. 'Do you know who No 30 is?' The boy's head came up slowly and he nodded at Papa. 'Tell us then. I am dying to know. The man is such a dynamic player.'

The boy's voice came out in a whisper, 'Peter Mponda.'

'Of course,' Khanyisa agreed, 'Peter Mponda.'

Khazamula shouted. 'Hooray for Lidoda Dhuva, the Black Leopards!' Khanyisa and Khazamula started dancing around the room, chanting, 'Lidoda Dhuva, Lidoda Dhuva.'

'Khanyisa, you said Peter Mponda was one of three from Malawi. Who are the other two?'

Khanyisa frowned, Khazamula frowned, but the little stranger was smiling. Father turned to him, 'I think you know, don't you?' The boy nodded. His eyes were shining. 'So tell us,' Papa said.

'Robert Ngambi and Fischer Kondowe.'

'All from Malawi?' Papa was smiling at the little boy who nodded. 'Are you from Malawi too?' The little boy nodded again.

Mother, who had come in and had been listening, smiled. 'So Malawians have come to make us famous. And we don't mind them when they play football for us, I see. Since Malawians are the stars of our team, I think it will be an honour to have this little Malawian at our table for supper.' She came up to the strange boy and held out her hand to him. Then she led him into the kitchen. 'Come on, everyone, Khanyisa has cooked us a lovely meal.'

These are stories about the Chauke family who live in Limpopo Province. The family consists of a father, a soccer enthusiast who gets children involved in the sport, a mother, an artist who creates embroidered pictures, and three children.

Khanyisa, the oldest, is in the school's soccer team and dreams of playing for Banyana Banyana one day. Her brother, Khazamula, the youngest of the three children, is also in the school soccer team and he too wants to represent his country in soccer. Misaveni, the second child, takes after her mother and is studying art.

The stories reflect the children's ambitions and their efforts to realize them.

