

### ***Foreigners***

One Saturday, Mani, Khanyisa and Khazamula were at the supermarket buying groceries. Khazamula was pushing and Khanyisa was loading the trolley with goods 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, at least twice a week, for his family.’

‘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,’ shouted Khazamula.

After they 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.’

He 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 shouted.

‘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.

My 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?' 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. It smells good. Next week, Mani is going to teach me to cook too.'

‘No, she is going to teach me to cook sausages,’ Khazamula shouted. 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 know they have two midfielders from Malawi.’

‘And a Malawian defender too.’ Khazamula shouted.

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

‘I think I know who that defender is,’ Khanyisa said. ‘It has to be 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 addressed 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 shouted. ‘Papa, he is one of three Black Leopards who have been recruited to the Bafana Bafana team.’

‘Isn’t that great, Papa?’ Khazamula shouted. ‘Hooray for Lidoda Dhuva, the Black Leopards!’

Khanyisa and Khazamula started dancing around the room, shouting Lidoda Dhuva, Lidoda Dhuva.

‘Khanyisa, you said Peter Mponda was one of three who will be playing for Bafana Bafana. 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.

‘Peter Mponda, Robert Ngambi and Fischer Kondowe.’

‘Are they all from Malawi?’ Papa was smiling at the little boy who nodded. ‘And 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.’

So 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 a lovely meal for us.’