

Misaveni's Painting

Khazamula was sitting at the table in the kitchen reading the newspaper. He was looking through advertisements and articles on the 2010 World Cup 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 perusing 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. So 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?' '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.