

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 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.

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 I made arrangements for Misaveni to attend 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 boys' and girls' soccer teams and they travelled to Cape Town for the Cup of Heroes Tournament.

Even though their teams did not win, Khazamula became very popular with the crowds.

And Khazamula made up his mind that soccer would be his life.

Nothing was going to stop that and he continued to search for opportunities.