

## ***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 she gets 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?'

Mani went off.

Misaveni nodded and

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. M  
ani 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. The first one she took, 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!'