

Magozwe

- ✎ Lesley Koyi
- 👤 Wiehan de Jager
- 💬 engelska
- 📊 nivå 5





In the busy city of Nairobi, far away from a caring life at home, lived a group of homeless boys. They welcomed each day just as it came. On one morning, the boys were packing their mats after sleeping on cold pavements. To chase away the cold they lit a fire with rubbish. Among the group of boys was Magozwe. He was the youngest.



When Magozwe's parents died, he was only five years old. He went to live with his uncle. This man did not care about the child. He did not give Magozwe enough food. He made the boy do a lot of hard work.



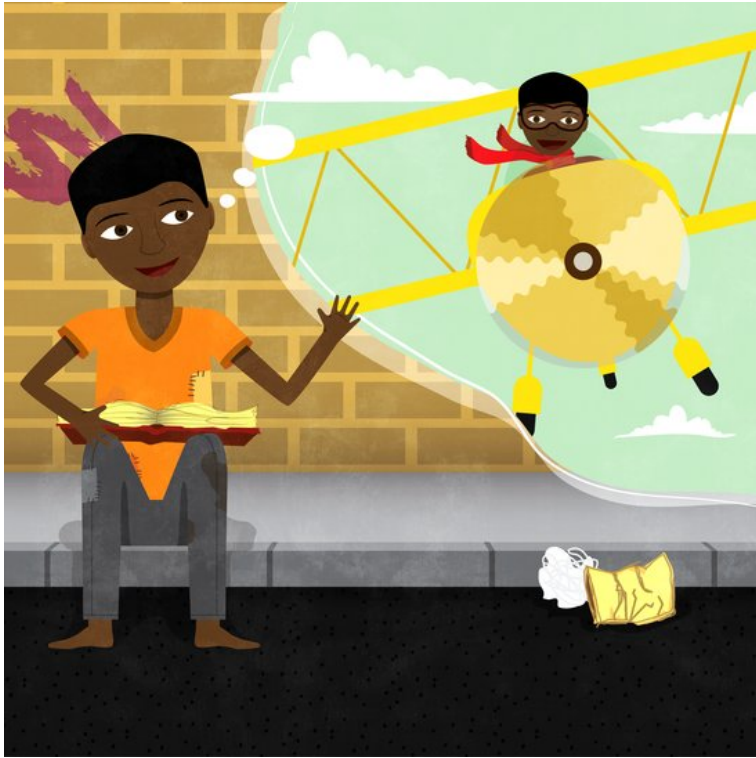
If Magozwe complained or questioned, his uncle beat him. When Magozwe asked if he could go to school, his uncle beat him and said, “You’re too stupid to learn anything.” After three years of this treatment Magozwe ran away from his uncle. He started living on the street.



Street life was difficult and most of the boys struggled daily just to get food. Sometimes they were arrested, sometimes they were beaten. When they were sick, there was no one to help. The group depended on the little money they got from begging, and from selling plastics and other recycling. Life was even more difficult because of fights with rival groups who wanted control of parts of the city.



One day while Magozwe was looking through the dustbins, he found an old tattered storybook. He cleaned the dirt from it and put it in his sack. Every day after that he would take out the book and look at the pictures. He did not know how to read the words.



The pictures told the story of a boy who grew up to be a pilot. Magozwe would daydream of being a pilot. Sometimes, he imagined that he was the boy in the story.



It was cold and Magozwe was standing on the road begging. A man walked up to him. "Hello, I'm Thomas. I work near here, at a place where you can get something to eat," said the man. He pointed to a yellow house with a blue roof. "I hope you will go there to get some food?" he asked. Magozwe looked at the man, and then at the house. "Maybe," he said, and walked away.



Over the months that followed, the homeless boys got used to seeing Thomas around. He liked to talk to people, especially people living on the streets. Thomas listened to the stories of people's lives. He was serious and patient, never rude or disrespectful. Some of the boys started going to the yellow and blue house to get food at midday.



Magozwe was sitting on the pavement looking at his picture book when Thomas sat down next to him. "What is the story about?" asked Thomas. "It's about a boy who becomes a pilot," replied Magozwe. "What's the boy's name?" asked Thomas. "I don't know, I can't read," said Magozwe quietly.



When they met, Magozwe began to tell his own story to Thomas. It was the story of his uncle and why he ran away. Thomas didn't talk a lot, and he didn't tell Magozwe what to do, but he always listened carefully. Sometimes they would talk while they ate at the house with the blue roof.



Around Magozwe's tenth birthday, Thomas gave him a new storybook. It was a story about a village boy who grew up to be a famous soccer player. Thomas read that story to Magozwe many times, until one day he said, "I think it's time you went to school and learned to read. What do you think?" Thomas explained that he knew of a place where children could stay, and go to school.



Magozwe thought about this new place, and about going to school. What if his uncle was right and he was too stupid to learn anything? What if they beat him at this new place? He was afraid. "Maybe it is better to stay living on the street," he thought.



He shared his fears with Thomas. Over time the man reassured the boy that life could be better at the new place.



And so Magozwe moved into a room in a house with a green roof. He shared the room with two other boys. Altogether there were ten children living at that house. Along with Auntie Cissy and her husband, three dogs, a cat, and an old goat.



Magozwe started school and it was difficult. He had a lot to catch up. Sometimes he wanted to give up. But he thought about the pilot and the soccer player in the storybooks. Like them, he did not give up.



Magozwe was sitting in the yard at the house with the green roof, reading a storybook from school. Thomas came up and sat next to him. “What is the story about?” asked Thomas. “It’s about a boy who becomes a teacher,” replied Magozwe. “What’s the boy’s name?” asked Thomas. “His name is Magozwe,” said Magozwe with a smile.



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Skriven av: Lesley Koyi

Illustrerad av: Wiehan de Jager

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