

T H E R E ' S " G O L D " I N C A P E T O W N

The radio was blurring in the far corner of the hut. It was switched on Radio English. The announcer was explaining the tremendous potential hidden in the soaring mineral prices. The revenue of the gold was reflecting stability unequalled anywhere on the globe.

Mama was nursing a fire outside where-on was boiling white mielies, the supper for the night. She wiped the tears from her eyes caused by the smoke. On entering the hut she could hear that the radio was on English. She gave her listening son, Temba, an angry look and he knew that he had to switch the radio to Radio Bantu. In spite of the switch-over his mother still gave him an angry look.

"Why do you always switch the radio on English?" his mother coarsely asked. Temba swallowed deep and answered: "Because I'm interested in the rising prices of minerals of which we hear so much in school". His mother looked at him saying: "I thought you would love to hear news from your father in Johannesburg, but you're interested in minerals instead". Temba felt bitter because he gave his mother a wrong impression of how he really felt. "Go and put some wood on the fire," his mother ordered him. Temba went outside and wiped the tears from his eyes while pulling long logs of wood with the other hand. He felt inwardly hurt by what his mother said. His father was somewhere in Johannesburg. The only thing Temba was certain of is that there's money where his father is and his mother depends on it. So far his mother hadn't received any word about his father's whereabouts. The glittering sweatdrops steamed from his forehead as he chopped the wood into sizes. So many thoughts triggered through his mind without him being able to concentrate on anyone. His mother's words were still echoing in his mind. It haunted him like a tiger stalking a steer. He loved his parents and was concerned about the distorted image his mother may have of him.



"Mother didn't receive any mail to say whether anything has happened to dad," Temba mumbled to himself. He quickly gathered all the wood in his arms. While walking towards the door his mind flashed back to the Rand where his father is supposed to be. Someone was collecting all the gold in his arms for himself or else what happens to it. Before reaching the stoep he tripped over his own feet and the wood fell out of his hands. His mother opened the door after hearing the noise and shouted: "You clumsy thing! Is there nothing you can do properly?" Temba stood up and he fell again, but this time it was over the wood. Tears glittered from the corners of his eyes. He was deeply hurt, but he still gathered all the chopped wood. After neatly packing the wood away under the stove, he went to the shop to check if there was any post.

Along the road Temba met some of his school-mates who had parcels with them sent by their fathers. "Hello Temba! Temba!" they shouted playfully. Temba just smiled and walked on. "Are you also going for parcels?" they asked, but there was no answer. The shop was full when Temba arrived. The customers were all queuing for groceries and their mail. The shop was a beehive of activity as inhabitants brought livestock in exchange for sugar and coffee. There was a sudden twinkle in his eyes when he received a letter addressed to his mother. Temba was so excited that he couldn't hear a friend shouting from the queue, "Temba, please wait for me". He ran home as fast as his bones could carry him. His mother was standing on the stoep when he rushed towards her with the letter. She recognised her husband's handwriting, but she was puzzled by one thing. The letter was posted in Cape Town and as far as she knew her husband was on the Rand though she had never heard from him since. She smiled broadly and so did Temba who was anxiously waiting for his mother to share whatever news available.

"Your father is in Cape Town. According to the letter he now works at the docks in Table Bay. The money is better than on the mines. He'll be home for Christmas this year. Your father also wants to know if you're doing your homework because he wouldn't like you to suffer like him".



Early in the mornings James Maklaba travels from Langa to Cape Town by train. He travels third class which is not much per month. He cooks in commune with other workers at the Bachelor's quarters of Langa. They cook a huge pot of white mielies which lasts them for a week. Its only Sundays when its a special dish of mielie rice, potatoes and meat. Jelly and custard is seen only when servant rooms are visited on Sundays. Because of all the hardships he had to endure, James' ambition was to see his son educated so that he could one day spend his life with his family. It was hard work at the cold storage of Table Bay and extremely cold during winter. In spite of all this at least they were paid overtime which was better than the Mines'.

Temba's mother's attitude towards him had changed so much that he was surprised when his mother said: "Temba, my child. You need shoes and a jersey for school". Though happy, Temba was still puzzled how his father happened to be in Cape Town. He was big enough to know that it's not so easy for any migrant labourer to change from one employment place to another. "Mama, tell me. When did father leave Johannesburg and why?" Replacing the letter in the envelope she replied: "Don't ask questions my child. Your father had sent us money. We now know he's still alive even if it is in Cape Town".

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