



Dreams of Gold

By Wayne Visser

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I am Shado. I am called *sangoma* and *sanusi* by my people; *shaman* and mystic by others. I am the keeper of legends, the healer of disease, the voice of ancestors, the interpreter of dreams, the teller of stories. In days gone by, the people of my tribe – young and old, rich and poor, chief and beggar – would gather around a blazing fire under the star-beaded African sky, and listen to my stories. Today, my people are scattered by the winds, but my stories live on. Through the written word, I speak to a larger tribe, who live in places and listen at times that are unknown to me. Still, I think of them – of you, the reader – as seated around a common fire, which is the soul's yearning for meaning in an often-times bewildering world.

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This is a great story. I tell it from my own recollections, spanning more than sixty years. It is a life story, but not my own. It began one African summer night. I, a young initiate in the ways of divination, had seen an omen in the sky: bright-crimson blood smeared across the sun-bleached, dusty horizon. This was no ordinary sunset, I could tell. Something significant had happened, or was about to happen. A massacre of sorts. I alerted the village chief of my premonition, and he wisely doubled the number of guards on duty that night.

But, as we were soon to find out, the danger had not been our own. Two days later, the news from the city finally snaked its way across the green hills to our remote, rural location. More of our brothers and sisters had made the ultimate sacrifice in our struggle for freedom. It happened when government police opened fire on an angry crowd, comprised mostly of school children. They were protesting against the racism that grips our troubled land like the icy hand of death. In the wake of this tragedy, outrage spread like a bush-fire throughout the country. Angry youths took to the street, looting shops, petrol-bombing cars and smashing public property.

The reaction in our small community was thankfully less violent, although emotions ran high. It was in the midst of this turmoil that the ancestors delivered a message of hope. It came in the guise of a recently-married woman in our tribe. This young woman (I was scarcely older than her at the time) came to me for a consultation about a disturbing dream she'd had. She described her strange journey across the ethereal night plains as follows:

I came upon a praying mantis in the field. Knowing this to be a sacred sign, I prayed my thanks to the sky gods. Then I noticed a golden thread, which reached up from the thatched roof of my hut to a hole in the clouds. Without hesitation, like a spider, I climbed up into the clouds, where I was met by a hare, who escorted me to the foot of a fertile hill and told me to wait.





After a short time, a radiant, golden light appeared at the mountain top and descended slowly toward me. As it approached, the glare was unbearable and I shielded my eyes from its painful brilliance. Suddenly, I realised that this was the mighty Sun King, so I threw myself on the ground in awe and began to worship his glory.

Then, in a voice from nowhere and everywhere, the King said that He had sent for me in order that I might carry a special gift back to the Land People. Whereupon He sprinkled a few grains of golden dust into my hand and said, 'Swallow these, for they are like the gold dust that I once commanded the mole to bury in the womb of the Great Mother Earth.'

This being said and done, a blinding flash of lightning struck me on the forehead and He was gone. Still dazed and confused, I was led back to the hole in the clouds by a porcupine, who gave me one of her quills, saying, 'This is for protection in the World of Dust.' At last, I awoke and told my husband of the dream, but neither of us could decipher its meaning.

Even as a young and relatively inexperienced initiate, it was immediately clear to me that this dream held great significant. The night-land journey that the young woman had described to me was full-to-bursting with sacred symbols, like a rain-pregnant black cloud just before the refreshing thunderstorm breaks. I felt so strongly about the importance of the dream that, before I conveyed its interpretation to my anxious supplicant, I first consulted the senior *sangoma* of the region, as well as the elders of the tribe. They confirmed my intuition, that this was indeed a timely and potent message from the gods. In the animated dialogue that followed, we debated long into the night, until we reached consensus over its meaning. After informing the chief of our conclusions, I summoned the woman back and proceeded to decode the dream's contents:

"Two of our greatest deities, Praying Mantis and Sun King, have ordained that you will give birth to a boy child, whose life will be greatly blessed. Our brother, the hare, confirms this message of fertility, but also cautions that this boy's weakness will be his hasty desire for success and his easy distraction from the true path. Our sister, the porcupine, warns that in order to survive in this hostile land, he will need protection from the forces of evil, but the quill has the power to create a new era of harmony between black and white. He will need to learn the lessons of gold and his mission will be to re-establish the glory of the sun among the peoples of the Earth. In him is the fire of creation, but also the winds of chaos. He will be a blazing star in the world, ever under the watchful care of our ancestors in the sky."

Tears were streaming down the young woman's face, as waves of emotion crashed upon the shore of her consciousness – relief, joy, hope and fear, all swirling together in eddying currents that overwhelmed her senses.

By Spring, she was the proud mother of a baby boy and stood beside her husband beaming before the gathered tribe, ready to perform the sunrise ceremony of dedication. I was called upon to exercise my ceremonial duties of consecration (for the first time, if the truth be told).





Fixing my gaze on the innocent young couple standing across the crackling fire from me, I began.

“Will the parents please bring the child forward so that we might dedicate him into the care of our ancestors. By what name do you call this boy?”

The father spoke, in deep and measured tones. “Before the child was born, we were given a sign by the Sun god. Therefore, in all humility and respect to the great Giver of Life, we wish to call him Langa, which means ‘sun’”.

Gently, I took the baby from his mother and held him outstretched towards the morning star which shone brightly above, and raised my voice in a song of recognition. As the sun rose on another African dawn, the assembled community joined in singing the chorus of blessing and support:

Oh, Langa, our boy from the sun
From the blessed dust of gold you grew
Like an arrow from the bow of the hunter you flew
May your flight in life be swift and true
Carry this quill every tightly in your hand
And bring light and reconciliation to this shadowed land.



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