

CURSE OF THE GLOBE

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The village was at peace and beautiful, until things fell apart. Previously, the people lived in harmony, cultivated their farms and fed the sick and the aged who couldn't work. From their hard work, the farmers contributed money to put up a school and clinic in the village. Though the facilities were not impressive, they were happy to give their children a better life. The kind of life that had eluded them when they were growing up. The farmers made the village a haven for everyone until illegal mining activities ruined the beautiful rhythm that existed among the people.

The clean river that once served as a source of water for the villagers has been polluted by the miners. With all the vegetation gone, the land became bare, almost like a football pitch which couldn't support agriculture. Water became scarce and the villagers had to walk for miles before they could bring a pot of water home for their chores.

Life became unbearable for the village folk. They couldn't provide for their children as they used to. Indeed, it is true when they say 'Where there's gold, there's poverty'. This adage was a true description of Kyebiase village where people had lost their source of livelihoods due to the work of the miners. The chief who could have helped the farmers get their ancestral lands back had turned against his own people and had joined the course of the foreigners who were illegally mining gold on their lands while rendering the farmers in poverty.

The chief's son, Amoako, also amassed money from the mining at the expense of the farmers. His father's alliance with the foreigners broke the peaceful bond that existed in the village. The farmers were agitated and protested every day to have the chief change his decision but none of the numerous protests brought the desired result. The miners continued to destroy their farms and polluted the river.

What infuriated the farmers most about the miners was the Tuesday ritual. Every Tuesday, a white goat was killed to the gods to help the miners get plenty of gold. The village folk hated the ritual because they were Christians and didn't want to have anything to do with pagan rituals. They were worried that God would unleash His anger on the village. But their concerns and distress couldn't bring any significant change.

The farmers once again marched to the palace in their red attire. They had a lengthy conversation with the chief who promised, as always, to talk with the miners not to encroach on their farms or pollute the river. Although the chief sounded convincing that afternoon, some farmers didn't believe that the situation would change. The chief had been promising to talk to the miners but he never did and the situation was worsening.

Adjoa, one of the farmers who have suffered severely from the miners, told the chief that she wanted to sell her farm to the miners. The chief asked her to go back to the palace after two days so that they could sign the necessary documentation for payment to be made.

After leaving the palace, Kyei, the leader of the farmers confronted Adjoa for going against the plan.

“How do we fight for our farms when our own leader has turned against us? I don’t see anything changing, that is why I will sell my farm and buy another land and start over again,” Adjoa said.

“Start over you say! You know how difficult it is to start a new farm. Let’s fight for what is ours. We can win this when we are united,” Kyei appealed.

“We have already lost the land. I just want to make something from it before I lose everything. I am sorry, I can’t continue with this fruitless protest. My mind is made up. I will sell my farm to the chief.”

Adjoa sold her cocoa farm to the chief and used part of the money to buy a new piece of land. She planted cassava in her new farm. Meanwhile, the other farmers never got any help from the chief. Instead it was promise after promise.

Every day the cocoa, yam and plantain farms were destroyed by the miners in their quest to search for gold. No farmer dared to stand in the way of the miners. They were practically untouchable in Kyebiase.

The farmers grew tired of how they were treated on their own lands so they visited the palace again, this time to sell the farms since the miners were destroying their crops with poisonous chemicals. After hours of negotiation, the chief agreed to buy the farms. The farmers received their monies as promised. They used the money to venture into different businesses such as selling of water, groceries and cooked food.

The village folk soon adapted to their new life. After a few months, the government banned mining in Kyebiase. There was jubilation in the village as the mining activities had affected even their health. The women marched to the chief’s house dancing and singing. That night the chief did not come out of his house.

The next day, the military and police officers were deployed into the village to arrest the people who had been engaged in the illegal mining. They arrested the chief and some of the foreigners who were attempting to run from the palace. The people celebrated the arrest and followed them to the police station. However, by evening the people were shocked to see the chief back at the palace.

Amoako was one of the miners who managed to escape and had fled to Accra to start his life over again. He was excited and looking forward to the new opportunities in the city. He was visiting PK, one of his mining friends who was now working in the city as a mini-bus driver. PK used to work with Amoako at the mines but he stopped after he had made enough money to buy himself a car to start a transport business.

While in a bus to Accra, Amoako's thoughts drifted back to Kyebiase. He thought of his wages that he couldn't take from the foreign masters because of the ambush. He had planned to invest that money in PK's transport business so that he could buy another car.

After alighting from the bus, Amoako clutched his bag tightly as he dialed PK's number. He spoke briefly with PK then sat on a nearby bench. After hours of waiting, PK arrived. They exchange pleasantries and drove home. Amoako narrated how security officers raided the mining field.

“We had heard the rumours that the security officers would come but we were not worried because we always gave them money. But that day was different. They were hostile. Some of the workers were washing the minerals in the river while others were digging up new grounds. I was in one of the new holes when I heard a sound like horses racing on the field. My heart nearly stopped beating, I thought the pit was going to collapse on me. After some

time, the noise and struggling ceased. I peeped out and saw the military cars leaving the site. I quickly left the site, took my clothes and ran away,” Amoako narrated.

“You were lucky my friend. I pity those who were arrested. They are in big trouble. So how about the gold, did the military take that?” PK asked.

“They took everything we had that day, the money and the machines,” Amoako answered.

When they got to the house, PK showed him around. He took him to the public toilet and bathhouse. They also went to the beach, which was not far from where the public toilet was situated.

“This place smells badly.”

“Yes it does. Some people do not like to use the public toilet so they have turned the shore into a toilet. We also dispose of our garbage here,” PK elaborated

“There’s something you must know about Amoako. Since you will be staying with me until you rent your own apartment, we will have to share the rent and the light bills,” PK said.

Amoako agreed to the conditions of his friend and promised to honour his part of the deal for as long as he stayed with him. He expressed his gratitude to his friend for the accommodation he had offered him.

After PK and Amoako had taken their bath, they went to a ‘chop bar’, which is a local restaurant, for a bowl of kenkey and fish.

One day turned into many days and Amoako soon became acquainted with the city. One evening, PK informed Amoako that

he could start working as his conductor the next day. Amaoko was overjoyed. At least he would have a job.

After some days of trial and error, Amoako soon mastered the affairs on the street. He was full of joy whenever he had a full set of passengers.

Life in Accra was good for Amoako. He saved some money and occasionally sent some to his father in the village. Everything seemed to be working for him and he was glad that he had come to the city despite his previous apprehension.

One afternoon, when Amoako was busy taking money from the passengers in the car, he heard them talk about Coronavirus which was affecting several people in Europe and Asia. He joined the conversation and teased that, the virus couldn't affect Ghanaians, since God himself was a Ghanaian. The passengers burst into laughter. The conversation in the car that afternoon was centred on the new virus. Many of the passengers boldly argued that, the virus couldn't survive in Africa. Some made strong points based on religious beliefs and others doubted the existence of the virus. Finally, a man in transparent medical glasses who had been quiet for most of the journey, decided to speak up.

“It will definitely come to Africa. It started in China and it will soon be our turn because Africa like China is overpopulated. This virus will kill many people in the process reducing the population of the world.”

The car was silent for a moment until a woman at the front seat turned to the direction of the man to challenge him.

“We serve a living God. The Bible says in Isaiah 54: 17 that no weapon formed against us shall prosper.”

The woman prayed in tongues for a moment, and there was total silence in the car. No passenger said a word again.

Tension was mounting in the city and everyone was afraid. Anybody who exhibited signs such as cough or runny nose was perceived to have the virus and was discriminated against.

Accra kept recording new COVID-19 cases almost every day. A virus that they once believed couldn't affect black people was now at their doorstep. They feared for their lives, and for the first time, they were forbidden to hug or shake hands but rather wear nose masks so that they could prevent the spread of the virus.

Despite all these measures, COVID-19 cases kept increasing. The government ordered for the number of passengers to be reduced in cars to ensure proper social distancing. This directive affected Amoako and PK. The regular thirteen passengers were reduced to eight. Amoako's daily pay was reduced. He couldn't save or send money to his father anymore.

For fear of the virus spreading to other parts of the country, the government imposed a partial lockdown in the city. People were told to work from home, markets were shut down, schools and religious centres were closed as well. Amoako and PK could no longer go to work. They were gradually losing their savings and that terrified them.

City life became insufferable for Amoako. He had spent most of his savings on food and had little to sustain him and PK. Unsure of where their next meal would come from in the next few weeks,

PK decided to go back to Kyebiase. He was however, afraid that he might be caught and punished by the security officers who had been deployed to ensure that people stayed in their homes.

He devised a plan. He went to a drug store and bought a bandage. He tied his left hand as if he had been injured. He told Amoako that was his plan to get out of the city before hunger killed him. He went to the bus station with excuses of been injured and made it home.

That night, Amoako couldn't sleep. Thoughts of how to survive the lockdown kept running in his mind. He had no family or friend to run to if he was hungry or sick. How to pay for electricity was also a puzzle for him since he wasn't benefiting from the government's free light and water.

In the morning, he heard that some of his bus conductor friends were planning to escape the city at night. They had learned that at night, some of the security personnel were not at post. He went to see his friends and they paid the driver a visit. They inquired from the driver the amount to be paid. Amoako was alarmed when he was told how much he was going to pay. He pleaded for some discount but the driver argued that, his life was at risk so he wouldn't take anything less.

Amoako quickly came back home, took his mobile phone to a porridge seller and narrated his plight to her and begged her to purchase his phone. The woman agreed to buy the phone.

Deep in the night, Amoako picked up his bag and left for the driver's house. To his shock, the mini-bus was full to its capacity. Most of the passengers were women and children and none of them wore nose masks. He joined them and they drove off.

Amoako was happy that he was heading back home. He knew that hunger would have killed him if he had stayed. After all, there was no place like home. Throughout the night on the road, they didn't meet any security personnel.

When he got to Kyebiase, he met PK and some of his friends who had returned from the city as well. They spoke briefly about the effects of the virus such as loss of jobs. Amoako bid them farewell and decided to go and check on his bar before going home.

To his horror, the wooden structure had been brought down and windows torn apart. Tears filled his eyes as he stood and gazed at his last hope. He sadly headed home where he was also greeted with another piece of sad news. His father, the chief, was sick. He was taken ill after Kusi, one of the returnees from the city, visited him.

The chief's condition worsened and Amoako rushed him to the clinic. They both tested positive for Coronavirus. They were quarantined in the clinic.

Weeks later, Amoako was declared negative of COVID-19 but his father had no such luck and he passed away. That evening, the chief was buried and no funeral was held for him.