

An Uproar In The Wind

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### Part 1: Growth Taken

The sun gleamed through my chocolate coloured hair. It was the early morning, just after sunrise. The birds began their melodious tunes as they flew above our village. Our water supply had run out again and the trip for it was ten kilometres. My mother and I set out early gathering our buckets. We would be back, by ten at night. We set off for the exhausting journey. Dad stayed behind with Yusuf to take care of the family farm. The rain had been our worst enemy; in the past week, it has rained heavily multiple times causing minor damage to our crops. Today luckily we were greeted by the warmth of the sun. I couldn't wait for the sweet potatoes to grow. My favourite part was to pick the flowers for my mother. The light violet colour fading to the snowy white always awed me. Each flower is different somehow, whether it be the actual colour to the size of the flowers. The buds have just come in and were going to bloom anytime soon.

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The Nigerian sun was one not to mess with. My feet were burning just because of how hot the ground was. We were about halfway our journey and decided to take a small break. Mom and I were just plain tired out and annoyed at how many times we have made this journey. We took a bit of bread for our journey but that was it. I gnawed hard at it; it wasn't the best of tasting but we needed it to survive. Being the oldest boy in the family gave me many responsibilities. If father fell ill it would be up to me to take care of us.

I had heard rumours of other lands with better lifestyles with better water. Giant pools of water where they just swim and play in. The water they spray themselves with for fun. The water we need. We, on the other hand, are forced to go out tirelessly and save most of our water for our

crops. I always imagine those outsiders to be mean and rough when they come to our land. Once I saw one from a far distance. He was white and tall, wore beige clothes and was sweating like crazy. I guess they never felt the true pangs of heat.

BANG... BANG... BANG...

The air filled with the sound of fire. We knew it was a time of true flight. We ran and ran. We tried to escape to the nearest bushes of trees and camouflage ourselves. We heard about these people but never encountered them.

“How could they come now? They usually come in the late evening” I cursed.

Well, there was no point in asking them. Who knows what they would do to us if we were caught. My family needed me for the survival of the farm. I was dad’s first helper; his first man

Someone grabbed me by the collar of my shirt. I tried fighting back with all of my fury but it was no use. The hooligan that caught me was double my size. I attempted to bite my way through but he was more cunning.

“ Keep running!!!” I shrieked to my mom.

“Noooooo!” she yelled from a distance.

“ Go back to the farm and tell father what happened!! I love yo--”

Those were the final words before the man but his hand over my mouth.

Part 2: Lies and Deceit

A bag is on top of my head. The stomach aching stench of alcohol hits me face on. They must have drugged me to keep me silent. Nausea and a thumping head prevent me from breathing with this irritating excuse of a bag. My wrists are sore from what they tied me up with;

probably rope that was used too often for prisoners. I feel rope burns all around my frail wrists. Then questions start piling through my thoughts.

*What happened to Mom? I remember her screaming 'no'. How are they going to take care of the farm? How will my father react to the news of my capture? How will Yusuf take it, his big brother gone?*

Tears unknowingly began to roll down my face. Tears that no one would understand the weight of falling.

What time has passed since I was knocked out, I don't know. I am on a bus, I think, judging by the number of bumps we've passed smoothly. Voices travel the air back and forth carrying different messages. What is being said on the other hand was for my head not to tell. All that is known that they were smoking, by just the scent carrying through the bus. I dare to reach my foot in front of me. The tip of my toe grazed the sharp cold of metal.

*Hmm... Perhaps a stolen military bus. The seats stripped of any cushioning and the sides feel barren to any distinct insignia.*

I suddenly could hear the crash of waves of the sea.

"But how?" I whispered to myself. My brain had a hard time comprehending.

We abruptly stopped and I heard more screams and pain. A baby and a mother with someone judging by the screams. The sharp stringent smell of fresh blood encompassed the atmosphere. The scene must look horrific with the mother shot and the baby shot as well. Dead to the ground representing what greed and ego do to a human soul. Whoever was with them must have looked strong like I did. More victims of the struggle of power...

*Why? What forces you to act like animals. You weren't born to be killing machines... This is why people say this is always Africa; blood, weapons and depression.*

The jolt of us moving woke me up from my mental state. I heard a person thrown next to me. Fear developed in us both. We tried to hold the hands of each other but failed miserably. The bus's atmosphere is filled with silent whimpers.

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We finally arrived at our soon demise. The scent of sea air is still present. I believed we were in the Ivory Coast Area. I could feel the tip of a gun on my back pushing me forward. We got off the bus and were lined up. One by one we were unmasked to watch horror.

A man with decent clothes began to speak to us. I think the twenty of us?

“You are no longer at your homes. You now belong to us. Any questions you will die. If you try to fight we will kill you. Any words from your stinky mouths you are dead. If you escape we will kill your family in a most humiliating death.” he said that while raising the machete he had close to our faces.

“We are sending all of you to work in a Cacao Farm. The people who I am selling you do not know your ages. I don't frankly care about it but... if you mention it to them you die a most painful death. I assure you that.”

We walked down to the plantation and were handed off like cattle.

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It's been a few months since working here. It gets hot on some days while it's freezing in the night. I've only eaten small rejected yams, the animals we hunt and fruits found in the forest.

If I'm lucky, some stolen pieces of the cacao fruit. We stay in small huts made of straw. No blankets, no pillows. We make our own by folding leaves into a bundle.

The farmer tries to treat us well, but when you're at the end of the food chain there's not much you can do. From the fields, I can see their house. It is a modest building with a water pump at the back. I've seen the farmer's family forced to work with us. They have a contract with some high international company. It looks like they get cheated in the actual deal-making by how he lives. The cacao we harvest is undoubtedly given to the same people who played with the water.

My job is to line the cacao fruit with a substance I don't know. It feels slippery and it's clear; nothing we've ever seen before. This farm is much more equipped than ours. It has row upon row of cacao trees, lush coffee trees and yams. There are giant machines meant for harvesting the crops of the other trees, cacao fruit has to be taken off by hand, one by one by hacking it with our machetes.

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Time has passed and the cacao fruit is finally ripe. We start from sunrise to a little after dark. Sweat trickles down my neck. I wipe it with the edgy of my torn maroon shirt. It would be around midday now and close to our break. We get half an hour each to rest on intervals so work would continuously be done. I am among the last few to receive theirs. What keeps me working through is the thought of this ayah from Surah Rahman.

هَلْ جَزَاءُ ٱلْإِحْسَانِ إِلَّا ٱلْإِحْسَانُ (٦٠)

Is the reward for good [anything] but good?

The thought of this ayah brings tears to my eyes, during my whole lifetime, Allah (SWT) blessed me with so much. The ability to take care of his blessing; the earth. Every day and night I am here taking care of plants. Back at home, we cultivated the earth so that we may grow to provide for ourselves, our neighbours and the orphans. In doing so, Allah blessed our crops despite the harsh weather. We always shared whatever we had, whether it be our crops, home, and more. Those lessons still translate here as well. As a group of young men, we rely on the strength of each other to survive. By sharing our spoils of hunting our bonds have become stronger. What hits me the most is when I was on the bus captured I prayed to Allah to not put me in a position where I would have to harm his creations on this Earth and now here I am taking care once more of his creations.

### Part 3: World Calling

Most of the cacao fruit has been harvested. We were now on our second phase of production. My job had switched to cut the cacao pods open and separate the fruit from the seeds. There are many risks to this post. I've seen boys accidentally cut themselves when they either miss the pod or it rolls away. We tried to tend to them the best we could but how can you with no real supplies?

The cacao pods remind me of the flowers back home. Each one is different, Subhanallah. Whether it be in the hues of bright reds fading to the lightest of yellows. The fragrant scent of the cacao fruit. Lastly seeing the most treasured possession to make the chocolate; the seeds. Something we never tried before.

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These days I work with a fellow companion named Yasir. He too was kidnapped from his homeland from his parents. We speak the same dialect so it's nice to have a conversation.

“Do you ever wonder what happened to your family?” he asked.

“Yes, I do. Every time I pray I make duaa for their well being,” I replied

“Do... you ever wonder why this all happens to us? Time in and out our people are oppressed, ridiculed and hurt. When we strive as a people our work is trashed upon. Why? Why?” He asked constantly.

I had no clear answer to this. I wonder if the world could ever answer this question.

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Days keep passing like sand in the wind. The cacao fruit has started growing once more. Strenuous work would follow after it. Today felt different somehow. The sky is a crisp light blue and barely any clouds roaming the sky. The wind blew across the branches of the trees. A stern voice came to follow.

I stood up straight and looked down immediately, whoever came must have come to see the farm. That stood no importance to me.

“So this is where the magic happens, for chocolate?” the man asked.

“Yes, yes. This is among the many hectares of the cacao trees we have,” the farmer replied enthusiastically.

Ah. I see you now. They were so-called reporters trying to pick up something “juicy”. Their presence kept me in disgust. I've seen them from the far glimpse of the farmer's house. They put images of our countries between the weather and sports for mere seconds. Does any change come from them? No. Any hope from them? Nope. Just another useless article filling the



page. Their stories are nothing to me. They might cause a person to donate to a well that a rebel group will take over. Water is a sign of power in this region. The group walked off continuing the tour except for a woman who seemed to care about me more than the tour. Her light skin complemented the pistachio green shirt with her maroon bandana. Of course, I couldn't tell her that if I wanted to.

Just as I turned back to the lush green tree, someone tapped me on the back. To my surprise, it is the same woman.

“Hi, there! Do you speak English? I'd like to know your name and what you do here please.”

My reply, me looking down and remaining silent. There is no way I am risking my life for this.

“I know what they told you. They told you to keep your mouths shut or they'd kill you? I am not here to look at these mere trees that bear fruit; I came to see who harvested them. You have been mistreated, probably taken from your homeland and put here to work?” she said that with a convincing smiling.

*How does she know all of this? Is she a spy, this information is never looked upon. Maybe she will bring change? One thing she will never know is all the pain that we children go through. Not at all.*

I glared behind her around the area to make sure no one is paying attention. No. It's too risky to speak. If a wrong word leaves my lips, I'd be history; but no one said anything about writing.

Part 4: Released Words

The heavy sun dazed against my back. The heat overwhelmed at first but now has become a warm blanket surrounding us. Today, we were going to finally go to the cacao plantation. My mission is finally going to be complete, but of course, no one can know. I prepared my attire; a cotton pistachio green shirt, brown laced sandals and lastly a maroon bandanna to complete the look.

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We arrived at the humble abode. It looks quite different from what we were accustomed to. There were fields of various vegetation encompassing what we thought was going to be dried barren earth. The things that we were told and shown. I hopped out of the SUV and prepared for the task at hand. We were a group of news reporters coming here to see where our delectable chocolate comes from. We all had our reasons for coming, whether it's just to take a break of the city to catch a juicy story that viewers will dwell upon. Mine is surely different from the rest. I came here by myself to see who has been doing the hard work to keep these businesses alive and flourishing. Apparently, companies like *Hershey*, *Nestle* and *Mars* have pledged to not have child labour in the production in their goods. Words are easy to say but actions have their true meaning.

It took about fifteen minutes before we were able to start our tour. We were greeted by the farmer and his family. Something looked odd about their clothing. The girls had a basic dress that were soiled and had stitches all across them patching holes. The boys had torn t-shirts with pants surely not their size. His wife had no signs of jewellery and the farmer himself looked exhausted. I read that this specific farm had a deal with *Hershey's*, I believe. Their appearance spoke louder than the words being fed about them having a good life.

“ May I have a picture? I want to keep it as a memory and also put it in my article” I asked, pretending to be curious.

“Of course, you can. Now come, come children. We want to make this look nice.” the farmer eagerly replied.

Click. My first piece of evidence taken.

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No one will speak to me. I tried to reach out to them in any way possible. How can I come so far for nothing? This was until I met a boy who told him to give him a sheet of paper and a pencil. This is what he wants one to know.

*“My name is Adam. I will be of no importance to you until you read this. You will not know how I was kidnapped and treated as an animal. You will not know how my family will suffer in my absence. What I want you to know is this. There are others like me. Children like I, are taken from the grasps of their load-bearing fathers and the tears of their weakened mothers. I doubt you’d survive for a second without knowledge of your child’s being. But who am I to say? Children like me have no water. No water to drink. No water to swim in. Water is only a means of getting bloodshed. I doubt you’d survive a day without it. But who am I to say? Children like me are forced to work in horrendous situations like I at this Cacao Farm. I doubt you’d exchange your easy lifestyle for the heat of the African sun. But who am I to say? In my religion, Islam, there is a saying of God in our holy book in the Quran. It goes as follows in Surah Rad*

*For each one are successive [angels] before and behind him who protect him by the decree of Allah. Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is*

*in themselves. And when Allah intends for a people ill, there is no repelling it. And there is not for them besides Him any patron. (11)*

*My emphasis is on the verse on the part where it states Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change themselves. We as a people have been waiting for the change the conditions of our lives by surviving and praising what we have, but how can we when our wealth, our water and our being is left to you those who simply don't want to open your eyes and see it?"*

How does this not bring tears to your eyes?

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