

WAS IT A DREAM?



LIFE IN THE VILLAGE

I can remember the chilly morning that I began school. I had been longing for this day! Daddy had bought my new uniform from the market. I guess the time was 6:00 am when my elder brother woke me up to take the goats outside and feed them. After we came back from the bushes, where we tethered the goats, mummy served us with hot *fufu* corn (corn cake) and *njamanjama* (cooked and heavily spiced vegetable).

We happily trotted off to school. At school I discovered that my brother, Chah, had not been very truthful to me. He had painted a wonderful picture of school to me, and my expectations were very high. I was floating in the sky. On arriving at school, it did not take long for me to get out of my fantasy world. I discovered that my teacher, Mr. Francis King had a couple of whips, which he used consistently as a correctional aid. He did not hesitate to use the whip on me or anyone else when we made mistakes, and it was very often. My zeal for school quickly evaporated.

The days that followed brought more misery to me. My state of mind amplified the pain I felt from the prickly stones under my bare feet as I walked to school each morning. To make things worse my Mum was not feeling like cooking a generous breakfast every morning. Lunch break was a great relief to me and some children in my situation. We would beg with the most convincing tones of our voices for little pieces of donuts or bean cake from those rich children who could afford to buy lunches at school. We would wander into the near bushes and farms so that we could steal some guavas, pears, sugar cane, and mangoes. Then we were late for classes, and another round of serious beatings ensued. I put up with this misery for four years. By the time I decided that I had had enough of this misery, I was promoted to primary five, a turning point in my education.

A classmate of ours, Kuma, was far bigger and older than all of us. In fact he was too old for his level and had beaten up our teacher, after the teacher had slapped him. Consequently, he skipped school permanently and became a very active member of our village secret society called "Ngang Mulion." After a few years picking up coins for dancers and carrying drums and xylophone poles for occasions, his status had been upgraded to a dancer.

We greatly admired him and would gladly skip school and follow him around when there were occasions like funerals and death celebrations. We assisted him in picking up the coins that the bereaved family member dropped in front of him as sign of their appreciation of his performance. Thereafter he gave us 25 cents, 50 cents, or 75 cents depending on the how much money he got from dancing. Wonderful money, so we thought! So Juju could pay this much, we would wonder aloud. As the days went by, we had the timetable of all the death celebrations around our neighborhood and beyond. Kuma also promised us that he could use his position to influence our rise to the position of dancer if we continued carrying xylophones to death celebrations unflinchingly.

Yes, that was primary five! I would leave the house with my uniform and a t-shirt in the bag. With this discovery, my parents were not very happy. Dad, who was the disciplinarian of the two, was on my side when my status in the secret society changed. I started bringing home some fowls and on some occasions salt. It did not take long for my professional mourner friend and me to become popular. We traveled the length of the valley on foot from North Mulion to Tuafundong West passing through the forest of Aweh Hill. Sometimes at night we walked about six hours on foot. We did so happily. The interactions I had with the professional mourner community gave me a lot of self confidence and sense of fulfillment. My popularity was further enhanced by the secret society I belonged to.

This worked out well for me. This could be a wonderful attraction to the opposite sex, who were not supposed to know theoretically who was behind the mask. Years went by, and I became quite powerful in the secret society. "Ngang Mulion" could not go any where if I did not perform some rituals. Even my parents feared and respected me. No one in the village could match my physical prowess.

I think I must have been 18 when I started to become uncomfortable. I performed fewer spiritual rites, sometimes only once or twice a year. The reason was primarily because my elder brother spent his time reading books and always looked a lot better dressed than me. He could also defeat me in all logical arguments. On top of all of this, he was the only person who could read and also write letters for the elders in the village. I wanted to be able to do these things too. So, I went back to school for two years, and I learned to read and write in French and English, just like my brother.

~ Victor Ankiambom

THIS BEAST

Looks kind of splotchy and yet dull and mismatched
Like a tumble weed it moves on free, unattached.
It's matted with hair and with some horrid smell
Your hatred is growing. You wish it to hell
Somehow you move and then you catch eyes
And here with this beast is a startling surprise

Pride
The way that it lives, it has nothing to hide
And as you stand staring as if for weeks
The beast opens its mouth and it suddenly speaks

And it said,

"I am a man.
I try to live life as best as I can.
I'm not like you, and it is my choice.
I only wish you to hear my voice.
I feel and breathe and hurt and bleed.
Just like you I want and need.
Though you're maybe scared of me,
But what I really am is free."

This realization has you taken aback
Maybe now you will cut him some slack
Just 'cause something appears as a troll,
Nevertheless it still has a soul.

~ Clay E. Young

THE POEM

Skies as beautiful as an African queen and
Grass as sweet as the first day of spring.
Flowers that smell and feel like a newborn baby's skin and
Water like a blanket, warm and silky.
The soil is like a feather bed, and
Air like . . . **SULPHUR** . . . permeates the air.

"Fallout, platoon! Soldier, let's move it! This isn't a garden party!"
The young soldier puts away his scrap of paper and pencil,
picks up his helmet and AR15,
and jogs back into formation.

~ Jamar Mitchell

BIG BOY

Daydreaming while listening to the thunder and watching the rain hit the window of his room, the little boy is startled when he hears a noise coming from somewhere inside the house. He slowly opens his bedroom door and walks down the hallway. Suddenly, he hears a large crack of thunder and the lights begin to flicker on and off, on and off. Frightened, the boy stops and braces himself against the wall.

Now the little boy hears a shuffling coming from the direction of the kitchen. Nobody's here! Everyone's at a church meeting. Mom and Dad wanted him to come with them and his older brother, Rosco, but he refused and yelled that he was a big boy now, so they left him home alone and promised to be back soon.

Again a thumping came from the kitchen. The little boy's heart begins to pound as he continues to inch forward, hands feeling the rough wallpaper along the passage. He is wishing them home right now and also wishing he had gone with them! He hears a chair scrape the kitchen floor, and the boy lets out a little squeak. He cannot help himself and continues towards the kitchen door.

Just as he is about to open the door to the kitchen, his heart slamming in his chest, the door bursts open and his mom, dad, and brother shout "Happy birthday!" while wearing party hats and holding a big round chocolate cake.

~ Rosco Pearce

DREAM VACATION

“All that glitters is not gold.”

I got a call today – you know the kind! “Hello, Mrs. Stieber, you have just won! The prize is ... A four-day, three-night cruise to the Grand Bahama Islands. A luxury overnight stay in a DELUXE SUITE at the Beautiful Discovery Beach Resort. All you need to do is give us your credit card number so you can pay just two-hundred dollars for round trip airfare. Everything else will be included.”

WOW! You say, that is an incredible deal! Well, by now you know the old saying, if it sounds too good to be true, it is. What you weren't told is... Your all-inclusive cruise has all sorts of taxes, fees, and gratuities you weren't aware of when you left home and the bank behind you.

Also, they neglect to tell you that your deluxe accommodation at Beautiful Discovery Beach Resort is a time-share offer. The cocktail social and the viewing of a night space-shuttle launch is really a four-hour, hard-sell presentation to invest a mere \$20,000 in a time-share condominium.

Meanwhile, as your friends back home are waiting to hear all the details of your fabulous dream vacation, you and your spouse are cooling your heels at the airport, since your flight has been delayed six hours and you're trying to scrape up enough change for a drink from the vending machine.

While this telemarketer sounded like the answer to your prayers, she only wanted you to see the sunny side. No one tells you that their preferred airline has more blackout dates than cable TV and the N.F.L. Or that they have crash landed in the Everglades three times in the last year alone.

All taxes, fees, and gratuities are to be paid at the dock. So there went all your spending money! And you missed the spectacular night launch because you were locked in an office with a time-share salesman.

Some dream vacation! You can bet, it was just too good to be true.

~ Meredith Martin

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

In 1969, my first airplane flight was from Greater Cincinnati Airport to New York City, landing at JFK Airport. My niece, Jerry, and I were going on a 21-day tour to Europe. All expenses were paid by my employer.

We were very excited about this trip. As we embarked upon this huge American Airliner jet, we were escorted to our seats by the stewardess, who then gave us the instructions on the airbags, seat belts, ear phones, exits, and restrooms. Cool! The stewardess had served me a glass of water just before the plane took off, and to my surprise, the plane went straight up. Needless to say, my glass of water spilled, and I was wet from this point on to JFK. I was so excited, so what the heck, no big deal.

After landing at the airport, we took a taxi cab to the Waldorf Astoria. We signed in, and the bell boy escorted us to our room. After reading the safety instructions on the door, we decided to take our traveler's checks and passports to a security box downstairs at the front desk. While we were on street level, we decided to take a short walk in New York City. We came back to the hotel, took an elevator to the fourth floor, and lo and behold, there was a guard on both ends of the hall. We felt very secure with guards on our floor. Upon opening the door and entering our room, on the table was a large bouquet of long stemmed red roses. Jerry called her husband and thanked him for sending her flowers; however, Charles said they were not from him or her parents. There was no ticket on the flowers; therefore, we were not aware of who they came from (Mistake #1).

Reservations for our dinner had been made at a hotel on Times Square, so we put on our finery and white gloves, went out the door of our room, and saw that the two

guards were still on board. Again, we felt secure in our hotel. We felt like celebrities.

Stepping out of a taxi on the great Times Square, we saw bright lights and people coming and going, buses, taxi cabs, cars, even horse-drawn carriages. What a sight to behold!

After a five-course meal in the Edwardian room of one of New York City's finest hotel dining rooms, we departed, amazed at all the night life on Times Square and returned by taxi cab to the Waldorf Hotel. As we sojourned from the elevator to our room, the guards were still there. By now we are wondering, "What's up with the guards on our floor?" Upon entering our room, the lights were on, our beds were turned back, and in the middle of the table where the bouquet of long-stemmed roses were, there too was a huge bowl of fresh fruits (Mistake #2). We thought, "Well, now who are we that we are getting such hospitality by the hotel?" As we examined the fruit bowl, we found a note saying, "Welcome Madam Mahatma Gandhi, to the USA and New York City." We both fell across our beds with laughter.

The next day, we went on a walking tour of the city and to see the Empire State Building. We went up to the observation deck, looked over the city, and took pictures. We then went back to the hotel. There were no guards, no long-stemmed roses, no more mistaken identity, only a huge bowl of fresh fruits that we could not consume.

Later that afternoon, we went back to JFK by taxi cab and waited for our night flight by Swiss Airline to Europe to start our 21-day tour.

~ Rose M. Buckner

DEAR ABBY,

I am looking for a few answers. I love a man who loves three women. He calls one his "Black Beauty," one his "Hawaiian Queen," and then there's me. I've known about them for some time but say nothing about them.

One day, he and his Queen passed me on the interstate. He looked at me and smiled. I could not stop thinking about it all afternoon. But that night, we talked about the high points of our days, and I was delighted to hear that she was not one of them!

The following day, he and Beauty went to town. If he goes somewhere, one of these two women will tag along. This goes on all the time! Abby, both women live behind us. Should I be concerned?

Signed,

A Concerned Woman

P.S. Abby, the other women are a black GMC pickup and a Harley Davidson!
HOW DO YOU STOP A LOVE AFFAIR LIKE THIS?

~ Charlee Daniels

