Afro Gbede

A Play



V. L. K. Djokoto

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Afro Gbede

Art by Kɔsi T. Gobah

D. K. T. Djokoto & Co
Accra
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In memory of our ancestors

CHARACTERS

Komla Agbeli Gbedemah (Afro Gbede)

Kwame Nkrumah

Ofori-Atta

Akufo-Addo

J. B. Danquah

Kojo Botsio

The Chorus

The Steward

The Guard

Prisoner 1

Prisoner 2

The Crowd

Scene 1: Prince of Wales College — The First Batch

(A long mahogany table gleams in the hall. Ceiling fans stir the warm air like Anyako priests. Three boys in immaculate blazers sit in solemn posture, their futures pressed and starched like their collars. A steward loiters, tray quivering. A portrait of the Prince of Wales presides, cool and aloof, his painted eyes wielding empires in their gaze. The Chorus hums faintly — half-hymn, half-mockery.)

OFORI-ATTA *(Pompous, chin aloft, as though addressing a market square from birth)*:

First batch, gentlemen!
The crème, the crown, the crest of Africa's dawn.
A covenant writ in gunpowder and gospel,
sealed with the wax of the Empire's cautious ante.
Here we are, heirs to throne of Great Britain,
princes of a future mortgaged before our birth.
They have chosen us — marked us,
as gardeners of Guggisberg's Eden.

AKUFO-ADDO *(measured, deliberate, with quiet gravitas that fills the room like incense)*:

With this seat comes a frightening burden,
weight that bends the spine before it strengthens it.
To be lanterns upon the green hill,
burning not for ourselves alone,
but to blaze a path for those locked beyond these iron gates,
those whose names will never grace these halls,
whose feet will never polish these marble floors.

For they shall look upon us —
from market stalls, from fishing boats, from cocoa fields —
and see either heralds of freedom,
or traitors to it,
clandestine collaborators in their own continued chains.

GBEDEMAH *(with a smirk, drawing a small silver flask from his blazer like a conjurer revealing truth)*:

Lanterns, yes —
though never brighter than the British sun,
never casting shadows they cannot control.

(He takes a sip, winces with relish, offers a mocking toast toward the portrait.)

Do you not feel the experiment pressing on our necks?
Mahogany walls, silver cutlery, Jamestown cloth —
all masks, my friends, masks upon masks!

We are specimens in colonial glass jars,
pickled in privilege, preserved in protocol,
fed with polish,
and denied the flame.

Laboratory mice in suits and ties,
trained to mimic, and not to master,
to recite but never to revolt.

They study us as botanists study blooms:
"Can the African be civilized?
Can he wear shoes without stumbling?
Can he speak English without an accent staining his tongue?"

(The steward stiffens at the sight of whiskey. His eyes dart anxiously toward the King's portrait, as though to confess to an invisible magistrate.)

OFORI-ATTA *(with a forced laugh, adjusting his lapel with aristocratic precision)*:

Komla, Komla!
Cynicism ill becomes the honoured.
This place is gift, not gall;
a bridge, not a snare,
a ladder they have built for our ascent.
Gratitude, sir, is the proper uniform,
the currency with which we purchase entry
into lush rooms where decisions are made,
where power whispers its secrets
to those who know how to listen,
how to bow at the correct angle,
how to smile without showing teeth.

GBEDEMAH *(producing a slim rolled leaf, lighting it with a deliberate flick, then inhaling with languid grace)*:

Gratitude? Paa!
I taste vinegar in their honey.
A gift that shackles is no gift,
it is bait — velvet upon the hook,
sugar upon the poison,
a throne with chains for legs.
This hall, this varnished cage…

(He exhales smoke in a curling halo toward the portrait.)

Shall we bow to its polish,
or use it to sharpen the blade?
Shall we genuflect before their painted kings,
or learn the architecture of power

so that we may one day tear it down,
brick by brick,
and rebuild it in our own image?

AKUFO-ADDO *(calm, gaze following the smoke's ascent like a prophet reading omens)*:

Better polished within,
than left raw in the dust outside,
shouting at gates that will not open,
throwing stones at walls too high to scale.
They groom a few — us.
Better the banquet than the hunger at the door, Komla.

To dine is to live,
and to live is to plot,
to learn their language so fluently
that we may chaunt insurrection in their own tongue,
concealed, patient,
termites in the foundation of their palace.

GBEDEMAH *(leaning closer, passing the flask across, eyes bright with prophecy)*:

Look, I was not born to scratch at doors,
nor nibble at crumbs from the master's table.
I was born to claim the house entire —
walls, rafters, furniture and sceptre!
Not guest, not tenant,
not the grateful ward forever bowing,
but master!
The deed shall bear my name,
my children's names,
names written in alphabets these *Yevu* cannot read.

(The steward gasps, drops a spoon; the clang resounds like a shot in a quiet forest. The boys fall silent. Their eyes flit nervously to the portrait, as though it had ears and eyes. The Chorus swells — sly, spectral — weaving hymn with taunt, as though fate itself has joined the hall.)

CHORUS:

The chessboard begins…
The pawns advance, the kings disguise…
The dice are loaded, the wine is spilled…
The smoke ascends, the chalice tilts…
The chessboard begins!
White moves first, but black remembers,
and memory is the longest game of all.

(Thunder mutters in the distance like Ogun clearing his throat. Lights fall, leaving the portrait aglow, its gaze like a silent gaoler's. A faint wreath of smoke lingers, crowning

the painted prince as though with spectral incense, a ghost already haunting its own legacy.)

Scene 2: UGCC Breakaway — The Drawing Room Schism

(A drawing room. Leather chairs glow under the amber haze of gaslight. The air is thick with brandy fumes and cigar smoke, a fog of gentility and conspiracy. Crystal decanters catch the dim fire of the lamps like trapped stars. DANQUAH, OFORI-ATTA, and AKUFO-ADDO sit with aristocratic ease, their gestures studied, voices cool and clipped like Oxford syllables. A servant moves silently with a tray, replenishing glasses, invisible as furniture. Enters GBEDEMAH, restless and volcanic, with NKRUMAH, magnetic, a presence that shifts the atmosphere the moment he crosses the threshold like lightning entering a shrine. KOJO BOTSIO scribbles in the shadows, a quiet chronicler, history's stenographer. The Chorus mumbles like community gossip — sly, nasal, punctuated by snickers and the rustle of newspapers.)

DANQUAH *(lofty, deliberate, swirling his brandy as though discoursing upon a vintage)*:

The path, gentlemen, is patient — measured — gradual.
Freedom must be refined,
filtered drop by drop through careful sieves,
lest the flute shall spill over
and drown us all in frenzy,
in the madness of the masses,
in democracy untampered by wisdom's restraining hand.
Carthage was not built in a day,
nor shall the Gold Coast be.
We must cultivate our garden with the British methodology,
pruning excess, training the vine,
until it grows in the direction we deem proper.

OFORI-ATTA *(solemn, priestly, with the cadence of a sermon, setting his glass with gravity)*:

The masses cannot yet be trusted with the flood.
Universal suffrage?
A tide far too wild, too unschooled,
too prone to demagoguery's seductive song.
It would swamp our fragile vessel,
capsize hard-won order into chaos.

Better a measured franchise,
votes earned through education,
through property, through proof of readiness,
than a deluge that washes away
all we have carefully constructed.

GBEDEMAH *(snorts, disdain cutting through the haze like a machete through fog)*:

The masses are no flood, sir —
they are the river entire!
And you, ensconced in leather, sipping your brandy,
are reeds trembling upon the bank,

calling yourselves the river's masters
because you have learned to bend without breaking.

Without them, you rule only tea cups —
fragile porcelain kingdoms,
cracked by the first shout in Makola,
shattered by the first real wind from the streets.

(A low murmur runs through the Chorus — "porcelain kingdoms, porcelain kings" — mocking, amused, like servants whispering behind their masters' backs.)

AKUFO-ADDO *(lean, aristocratic, voice clipped with disdain, adjusting his cufflinks with the precision of a surgeon)*:

Democracy unfiltered is chaos unchained.
Better the sieve than the storm.
We sieve to preserve,
not to deny,
to protect the delicate mechanisms
of governance from mob rule,
from passion's tyranny,
from the violence of ignorance unleashed.

NKRUMAH *(rising suddenly, electric, his voice filling the chamber with uncontainable charge, a generator humming with destiny)*:

No, my brothers!
Chaos is not the danger — stagnation is!
The glacier that moves so slowly
it appears to stand still,
frozen in its own caution.
The people's cry is not whisper but thunder.
They thirst not for patience,
but for liberty now —
immediate, unchained, unmeasured!
Not metered out like medicine to children,
but seized like breath by drowning men.
The hourglass lies shattered;
the sand rushes in torrent,
and time itself refuses to wait
for your committees and your studies.
Who among us dares to halt the river's course?
Who among us has that godlike power?

DANQUAH *(with cool disdain, lips curling as though upon an inferior port, gesturing lazily with his cigar)*:

Rhetoric, Nkrumah.
Dangerous music — seductive, reckless,
the kind that leads men over cliffs
while they march with smiles on their faces.
You intoxicate the rabble,

fill their heads with dreams too large,
promises too grand.
But tell me, do you govern thunder?
Do you cage the storm?
Or do you simply ride it
until it throws you,
broken, into the dust?

NKRUMAH *(leaning forward, voice booming like drums at dawn)*:

I do not cage it.
I ride it!
I stand with the multitude as lightning strikes,
as heaven touches earth,
as history pivots on its axis.
Better to march in the tempest
than to rot in polished calm,
better to risk the whirlwind
than to calcify in safety,
preserved like specimens in amber,
perfect and useless and dead.

GBEDEMAH *(slamming his palm on the armrest, voice sharp as flint against steel)*:

Music? No. Mathematics!
Count the people — then count yourselves.
Count the huts, then count the mansions.
Count the hungry, then count the full.
Tell me, gentlemen, which number rules
when the equation is finally solved?
The arithmetic of destiny
is not solved in cigar smoke and brandy fumes,
not calculated on leather chairs
in rooms lit by other people's labour.

(The Chorus titters, whispering as in a club corridor: "Arithmetic of destiny… not solved in brandy fumes!" They chuckle as if quoting a clever line overheard, spreading it like scandal.)

OFORI-ATTA *(stiffly, raising his glass as though making a toast, yet his voice weighted with warning)*:

Then break away if you must.
Follow your pied piper into the wilderness.
But mark my words —
you gamble with fire,
and fire, gentlemen, is democratic in its consumption.

It burns the hand that lights it
as readily as it burns the house.
And fire consumes its wielder first.

AKUFO-ADDO *(adding, in high spirits)*:

And when the embers die,
when the heat fades and reality returns,
what remains?
Ashes, gentlemen. Ashes.
And regret, perhaps,
though regret rebuilds no houses.

NKRUMAH *(smiling faintly, almost tender, like a teacher to slow students)*:

And fire, sir,
is precisely what we need.
To burn away hesitation,
to temper steel from our chains,
to forge in the furnace
what cannot be crafted in your drawing rooms.
Ashes, yes — but from ashes rises the phoenix.
And the phoenix, my learned friends,
does not ask permission to fly.

DANQUAH *(snaps, losing his languid calm for the first time, standing, trembling with aristocratic rage)*:

And what then of tradition?
Of order, hierarchy, the scaffold that binds us?
Of the careful architecture of civilization
built over centuries?
Shall Accra be ruled by mobs,
its policies shouted from market stalls,
its laws written by fishmongers and farmers
who cannot spell their own names?
What is a government without pedigree?
Without pedigree, it is rabble in robes,
monkeys at the organ,
chaos crowned!

GBEDEMAH *(mocking, his tone acid, rising to meet Danquah's fury)*:

Pedigree? Ha!
A kennel word!
A word for dogs and horses!
Shall men be weighed like hounds at show,
their worth determined by their fathers' fathers,
by the accidents of birth,
by the colour of blood rather than the content of character?
What need has freedom for pedigree?
It breathes in huts as in halls,
it beats in drums as in gavels,
it lives in callused hands
as much as in manicured ones.

You mistake bloodlines for lifelines,
aristocracy for ability,
heritage for destiny.

(A silence falls like a curtain. The Chorus rustles like startled birds, then falls quiet, holding its breath.)

BOTSIO *(from the shadows, his pen scratching, speaking low as if to himself yet heard by all like a prophet's whisper)*:

And so, it is written.
The old sip brandy in amber light,
the new taste fire in the street.
The hour divides like a split tree,
and from the trunk two branches grow,
reaching toward different suns.

(A heavy pause. GBEDEMAH, with sudden flourish, snaps his fingers. The Chorus erupts — no longer languid but fierce, like terraces of a football ground, their chant pounding with the rhythm of Aḍavatram.)

CHORUS:

Convention People's Party!
Convention People's Party!
Flame of the street, hand of the crowd!
Fire in the market, voice in the gutter!
Convention People's Party!
C.P.P.! C.P.P.!

(The chant builds, shaking the oak-panelled calm of the room like an earthquake beneath a cathedral. DANQUAH, OFORI-ATTA, and AKUFO-ADDO sit frozen in their leather seats, faces caught between disdain and unease, between rage and the first cold finger of fear. The old order sits in smoke and brandy; the new rises in flame and thunder. The stage divides: light falling on the seated elders, shadow embracing the standing revolutionaries.)

Scene 3: Prison — The P.G. Cap

(A dim prison cell in James Fort. Stones sweat with damp like fever. Rats scurry in corners, citizens of a kingdom beneath notice. The faint stench of urine and mould hangs in the air like a permanent fog. Prisoners huddle like shadows, wrapped in tatters, their bodies geography maps of suffering. A GUARD paces outside with a baton, heavy boots echoing like the heartbeat of tyranny. GBEDEMAH crouches beneath the dripping wall, stitching rags into a cap with a bent nail, his fingers moving with the precision of ceremony. The Chorus hums a sorrowful spiritual — low, steady, like oars beating across an endless sea. The melody is heavy with chains and saltwater, and its unending echo.)

PRISONER 1 *(curious, wary, peering through the gloom)*:

Komla, what madness grips you?
Threading scraps as though tailor to ghosts?
The rats shall laugh before we do.
Have you lost your mind in this darkness?
Does the wall's dampness seep into your skull?

GBEDEMAH *(grinning, needle flashing like a tiny blade)*:

Not madness — ceremony!
A cap of passage, a crown of defiance.
Here, in these walls,
where they would break us,
iron births imagination.
Suffering becomes university,
and pain our stern professor.
Call it the P.G. Cap — Prison Graduate!
Not shame, but honour.
Not stigma, but badge.
Not defeat, but degree!

PRISONER 2 *(mocking, half-believing, scratching his beard with shackled hands)*:

Graduation? Here in James Fort?
Among lice, and chains, and piss-soaked straw?
What diploma does darkness confer?
What certificate does iron sign?
Have you lost your senses, Komla?

GBEDEMAH *(mock pomp, voice swelling, rising to his feet like a vice-chancellor at convocation)*:

Yes! Graduation from fear!
Commencement of courage!
For what is prison,
but a furnace refining gold?
A crucible where cowards melt
and the brave are tempered into steel?
This rag is not a rag —
it is regalia!

These walls are no cage —
they are a university of resistance!
The curriculum: survival.
The examination: the breaking or making of the soul.
You enter as men,
you leave as graduates of defiance,
with degrees in dignity,
honours in unbreakable will!

(The Chorus swells faintly, echoing him, almost like an academic procession, mockingly solemn.)

CHORUS *(low, mocking and solemn at once)*:

Cap them, cap them,
graduates of stone and chain.
Degrees of iron,
honours of pain.
Summa cum laude in suffering,
doctorate in the art of not breaking.

PRISONER 1 *(shaking his head, but laughing despite himself)*:

You are mad, Komla.
Mad enough to make chains into jewels,
dungeons into lecture halls,
guards into deans.
But perhaps this is the madness we need,
the insanity that keeps us sane.

GBEDEMAH *(mock solemn, placing the ragged cap on his head, strutting like at convocation, hand on heart)*:

Mad? No. Ceremonious!
Behold — the convocation!
From this day, imprisonment is a rite,
a ritual of transformation.
A degree conferred by iron bars,
with warders as unwilling examiners,
with suffering as thesis,
with survival as defence.
I am capped —
P.G., Prison Graduate!
And so shall you be!
And so shall all who pass through this forge!

(The prisoners laugh, clap, and whistle. One beats rhythm on the wall with shackles, turning chains into percussion, oppression into music. The Guard bangs the bars with his baton, enraged, face red with fury at joy in a place designed for despair.)

GUARD *(snarling)*:

Silence, dogs! Silence in your filth!
You have nothing to celebrate!
You are nothing!
Criminals! Conspirators!

GBEDEMAH *(mock solemn, bowing to him as if to a Vice Chancellor)*:

Hush, officer.
Do not disrupt a convocation.
Degrees are being conferred!
A faculty of chains, an assembly of shadows!
Show respect for academic ceremony,
even if you do not understand it.

(The prisoners roar with laughter. The Chorus breaks into a mock anthem, blending solemn hymn with irreverent street song, graduation march with work song.)

CHORUS *(singing, swaying like at a graduation)*:

P.G.! P.G.! Cap upon the brow!
Iron for tassel, rag for gown.
P.G.! P.G.! Cap them now!
Graduates of prison,
march to freedom's crown!
From the dungeon to the palace,
from the shadow to the light,
P.G.! P.G.!

(A scrap of toilet paper slides under the bars like a secret entering the world. GBEDEMAH stoops, picks it up, smooths it carefully as though it were papyrus, and reads. His grin vanishes; his eyes ignite like coals in wind.)

GBEDEMAH *(soft, trembling with fire, voice dropping to a whisper that somehow fills the cell)*:

Nkrumah runs for Accra Central.
The board is alive.
The pawns are restless.
The game burns forward.
History moves while we rot,
but we are not forgotten.
Even here, behind these stones,
we are pieces on the board,
and our turn comes.

(The prisoners fall silent, eyes glinting in the dark like stars emerging. The Chorus rises like thunder — stamping rhythm on stone, shackles clanging like castanet, the dungeon becoming drum, the prison becoming instrument.)

CHORUS *(fierce, chanting)*:

P.G. Cap! P.G. Cap!
The chessboard lives!
Graduates of defiance,
marching from iron to freedom's flame!
From the cell to the chamber,
from the chain to the crown,
P.G. Cap! P.G. Cap!

(The chant grows into a roar that drowns the Guard's shouts. Lights fade on GBEDEMAH standing tall in his ragged cap, defiant silhouette against the barred light, shadow larger than the man, cast toward tomorrow.)

Scene 4: The Rally — Positive Action

(A great square, thrumming with bodies like a single organism breathing. The Chorus is the crowd itself, an ocean of restless voices, woven in cloth, dust, sweat, hope, and hunger. Policemen hover like wolves at the fringes, batons glinting in the harsh sun like fangs. A lorry serves as a pulpit, transformed from commerce to revolution. Upon it stands NKRUMAH, arms lifted as though conducting an orchestra of destiny. Beside him, GBEDEMAH, watchful, coaxing flame into inferno with calculated precision.)

NKRUMAH *(thundering, the very rhythm of drums in his breath)*:

Brothers! Sisters!
The hour is not tomorrow, nor the distant horizon.
It is now — resounding, insistent, undeniable.
Hear the clatter of chains in the marketplace,
the rattle of hunger in the gourd.
Shall we wait for charity doled in trickles,
when the river itself is ours by birthright?
How long shall we stand at the door of our own house,
knocking, begging entry
from those who stole the keys?

CHORUS *(rolling back like the tide, voices layered, swelling)*:

Now! Now!
Freedom now! Freedom now!
Not tomorrow! Not next year!
Now! Now! Now!

GBEDEMAH *(leaning into the roar, his words sharp as flint striking steel)*:

Do you hear it, Kwame? Do you hear, O Ghana?
This is no applause — this is judgment!
The people themselves are the tribunal,
and the verdict rings clear:
Enough delay. Enough restraint. Enough!
Shall we creep to ballots as beggars at a feast,
grateful for scraps,
or seize them as kings reclaiming crowns of their own inheritance?
Shall we whisper requests
or thunder demands?

NKRUMAH *(eyes blazing, his arms spread as though to embrace the multitude)*:

Strike, if you must strike!
March, if you must march!
But march not in silence, march in thunder!
Let your feet upon the earth
be drums announcing destiny!
This land is not the Governor's to bestow,

nor the King's to withhold.
It belongs to the sweat that tills its soil,
to the blood that waters its seed,
to the hands that have built every road,
every bridge, every building
upon which Empire stands!
Africa must be free —
not in whispers, but in the clarion shout of history!

(The crowd erupts. Sticks rise like a forest sprouting instantly. Fists pound the sky as though hammering heaven's gate. The Chorus surges into ecstasy, no longer a chant but a storm breaking through oak and stone.)

CHORUS:

Positive Action! Positive Action!
Flame in the market, thunder in the street!
Not patience but power!
Not begging but taking!
Positive Action!
Strike! March! Resist!
The time is now!

(Police sirens wail like wounded beasts. A baton cracks against bone. Smoke hisses from tear gas canisters, ghosts rising from iron. The crowd heaves forward, unstoppable as ocean meeting shore. NKRUMAH raises his fist aloft, statue of defiance. GBEDEMAH grins through the chaos, his eyes like sparks in the fire, calculating even in the maelstrom.)

Scene 5: The Substitution — Accra Central

(A smoky backroom. A lantern flickers, casting shadows that stretch like conspirators across walls that have absorbed a thousand secrets. Sheets of toilet paper lie upon the table like sacred scrolls, messages written in desperate ink. GBEDEMAH pores over them, lips curved in sly amusement. NKRUMAH's voice echoes ghostlike, as though breathed from the scraps themselves, as though prison walls cannot contain his will. The Chorus hums in undertones, like a cabal in cloaks.)

NKRUMAH'S VOICE *(measured, urgent, borne on air as if sealed in flame)*:

Afro, the board is yours. Guard my square.
Mask my intent until the hour strikes.
Accra Central is the prize — shield it.
Let them think I have abandoned the game,
let them believe the king has fled the board,
when in truth the king moves in disguise,
wears the pawn's humble face,
advances undetected toward coronation.

GBEDEMAH *(grinning, folding the paper with reverence, as though folding the future itself)*:

Then I shall wear the mask, Osagyefo.
Let them think I am the pawn that marches,
a simple piece in an unstudied game,
a loyal soldier following orders,
nothing more.
But pawns, when bold,
stride to the end of the board and transform.
And when the hour comes —
when the mask falls —
the pawn shall unveil himself as the King.
Or better yet, as the Queen,
most powerful piece upon the field.

(He tucks the fragile letter into his breast, against his heart. The Chorus circles him, whispering in chant, a liturgy of deception and destiny, of strategy sung like prayer.)

CHORUS:

Name for name, mask for mask,
shadow shelters flame.
The substitute stands,
the hidden advances.
Accra Central — surprise! surprise!
The board deceives,
the pieces dance,
and truth wears fiction's face.

(Spotlight: NKRUMAH enters triumphantly, hailed by invisible voices as though borne on the shoulders of the multitude, lifted on a tide of celebration. GBEDEMAH withdraws into half-light, watching with wry pride, the quiet architect of victory, the shadow that shaped the light, content to be unnamed so that the cause might be advanced.)

Scene 6: The First Budget — Parliament, 1954

(A grand chamber. Brass rails gleam like promises kept. Mahogany desks echo with murmurs, whispers of history being made. At the lectern stands GBEDEMAH, his papers trembling only slightly, his hands steady as a surgeon's. Ministers murmur; colonial faces scowl from the gallery, ghosts refusing to leave their haunting grounds. The Chorus adopts the restless voice of Parliament — clapping, jeering, sighing like a tide, the living breath of democracy in its infancy.)

GBEDEMAH *(solemn, resonant, with a statesman's gravitas, voice carrying the weight of new nationhood)*:

Honourable House — today we begin.
Today we mint our future.
This land shall mint its own coin,
not echo the pound of strangers,
not rattle like loose change in another empire's till,
not bear the faces of foreign monarchs
who never walked our soil.
Behold: the Ghana Pound Sterling —
our stamp, our breath, our heartbeat!
Currency that declares:
we are not borrowers of identity,
not renters of sovereignty,
but owners entire of our own destiny.

(He pauses, lifts his eyes across the chamber, then bows slightly, a gesture of respect.)

And to Kenneth Tours, my predecessor,
I pay due respect.
For stones already laid are not despised
when we build the temple higher,
nor is foundation shamed
when roof and spire ascend.
He laid groundwork in difficult soil,
and we honour the labour
even as we transcend its limitations.

(Scattered applause. The Chorus breaks into a chant, half-mocking, half-celebratory, the complex sound of a nation finding its voice.)

CHORUS:

Finance Minister! Finance Minister!
The boy from Keta writes numbers in the sky!
From fishing nets to fiscal policy,
from the Volta's edge to Parliament's heart!
Finance Minister! Finance Minister!

GBEDEMAH *(slamming the table, voice deepening to thunder, passion breaking through professional composure)*:

And mark this well:
Our coffers shall not remain tills for foreign hands!
No longer shall British firms
extract our gold, our diamonds, our cocoa,
leaving only dust and gratitude.
African merchants shall not grovel,
but stand tall in their own markets,
masters of their own commerce,
captains of their own industry.
And when we go to Washington, to London, to Paris,
we shall not speak in borrowed accents —
we shall speak as Africa,
with Africa's claim upon the future,
with Africa's seat at the table of nations!
No longer children seeking approval,
but equals demanding recognition!

(The chamber stirs with heat, with possibility, with the electricity of transformation. The Chorus hisses as though colonial ghosts scratch at the windows, jealous of the dawn, furious at their displacement.)

CHORUS *(whisper becoming roar)*:

The old order trembles!
The ledgers rewritten!
The accounts balanced
in soil-pigmented hands, African hands,
our hands

Scene 7: Independence Eve — March 1957

(A stadium trembling with anticipation, pregnant with the birth of a nation. Lanterns shimmer like constellations brought down to earth. Banners billow in the wind. Drums throb as if heralding the arrival of ancestors. Midnight hovers on the edge of breath, the entire world waiting. The Chorus hums low, a vast undercurrent — like the sea before the breaking of dawn. At the podium, NKRUMAH stands regal, trembling with history, conscious of the weight of this moment. GBEDEMAH is near, silent yet fierce, the shadow and ballast of the moment, the engineer of the miracle standing behind its public face.)

NKRUMAH *(voice cracking, then ascending, majestic)*:

At long last — the battle has ended!
And Ghana, beloved Ghana, is free forever.
Free not by permission,
not by the grace of charity,
but by the labour of her sons,
the sacrifice of her daughters,
the blood of those who fell
that we might stand.
Not by patience alone, but by fire and sacrifice,
by the willingness to risk everything
for the possibility of freedom.
Our dawn is no imitation of another land's sun.
It is Africa's own orb, sovereign and sovereignly ours,
banishing centuries of midnight in a single blaze,
turning slaves into citizens,
subjects into sovereigns,
colonies into countries!

(The crowd roars like a waterfall, like oceans meeting after continental drift. Fireworks sear the sky, writing Ghana's name in light. Drums answer the stars with thunder, earth claiming equality with the cosmos.)

GBEDEMAH *(leaning close, his voice private, warning, the counsellor to the king)*:

Kwame — hear them.
They will anoint you Pharaoh, they will name you God.
They will call you Osagyefo, Redeemer.
But leaders who forget their lieutenants
are soon abandoned in their palaces.
Guard your crown.
It is woven not only of gold,
but of thorns that pierce unseen.
Today you are lifted high,
but remember:
the higher the throne,
the farther the fall.

NKRUMAH *(faint smile, gaze lifted beyond the square, beyond Ghana, seeing Africa entire)*:

The crown is not mine, Komla —
it belongs to the multitude.
I am simply a vessel,
their voice clothed in flesh,
their dream given form.
Yet flesh bruises. Voices falter.
And the multitude is as merciful as the sea,
lifting you one day,
drowning you the next.
But what choice do we have
but to ride the wave?

(The Chorus bursts into jubilant song — jubilant, frenzied, sacred and profane, a carnival that crowns the moment, wedding drums with voices, mosque with church, shrine with square.)

CHORUS:

Freedom! Ghana! Ghana free!
The sun is ours, the night undone!
Ghana free! Ghana free!
From Cape Coast to Tamale,
from Takoradi to Kumasi,
the chains are broken,
the doors flung wide!
Ghana free!

(Lights blaze like a nation catching fire with hope. The stage becomes pure celebration, pure possibility, the moment before reality intrudes.)

Scene 8: The Rift — Flagstaff House, 1961

(A vast dining hall. The table is long, heavy with silver and uneaten fruit, a feast that no one tastes. NKRUMAH sits at one end, severe, transformed from liberator to pharaoh; GBEDEMAH at the other, defiant, still the man who wore rags as regalia. Outside, a storm drums against the shutters like the future knocking. The Chorus murmurs like courtiers, serpentine, waiting for the kill, for the fall that ambition always courts.)

NKRUMAH *(cold, clipped, voice carrying the chill of power consolidated)*:

Afro Gbede, your tongue is too quick with figures,
too ready with questions.
You question, you reckon, you calculate —
but numbers do not command loyalty.
And loyalty is the currency by which nations endure,
by which leaders survive,
by which revolutions are preserved.
I need not accountants,
but believers.
Not questioners,
but disciples.

GBEDEMAH *(leaning forward, voice bitter, yet noble, the dignity of the righteous)*:

And loyalty, Kwame, is not a license for tyranny.
We built this edifice together, stone by stone.
You lit the torch — yes.
I do not deny the flame's origin.
But must we all burn in its consuming?
Do you hear the whispers of the market?
The sigh of the farmer, the murmur of the clerk,
the quiet desperation of those
who expected freedom
and received only new masters?
You would silence them with decrees.
I would answer them with bread,
with accountability,
with the promise we made
before we tasted power's intoxication.

NKRUMAH *(rising, voice surging like the storm outside)*:

Enough! Enough!
A tree cannot have two roots.
A nation cannot have two heads.
And I — I am Ghana's root!
I am the trunk from which all branches grow!
You forget yourself, Komla.
You forget who stood before the multitude,
who faced the bullets,

who carried the weight of liberation
upon shoulders that bent but did not break!

GBEDEMAH *(standing also, eyes aflame, voice breaking with prophecy)*:

Then beware, Osagyefo,
for rot does not creep from without —
it begins within the root.
It begins when the root forgets
that it exists to feed the tree,
not to strangle it.
When the liberator becomes the tyrant,
when the voice of the people
becomes the silencer of the people,
when the dream curdles into nightmare —
that is when the tree falls,
and the root rots in darkness,
forgotten.

(The Chorus swells with whispers, echoing through the hall like wind through ruins: "Betrayal… Exile… Downfall…" A bell tolls faintly, as though summoning judgment, as though history is taking notes. Thunder cracks, splitting the sky like the nation splitting before their eyes.)

CHORUS:

The brothers break,
the builders quarrel,
the architects of dawn
draw swords at dusk.
The revolution devours its children,
the phoenix burns its own nest.

(Lights fall on both men, isolated in their righteousness, separated by the long table that might as well be an ocean, standing in the ruins of their brotherhood.)

Scene 9: Exile — London, Late 1960s

(A dim London flat. Rain scours the windowpane like an endless elegy, like memory weeping. GBEDEMAH, older now, sits hunched in a worn leather chair, nursing a glass of whisky that might be medicine or poison or memory itself. Newspapers litter the table — headlines of coups, of Nkrumah's fall, of Ghana's turmoil, of dreams deferred and revolutions betrayed. The Chorus is hushed, spectral, a murmur like the wind over abandoned graves.)

GBEDEMAH *(bitter laugh, soliloquy to the shadows, to ghosts, to history)*:

So — the chessboard lies scattered.
Queens toppled, pawns betrayed,
kings hunted into exile,
bishops ground into dust beneath boots
that promised liberation.
And I — Komla Agbeli Gbedemah —
what remains of me?
The man who crowned himself in rags,
who turned prison tatters into regalia,
who built budgets from dreams,
who stood beside leaders
and dared to remind them they were men.
Now my parliament is Sodabi,
my applause the patter of English rain,
my constituency these four walls
and the memories that haunt them.

(He picks up a letter, crumpled and smudged, handled so many times the paper threatens to dissolve. Reads aloud, voice frayed yet dignified, the dignity that suffering cannot erase.)

GBEDEMAH:

"History will remember."
Remember? Ha!
History is a drunkard at his desk,
scribbling in haste, tearing out pages,
writing victors' names in gold
and losers' names in disappearing ink.
It remembers who it wills,
forgets who it must,
simplifies what was complex,
crowns one while erasing others.
Will they recall me as builder or betrayer?
As thunder's echo, or thunder's silence?
As the hand that shaped the nation,
or the voice that dared to question?

(He rises, steps to the window, peers into London fog as though it were the smoke of his homeland, as though by looking hard enough he might see across ocean and time to the Ghana that was, that might have been.)

GBEDEMAH (soft, almost prayerful, yet defiant still):

And yet — I do not repent.
I would do it all again.
I sowed fire, and fire grew.
Yes, it scorched me,
yes, it consumed what I built,
but the land was lit.
Children learned to read by that light.
Coins bore our own faces.
Men who once bowed learned to stand.
When Ghana wakes anew,
when the fever breaks,
when sanity returns,
perhaps she will remember the tailor of prisons,
the graduate of chains,
the man who found dignity in rags
and taught a nation to find it too.
Or perhaps not.
But the work was worth doing,
even if the worker is forgotten.

(The Chorus returns — soft, elegiac, solemn yet proud, as though history itself sings from a distance, making its own judgment.)



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