

Experiences of

an

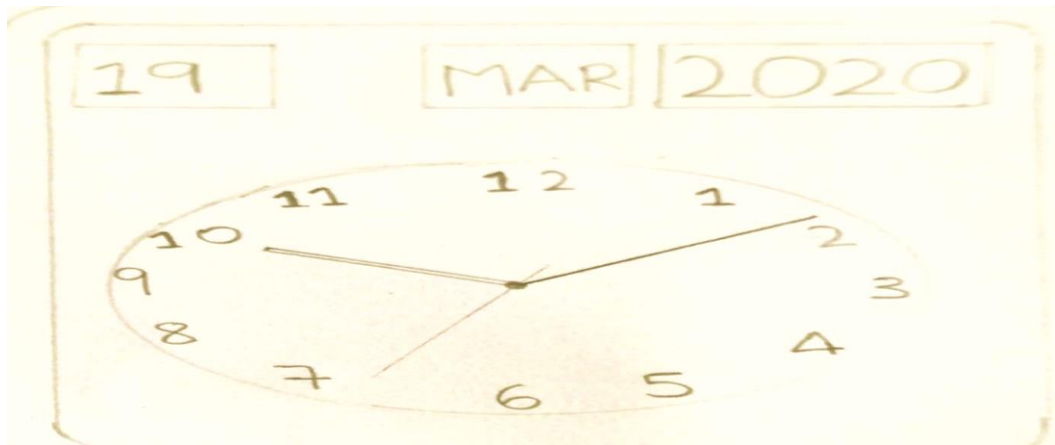
Apocalyptic World

By Shreya Ghocrun



I could be weaved, entwined or knitted into a tool for disguise, entertainment or celebration but my fate criss-crossed me into an equipment for protection. Little did I know that I would be the front-liner in an apocalyptic world.

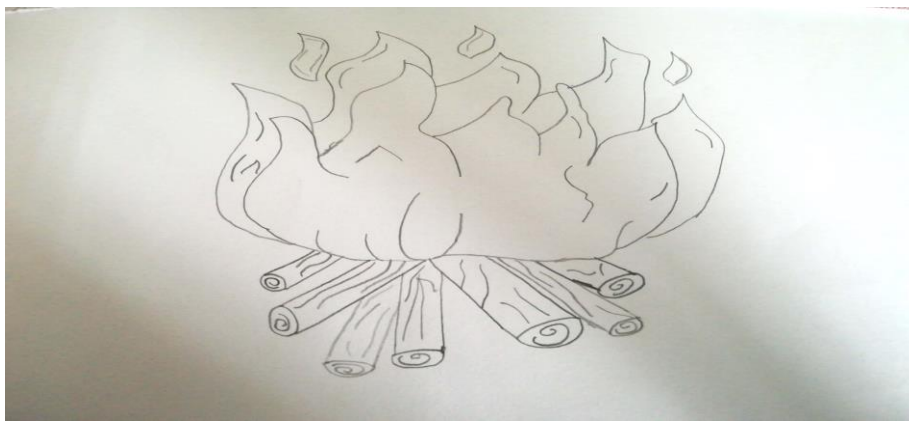
‘Covid-19’ was the word echoing while my brothers, sisters and I were being swiftly packed into polyethylene bags. While some bags were delivered to supermarkets and shops, I found myself on the towering shelves of a pharmacy, facing a Calendar Clock. ‘19<sup>th</sup> March 2020’ was the date displayed on the Calendar Clock when the pharmacy was filled with plaintive voices from paracetamol consumers, quick staccatos from busy purchasers with long list of medical products, intermittent noises from hand-sanitizer users and commotion caused by mask buyers. No children were around.



My heart skipped a beat when the bag in which I lay, was ferociously grabbed by a huge and steady hand in a brusque gesture. As I was being carried away from the hustle and bustle of the pharmacy with some of my brothers and sisters, I was awestruck by the length of the queue at the pharmacy and outside it which could have been at least seven metres. That day was the last memories of the pharmacy.

Everything went blank as numerous heavy stuffs were shoved upon me and I cannot remember how many days I stayed collapsed underneath extreme weight. When I opened my eyes, I was laid on a three-legged table in front of a television which was broadcasting the novel nationwide confinement measures announced by the Mauritian Prime Minister. My journey on that table lasted for weeks, throughout which I had glimpses of the daily routine of my new owners. The place looked more and more like a den with neglected and dusty cornices to the ceilings. At times, the ceiling leaked, and droplets of rainwater splattered on the floor, wetting the table and damping the polyethylene bag. I further crumpled out of fear inside the polyethylene bag which luckily acted as my shield.

After a few weeks, squalls resonated all over the house due to the lack of foodstuff. While the three-legged table used to accommodate enough bowls of rice and some curries, through weeks the lunches and dinners reduced to meagre meals consisting of simply rice and dhal curry or plain paratha with butter. As days went on, white tea which used to spill over the table causing milk droplets to stain my polyethylene bag shield, was gradually replaced by black tea. Soon constant laments about the unavailability of vegetables reverberated to such an extent that I thought my ears were plagued by tinnitus. One unfortunate day, my sleep was thoroughly disturbed by curls of foul-smelling smoke coming through the window. Sinister smoke shadows crawled across the table. It was only then that I realised that my owners had run out of cooking gas and had to get resort to cooking on wood fire. The smoke haunted me for days until twenty-fourth April.



That day, my polyethylene bag was carried into a small shop vis-à-vis the house of my owner. I discovered that my owner was a shopkeeper who decided to add me to his collection of items to be sold. Great was my surprise when I noticed that there was barely anything in the shop. Some packets of cigarettes, a few alcoholic beverages and hardly some laundry products were on display on the shelves and racks. No more than five customers entered the shop that day and each went out with packets of cigarettes. Much before dusk, my owner closed the shop and darted back home. I heaved sighs of relief and prepared myself to get comfortable in my new peaceful and cosy abode. Nevertheless, my joy was short termed as the serene atmosphere was suddenly muddled by noises coming from the neighbours.

The noises grew louder and louder until a cacophony ensured next door. A male voice seemed to be lashing at a woman. It started as some grumbles followed by snarls. It was as if unbridled anger was seething inside him. I was seized by a pang of unease which shortly transformed into terror. Before long, I realised that the woman was being beaten black and blue. Not only was she yelping but she was emitting blood curdling howls. Transfixed, I slumped on my

polyethylene bag. Cacophonous screeches vibrated the whole neighbouring building, but no one came to her rescue. This bedlam continued all night long. The morning, however, was wrapped in profound silence. Shaken by the night's chastising and shrieks, I was overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment. I could do nothing to help the person who was in such a distress and agony. My line of thought got disturbed with my owner entering the shop.

At around noon, a plump lady stopped by and enquired about the price of my polyethylene bag. I was baffled to find that I was being tagged as outrageously expensive and I got sold at an exaggerated price. After cramming my polyethylene bag into her backpack, the lady made her way home. Hankering about having a tranquil and comfortable dwelling, I was beaming with joy to leave behind my previous owner and the nightmarish ordeal in his shop. I remained in her backpack until the next day. As my polyethylene bag was being removed from her backpack the next day, a strong whiff of spicy aroma caught my nose. Chomping on a toast, she started to open my polyethylene bag. My heart thumped as I was the first one in the row of masks. She would automatically pick me and use me. Lucky were my brothers and sisters who were safely stuffed after me in the row. Dreadfully sad, I waved the last goodbye to them and swallowed my tears.

I soon formed part of the freckled face of the apple cheeked lady. I protected most of her face as only her shaggy eyebrows and her maroon eyes were to be seen. She used me to buttress her thick pair of spectacles. It was a muggy day as she made her way to her workplace. I realised with shock that the gloves had been thrown down the feet of the medical staffs. They were the actual front-liners in this pandemic. She firmly made her way towards a room which was being mucked out by some despondent staffs, dressed in overalls. Before entering, the lady locked eyes with some of the staffs and an awkward silence stretched among them.

The room consisted of people lying down haphazardly on small beds. Neither did it resemble an emergency ward nor an Intensive Care Unit. The thought of the proliferation of Covid-19 among Mauritians hit me with mortification. I understood that it was a room meant for Covid-19 patients. The lady got on with her routine check when suddenly a patient's health started deteriorating. The patient's face contorted in agony as it seemed that a scything pain rose in his chest. She darted towards him with great bravado, but little could she do to relieve him from the excruciating pain. Her resilience, however, was incredible. Her eyes kept on roving the room searching for a tool, equipment or a reliever but in vain. He started collapsing in pain and his coughs were infinite. With a perspiring forehead, the lady did her best to support and help

the patient. Terror seized me and I remained motionless. That scene remained encrypted in my mind.

In the evening, dabbing at her eyes and fanning her face, the lady left her workplace. I could feel her melancholy and her heavy heart which in turn made me feel dejected. As she made her way home, her eyes filled with tears while I remained numb with sorrow. As soon as she entered her yard, she loosely held my ear loops, gently lifted me and I was thrown over the walls of her yard and I ended on a waste land next to her house.

The sun was scorching high in the sky with warm fluffy clouds drifting across the sky. I was enthralled by the beauty of nature. Never had I seen nature so abloom, vibrant and verdant. Drooling little puppies were playing around, cicadas, leafhoppers and froghoppers were buzzing in the bushes and pigeons were befriending the bulbuls. Captivated by this pacific scene, I got ready to join nature and form part of it. My material structure would soon weaken, my edges would break down and I would gradually decompose to blend with the earth. For the first time, after months, I felt relieved, relaxed and ecstatic. I would shortly be reunited with my roots.

Nevertheless, my joy was shortened when I noticed a Labrador rushing towards me with a wagging tail. Tongue hung out, it stared at me quelling my anxiety. In no time, it pounced on me with its gaping jaws. "That's the life of a mask." I whispered while I was being torn apart by the dog.





