

POETRY

Wafula Yenjela



VANISHING ROOTS

The cow I used to milk
 Is no longer mine
 She kicks whenever she sees me
 The cow I used to milk
 Charges in hostility whenever I look at her udder
 The cow I used to milk
 Will never listen to my whistles again

The cow I used to herd is called Njeye
 Njeye gives her milk to strangers...
 I brought her grass from the mountains
 Because grass at the foot of Mt. Elgon is tender
 I brought her salt from the flamingo-patronized Lake Bogoria

And water from the spring in the sweet valley overlooking the Nile
 Where I used to herd her in the evenings
 As we trekked from the Congo
 But the cow I used to milk scowled morosely
 She mowed with rejection

Friend, it's the cow I used to milk that makes me weep
 Because now I know it's hard to live without milk
 Now I know that mowing is music
 I weep
 Because her udder is now beyond me
 How I long to herd her in the sweet valley at sundown
 How I long to embrace her in our annual festivals
 Of communing with my ancestors, pouring libation

The herd of the Bamasaba is stolen, forever,
 The herd of the Bamasaba is vanished
 And here I lie down among my ancestors
 Wrapped in strange veils instead of the rich cow-hide

A Dirge for Sandaal

We toiled together
 In the rains and in the sun
 We laughed together
 In mockery and in merry
 We sailed together
 In stormy seas and in still waters
 We chanted in unison
 In despair and in happiness
 We swallowed them all
 The silent curses and the shallow envy
 We drank from the same cup
 Of betrayal and of redemption
 Even in wilderness we wandered

And discovered our vanity
 Through thick darkness we raced
 And crushed forbidden gourds
 In dangerous rivers we waded
 But survived an ambush by crocodiles

For we were a portion
 In sorrow and in bliss

Then came the executioner's bullet
 And infallible revelations that you were
 A disgrace to humanity,
 A menace to society,
 A traitor to your country,
 A terrorist.
 You? Sandaal, you whom I knew?

Now you go alone, on a lonely journey
 You who never told me of divine rewards
 For aggression against infidels
 You who never treated me, a kaffir, disdainfully
 Have dived into the gaping jaws
 That have always opened for others
 And abandoned me in a nation seething with vengeance

Thin Tears

Call me softly, and let your voice caress my ailing heart
 Touch me tenderly
 And let your hand sing melodically in my hen-pecked heart
 Embrace me silently
 And let your breast sweep across my sad soul
 Kiss me calmly
 And let these forgiving lips nurse me with the sweetness of your life
 Take me home

And let me live for you
 For you have stolen my faithful God

Don't go, my love, don't go
 For in the fathomless chambers of my heart
 Is where I have hidden you.
 Return with the dew
 Return with the mist
 Return to me with a waking dream.
 My plea is too late?
 Cursed is my late tongue
 A tongue slackened by love unquenchable
 That untamable love that soars over fortresses

A tornado is sweeping
 Deep across the jungles of my heart
 She has gone away forever
 Forsaking this sighing body
 But my casualty soul shall forever write her nurturant name
 On every gemstone in the universe
 With these thin tears that shall never wither.



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