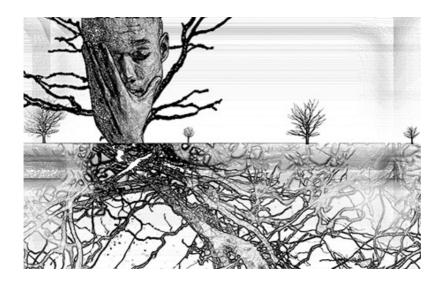
POETRY

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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