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Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 38(2)

ISSN

0041-5715

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Publication Date

2015

DOI

10.5070/F7382025967

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Love's Eloquence

Benedicto Wokomaatani Malunga

“Do you know that this is the longest kiss you have ever given me?” Elizabeth announced chuckling with evident satisfaction.

“Is that so?” Adrian asked, smiling from ear to ear like a sliced watermelon apparently bemused.

“You have made this evening truly special to me I must say,” Elizabeth continued contentedly.

“Special evenings like this one are the most appropriate gift men should give to loyal fiancées like you my dear. You have been a fantastic friend since the time we met and willingly and genuinely fell in love. That is why I organize outings like this one with you once in a while whenever my pockets allow it,” Adrian explained. The ring of sincerity and simplicity was evident in every word he uttered.

“You melt me like butter before flames of fire. You are such a great darling my man. Sadly, I now have to wait for three months before I see you again and hear those lovely words from you. It is like this long vacation will last forever,” Elizabeth complained.

“Before long our holiday will be over Elizabeth and we shall be back in the romantic groove again to enjoy each other’s company to the fullest,” Adrian spoke assuredly while holding the hand of his lover in his own with warm affection.

They were now standing outside the restaurant where they had ended their academic year with a truly sumptuous meal which both of them had thoroughly enjoyed as they reminisced on the mouth-watering milestones that had characterized their love affair which was fast maturing like wine with body.

“So you meant this exciting evening with me to be your longest goodbye to your queen love?” Elizabeth teased her man gently as her dimpled cheeks revealed their cherubic value.

“As you already know Liz, I do not like goodbyes. However, this time around, I thought I could cushion our temporary parting with good food and drinks. I am sure that you know better than to be reminded that you have become part of me so much that any separation from you no matter how short is like an act in

dismembering my body. That is what you mean to me in case you need convincing,” Adrian knocked Elizabeth out with these words.

She felt like one who was playing a mellifluous tune on a lyre for her grateful lover at dusk in a candle lit room which oozed rare intimacy.

“Anyway, let’s go now. We have been out for too long. We should be returning to campus to make final touches to our packing. As before, what we have had is indeed a lovely night and I owe it to my creative beau who refuses to be predictable on matters of the heart. In all sincerity, you organized this dinner when I least expected. It was a proper end to a highly successful academic year that has brought out of the best out of the two of us. Isn’t it great that we are inching closer to graduation without realizing it ourselves and with grades we can both be proud of?” Elizabeth continued to speak as they walked hand in hand. It was as if they were promenading in the aisle of a cathedral going towards the altar on their wedding day.

As this happened, the American crooner Percy Sledge belted out his gem titled “When a Man Loves a Women” in the restaurant the couple had left behind.

“You are very correct Liz. It is amazing how time flies when all is well. I am actually flattered by the remarkable progress each one of us is making in our respective courses. It is not very common to achieve so much academically while at the same time enjoying a rich romantic life like ours. We should consider ourselves lucky in this regard,” Adrian observed.

“That is my idea of a balanced equation,” Elizabeth answered. On this blissful note, the jolly couple proceeded to campus as it joked on a wide spectrum of topics.

On the following day, after wishing one another well, each one of them left for their respective homes hoping that letters they would exchange would keep them informed about what was happening in their lives during their vacation. That was sometime back.

Today, when Adrian Kiwanuka’s name was called, the entire graduation hall stood. In unison, it gave the blind man a prolonged ovation befitting his unmatched feat registered in this country. It was a moving moment as excited photographers jostled for strategic space to capture the Chancellor of Mulimbe University as he received this rare achiever of a man into the society of medical

graduates. This in the 1960s was the beginning of an era which would become the pride of East Africa as the dawn of independence embraced the African continent.

Resplendent in his colorful and flowing academic dress, the imposing and awe-inspiring figure of Kiwanuka became the embodiment of pomp and dignity, substance and circumstance, elegance and excellence. Guided by a cane he carried with him, he ascended the carpeted steps gingerly with an air of self-assurance which came with success earned the hard way. His grateful relatives in the gallery of the expansive hall punctuated his every step with heart-lifting ululation depicting unrestrained happiness. Admirers whistled freely in the typical African style with genuine appreciation. They were impressed to see the man they had initially only heard about, whose story of quiet courage and enviable determination, had captured his nation's imagination. His tale, would not leave the corridors of Mulimbe University for God knows how long because it defined greatness itself. Posterity would be mesmerized and inspired by it.

Elizabeth Kkulubya now his dear wife remained standing when others in the hall had resumed their seats. In a world of her own, tears flowed freely from her eyes and bathed her comely face which glowed with amazing beauty. As if in a trance, she was exceedingly enthralled to see Adrian descend the steps majestically with a degree in hand at the end of the stage where the Chancellor and his party of university managers and academics sat.

She could identify with the grandeur of this moment because she had been party in its demanding creation. She had helped water this seed. She had diligently nurtured it. She had made sure that it was not choked by weeds. It had therefore flourished as she happily watched. It had matured before her watchful eyes until today when it was being harvested. She would keep it jealously in her granary because it was near and dear to her heart.

As Dr Adrian Kiwanuka approached his two companions, they both stood spontaneously like trained army officers in appreciation, and gave him a prolonged hand-clapping befitting a hero belonging to the triad that had made history with the true African brotherhood that had become its trademark.

Adrian remembered with unprecedented gratitude how he first met his charming colleagues during their freshman's orientation on one bright morning. Yes, that was some twelve distant

years ago when they had just been admitted into their first year of the MBBS program after A levels. At that time, he least imagined that these two foreigners whose homes up until now, he did not know, would become and steadily remain, his closest and most trusted friends- companions upon whose support he could count upon come rain or sunshine.

In all fairness, it had never occurred to him that these humorous allies would steadfastly remain by his side through thick or thin, on this long academic journey, whose fruits could only be earned with sweat and sleepless nights, as they scaled intellectual hills and mountains whilst buoying themselves with spicy chatter and banter when their academic pursuits exercised their minds.

Failing to believe the spectacle unfolding before her with eloquent academic splendor, Elizabeth remained the only one standing for a while as the magnitude and scale of Adrian's enviable and unbelievable success, sank in her mind. Grateful tears continued to bring out her immense joy from her enchanting eyes as they lazily meandered down her high cheek bones that defined her attention-catching and jaw-dropping beauty. In fact, lightheartedly, Adrian would often admirably tell her that she looked like a reflecting Greek goddess of beauty. Now it was her looking fixedly at her superman as he took his seat. Deep down in her heart, she admired Adrian's determination and hard work. She sincerely marveled at his unflinching courage in the face of formidable adversity. She felt very proud for having been part of his dream when the world seemed to have suddenly crumbled and tumbled over him due to the blindness that struck him in adulthood.

Newspaper editors would write about this sweet and moving achievement. Radio stations would broadcast this rare and unmatched development in this part of the world. The national television would beam this unique event at this East African University. The celebration party which would follow at Kiwanuka's residence in the city, would endorse the view that real love's sonorous ring was in deeds and it thrived most when seriously challenged by the unexpected, no matter how daunting.

Elizabeth's tears revealed deep and heart-felt love. They told a story of profound human oneness and togetherness only principled people cultivate. They demonstrated how clearly elated beyond measure, she had felt for having remained faithful and

loyal to her man. They displayed the perseverance and resilience with which she had stood by Adrian when it mattered most.

She was glad to look back and relish the realization that even when blindness was almost shattering Kiwanuka's dreams at a time he was about to qualify as a medical doctor, her love for him had neither wavered nor faltered. If anything, it had gathered greater momentum she had never been able to understand herself. It had acquired deeper value only her heart could feel. It had taken on a new and enduring quality which washed her soul with joy. It is this unique love which enveloped Kiwanuka. It made him feel wanted where in its absence it would have created dejection and rejection. The fear of being possibly abandoned because of what had befallen him, evaporated quickly as the sunshine of hope asserted itself pleasantly.

It was Elizabeth's sustained warmth towards him, which had uplifted and had catapulted him to greater heights of achievement when able-bodied men were falling by the wayside. This love had spurred him to aspire for lofty ideals, had fed his imagination, had enhanced his courage and had spurred him in unimaginable ways in search of professional glory that matched his intellectual capacity.

Just as Elizabeth's love for Kiwanuka had taken a new dimension when her hubby had suddenly become blind, her friendship with his colleagues had also opened a new vista. Together with these well-meaning gentlemen, Elizabeth formed a reliable support team for her lover when he had become unbelievably dependent on them. In concert, they had fought with unstoppable ferocity and fury against his obtrusive and unwelcome handicap. Their spirited fight had culminated in the victory the whole nation was celebrating today. Kiwanuka had been awarded a Master's Degree in Medicine with distinction. He now belonged to the first cohort to ever specialize in Physiotherapy at Mulimbe University of East Africa where only the cream of this part of the continent went to study.

The whole story of valor had begun with a vacation letter Elizabeth had received. When the epistle arrived, it found her completing her final week of practicals in the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department of Musamale Teaching Hospital. It had come from Thabwa Kagwa. That afternoon she had been too restless to concentrate on her work for reasons that were not

immediately clear to her. She seemed to experience a disturbing premonition. But when she read the letter which landed in her hands, she could not believe the speed with which misfortune, like a ruthless and vicious viper, had struck the man who had brought unparalleled happiness to her life. Elizabeth wept as she helplessly stared at her piece of paper in painful disbelief.

The disturbing letter read as follows:

Dear Elizabeth,

It is with a heavy heart that I write you this afternoon. Our mutual friend Derrick Toga with whom I have been staying during this long holiday and myself, returned from visiting your fiancé Adrian yesterday. We were shocked to see him blind at the district hospital in his area. Upon speaking to his doctor, whom we knew when he was completing his internship at Musamale Teaching Hospital, we learnt that our colleague had developed river blindness. This led to his loss of sight.

As you are aware, Adrian hails from a black fly infested area. Hence, his doctor explained to us that laboratory tests indicated that he had filarial worms injected into his circulatory system by a female blood-sucking fly of the simulium family, which lives on human blood. He went on to elaborate to us that over the years, the microfilaria in our colleague's blood, found their way into his lymphatic system and reached his eyes where they damaged tissues and caused Onchocerciasis.

As you can imagine, Adrian is devastated. He feels his current health status will interfere with his desire to finish his medical degree next year. Additionally, he fears he may not proceed with his specialization in surgery later. However, Derrick and I as his closest associates, hold a different view altogether. We think and feel that with your full support and ours, Adrian should be able to complete his degree program. Even though it may be impossible for him to specialize in surgery which he loves so much, we believe our faculty staff will be able to advise him on what he could venture into if his dream to specialize is to be kept alive. Tentatively, Physiotherapy which will be introduced after we have completed our first degree would appear to suit his condition best because unlike surgery, it does not depend on sight a lot.

We shared everything that has been said above with him and assured his relatives and himself that we will spare no effort in

ensuring that he gets his degree. I was delighted to observe the relief with which he greeted these ideas. I am therefore convinced that once we return to Mulimbe, we will have to sit with you and discuss how best we should assist this great friend. Dereck and I thought you needed to know all this in good time so that when Adrian comes back, you should not be unduly shocked. From our deepest of hearts, we do not doubt that you and us will triumph over the setback we have encountered.

Please accept my warm regards and keep on praying for our friend. He needs our prayers to give him strength and hope.

I am yours,

Thabwa Kagwa.

Elizabeth was comforted by the assurance she got from Thabwa and Derrick. Since first year, these two and Adrian had been inseparable companions. Among them, they had happily and competitively exchanged the top three positions in their class. On campus they were affectionately referred to as the three musketeers by their colleagues. Like the quintessential scholars in the making they were, they participated fully in university life and brought out their numerous talents outside academia with enviable ease.

Apart from Medicine which was clearly their calling and passion, they read anything on which they laid their hands and interacted with the brightest colleagues from other disciplines. Needless to say therefore that when they spoke on more or less any subject of intellectual curiosity, you felt proud listening to their erudite conversations which underscored that knowledge, if indeed eclectically synthesized and utilized, was pleasantly seamless and impeccably user friendly.

When they debated with their fellow students in their campus parliament, they left everybody spellbound by the Churchillian eloquence and wit which accompanied the cogent arguments they ably and persuasively assembled and advanced with titillating and stomach-splitting jokes.

As actors in their university are traveling theatre, they dazzled their audiences with award-winning performances wherever and whenever they performed. The lines they articulated faultlessly like they had not memorized them, flowed naturally from their lips as they transported those watching them to another

world of make believe. Their convincing interpretation of the roles they acted out made their producers and directors prize them highly whenever they gave medicine a break to take part in theatre performances. Little wonder then that when they added their soccer prowess to all this, their admirers could not help but wonder how three friends would have so much in common and use it superbly to keep a diverse campus entertained year in year out.

When Adrian returned to campus after the long vacation he never wanted to remember because of the disability it had inflicted on him, Elizabeth was there to meet him. That evening they sat together in his room and their conversation went like this:

“Adrian, receive this special ring which renews my commitment to you. Just like Derrick and Thabwa vowed to see you succeed in your studies, I wish to assure you that this ring is a symbol of my dedication to the mission of giving you the support you need. I will read aloud notes and book chapters for you whenever you please. Your clothes shall be washed and be pressed by nobody else but me. You and I have come a long way. That is why our relationship can only grow in leaps and bounds now. I know that if you have ever needed me most, the time is now. I therefore offer myself as your everlasting pillar of support come rain or sunshine.”

Adrian was all tears. The only words he uttered were, “thank you.” Those two words carried a lot of meaning. He said them emphatically because they were a vehicle carrying his heartfelt gratitude. Luckily, Elizabeth understood that Adrian was not a man of many words. His verbal economy was the mark of candidness.

In fact, if she felt so secure in his company, it was because of the integrity he stood for. When he was unhappy, he spoke his mind so gently that if you were the source of his unhappiness, you felt so foolish and guilty that you did not hesitate to apologise. Similarly, if he felt good about what you had done for him, the encouragement he gave you made you yearn for doing better regularly. Hence, there was no doubt in Elizabeth’s mind that if there was a man to get married to after completing her nursing degree, it was Adrian. He was a partner who lived his profession when it came to extending care to others. It was such a man she wanted to call her own.

After Adrian had completed his internship successfully, the big question arose about what specialization he would get into. His white professors knew that he was not one who would be satisfied with a first degree only. Not when his closest companions Derrick and Thabwa had decided to specialize in Medicine and Surgery respectively. They were also aware that the easiest way to pulverize such a go-getter would be to deny him the opportunity to realize his vision of becoming a specialist due to his blindness.

When both Adrian and Elizabeth had completed their first degrees, the greatest news they ever heard in their lives was perhaps the impromptu announcement Dr Thabwa Kagwa made as a toastmaster at their wedding on the university campus. In his usual humorous style, Kagwa from Malawi said that if Adrian had not chosen a Malawian like him and a Kenyan like Derrick to be his best friends, God could not have blessed him with the wisdom to have graceful Elizabeth as his partner for life.

As the guests laughed their lungs out, he went on to announce that the Faculty of Medicine was delighted to inform all guests at Dr Kiwanuka's wedding that he had been admitted into the M.Med Program with a bias towards Physiotherapy. He then quickly pointed out that to allay the fears of doubting Thomases; he would invite the Director of the Physiotherapy programme who was among the invited guests to confirm this.

When Professor Kibera in his sonorous baritone endorsed the announcement, guests at the reception cheered loudly indeed. This was now Dr Kiwanuka's journey to a second graduation as his own wife proceeded with her two year Master's Degree Program in Surgical Nursing which would lead her to joining the university as a lecturer because she had performed exceptionally well at her undergraduate level.

If Elizabeth had been looking forward to that afternoon's party coming after her husband's most memorable graduation, it was because she knew that that occasion would have some unforgettable history behind it. That history would bring forth the richness of love between friends who appreciated the beauty and necessity of caring for one another. It would also add a new perspective to the meaning of authentic companionship between a man and a woman. She therefore wanted to share that love with Adrian, his two friends and their wives as they danced to songs played by the effervescent Beatles on a booming radiogram. She

wanted to extend that love to Adrian's family who had given her a rare gift of a man to share her life with as they tested her celebrated cooking - a wonderful husband who had done her proud when it mattered most and when the feint-hearted could have easily given up. It was this God-given gift she would cherish throughout her life as she lectured to nursing students with a passion for her profession.

It should therefore come as no surprise that she had stood transfixed to the floor in the gallery well after her man had descended from the podium where he had electrified the graduation atmosphere with his Master's Degree in Medicine majoring in the new field of Physiotherapy. She had remained standing because she felt that she could not do enough justice to savoring the apotheosis of her man's finest hour by sitting. Hence, her prolonged standing told how eternally grateful she was to her husband because of the great honor he had brought to their family.