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Beauty in a Scorched Land

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1

A Feast



2

A Pose



Thoughts From Kelvin



The stories I wrote are fiction.

My goal was to move the statistics from their status as cold numbers, to the living reality they reflect.

The journal entries and pictures by my sister, Charlene, are true. They are snapshots of her time working as a nurse in Zambia. As an editor, I have left her writing as intact as possible.

The idea of using parallel story lines was to contrast the state of the third world, with the richness of North America. Should this book be taken a reflection of whole continents?

Of course not.

The issues confronting Africa and North America are complex and diverse. This humble book cannot hope to cover them all. I would strongly encourage you to research the issues raised in this book for yourself.

Ultimately, our biggest goals for this project are to raise awareness, provoke thought, and most of all to prompt action. I hope we have achieved that in a small way.

Kelvin

P.S. Any resemblances between the authors and the monkeys are, of course, entirely coincidental.

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At the Water's Edge



Arrival in Zambia

6



Sunrise

The morning sun was a burning eye of fire. Its gaze beat through the clouds and onto a head of short black hair.

Samuel straightened and then wiped a sheen of sweat from his forehead. Muscles rippled in his powerful arms. He believed that his strength was a gift of God.

A gift that needed to be used.

He could see the tips of pots bobbing along the trail to the south. A long line of water carrying women were on the way over.

His knees buckled as he bent and then filled another bucket of water from the river flowing past his feet. He struggled to steady himself against the undertow that threatened to pull him under.

He straightened. Success! Once again he had beat the river and the reptiles in it.

Samuel Kyanamina was young, handsome, and full of life. His sculptured body was bare, revealing the moisture glistening on his

ebony skin. All he wore was a pair of tattered brown shorts and a gleaming white smile.

He headed over to the long row of clay pots lined up on the shore.

Water gurgled and splashed as it flowed from his wooden bucket into a fat little pot near the end of the row.

Would today be the day? It could, but only if he kept working. He would need all the time he could get.

Samuel bent down again, careful to keep his eyes on the wide river.

Crocodiles were notorious in this area. They would swim just beneath the surface toward their unsuspecting victims. Still, if one kept their eyes open, they could usually be avoided.

As he continued to labor, the rising sun pierced the clouds and drew a beam of light across the surface of the river.

The crimson blood of yesterday's victim still stained the dull brown sand of the riverbank. A foolish tourist had wandered near the river and been attacked by a hippo.

Hippos were violent when disturbed.

Even more so than crocodiles.

Samuel paused in his work. His eyes squinted as he stared across the river. Just as he suspected, those were two elephants on the other side. There was no danger from them.

The joyful singing of the women grew nearer.

Samuel increased his pace.

Perhaps Lebo would have come with the women today.

Samuel had noticed her smile on their last visit. His heart had skipped a beat, then before he had been able to speak to her, she was gone again. Off on the long trek back to her village.

Would today be the day when he could finally spare a moment to approach her?

He was hopeful. The long row of pots on the sand had been filled. The effort of waking up early had been worth it. Samuel would have time to introduce himself to her. He felt the pace of his heartbeat picking up again as he rehearsed his opening lines.

AT THE WATER'S EDGE

The joyful singing was descending upon him.

Samuel turned to examine the crowd of women in colorful motion as they filed around the row of pots.

Where was Lebo?

The women began removing the empty pots from their heads and placing them on the sand.

Samuel's eyes continued to search the chattering mob.

Where was she?



“You know, you and Jolene would be a perfect couple.”

Rob stopped before the office water dispenser. He stuck his paper cup beneath the spout. His fingers twisted the release lever.

It stuck.

He applied more pressure.

“You gotta jiggle it a bit, then it works. Come on man! You gotta be

serious! Work it like you're doin the macarena! There ya go. Anyway, like I was saying about Jolene..."

Rob kept grumbling as he watched the water flowing into his paper cup. "You'd think they would have something better than this garbage in here. The company makes enough money after all."

"Yeah yeah...I get you...but you know how it is. Politics. The managers get all the perks while we get all the work. But, listen man, I'm trying to help your love life here...the least you can do is listen to me."

Allen was the resident computer tech. If you were the Sherlock Homes type you'd be able to figure this out by his pale, narrow face. If you were like the rest of the human race, you'd figure it out pretty quick when you saw the rest of his attire. The white shirt, casual black dress pants, and tacky red tie. As one might expect, the front pocket of his shirt was overflowing with pens.

Rob's square framed glasses bobbed as he nodded.

"Jolene... got ya. Now let's be clear. You want me to defy common sense and go on a blind date. The problem here is, I'm not blind and neither is she!"

"No, I'm just saying you should consider it. Seriously..."

"Seriously, huh?" Rob laughed and then down his water like it was a shot of liquor on Saturday night.

He had a head full of curly black hair. His face was unshaven, but just enough to be manly, not slovenly. He looked like he should be the leading man in a chick flick...Or perhaps the front man in a boy band. A smirk toyed around the edges of his dull red lips as he stared at his friend.

"And where do I find this maiden of untold beauty?"

Allen's slightly yellowed teeth were revealed as his face split into a grin. "Wait five minutes. She's the habitual type, she always comes over for a cup of water at ten thirty."

"Okay, then why haven't I seen her in here before?"

"You just started work today, remember?"

"Oh yeah, it already feels like a lifetime...sorry."

“A regular joker you are. Like I said, you’d be perfect for Jolene.”

Rob scratched his neck. His white cotton shirt and black dress pant uniform wasn’t very comfortable.

“Why would she come all the way up to floor eleven just for a cup of water? She seems a little crazy to me.”

Allen’s emerald green eyes widened. “Why not ask her yourself. She’s standing right behind you.” On that note Allen vanished into the maze of cubicles that populated this floor of the skyscraper.

Rob turned to face the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

“I’m crazy am I? I’ve heard my share of pick up lines but that’s a new one. Now please get out of my way. I’m thirsty.”

Rob felt a rush of red foolishness spread across his face like a rash.

Why did he always say the wrong thing?

It was over before it had started.

Or was it?

As Jolene began filling her cup, Rob wracked his brain for a good comeback.

The ivory white of Lebo’s grin caught Samuel’s eye. He set down his wooden bucket and then began to walk toward her.

She was just as beautiful as he had remembered.

Lebo wore a blue dress adorned with a gold colored pattern of leaves. Her face was smooth. Her hands were calloused from years of hard work. She was perfectly formed in the hand of God. Samuel longed for the blessing of her attention.

The other women chattered like crows as they selected their pots from the row on the sand. When they found the object of their quest they placed it on their head for all to see.

Some of the younger women stared at Samuel’s masculine body as he walked by.

“Thank you Samuel!”

“Don’t be a stranger Samuel!”

“Beware of hippos!”

Samuel grinned as he returned their greetings. They were only jokes and he would treat them as such. The only woman he was interested in was Lebo.

He had to hurry.

She could never stay long. Her village was twenty miles away, she would need to start walking back soon if she planned return before dark.

“Good afternoon.” He said in a voice full of confidence.

Lebo bent down to place a pot of water on her head and then straightened. At first, the weight seemed to bring distress to her round, slightly chubby face and then this expression was replaced by a cautious happiness.

“Hello Samuel.” She mumbled, careful to avoid looking directly at him.

As Samuel stared at her, his heart began to pound out a tribal rhythm. Her face was round, but not too round. Her features were almost European, but a head full of small black curls betrayed her true nationality.

“Don’t be shy.” Samuel, stepped closer. “I know your family well. I’m sure you must have heard of my family. We...”

“Yes. Yes. My Father has told me all about you and your family. There’s no need to tell me anymore about them.”

Some of the older women tittered to each other as they watched the two lovebirds. Samuel ignored them as he pressed on.

“Did you have a safe journey?”

Lebo’s gold colored earrings swayed as she steadied the pot on her head.

“Yes, the rebels have moved south. The trail is safe...for now.”

“I’m glad to hear that. I...” Samuel lowered his head. “I have been praying for your safety as you travel.”

The pot of water on her head teetered as Lebo headed away from the river. “Thank you Samuel. I will pray that God will bless you for your kindness.” Lebo stopped to steady the pot again. All the while, the other women began regrouping and heading back toward the narrow path

they had come from. "I'm sorry, I must return to my home. The journey is long and one never knows when the rebels will return. "

Her body swayed as she walked to take her place in the line of women. Samuel felt an anxious tide rising within him.

He didn't want to lose her.

She was beautiful.

Elegant.

She had the bearing of a Queen.

Samuel's heart pounded in his head as he ran after her. "Ah, Lebo...a moment please."

Lebo kept walking, careful to keep her place in the line. "Yes...?"

"I..."

An expression of alarm crossed Lebo's face. Her finger trembled as it pointed at something behind him.

"Samuel, look behind you..."

He began to turn. "What is it?"

"Hippo!"

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