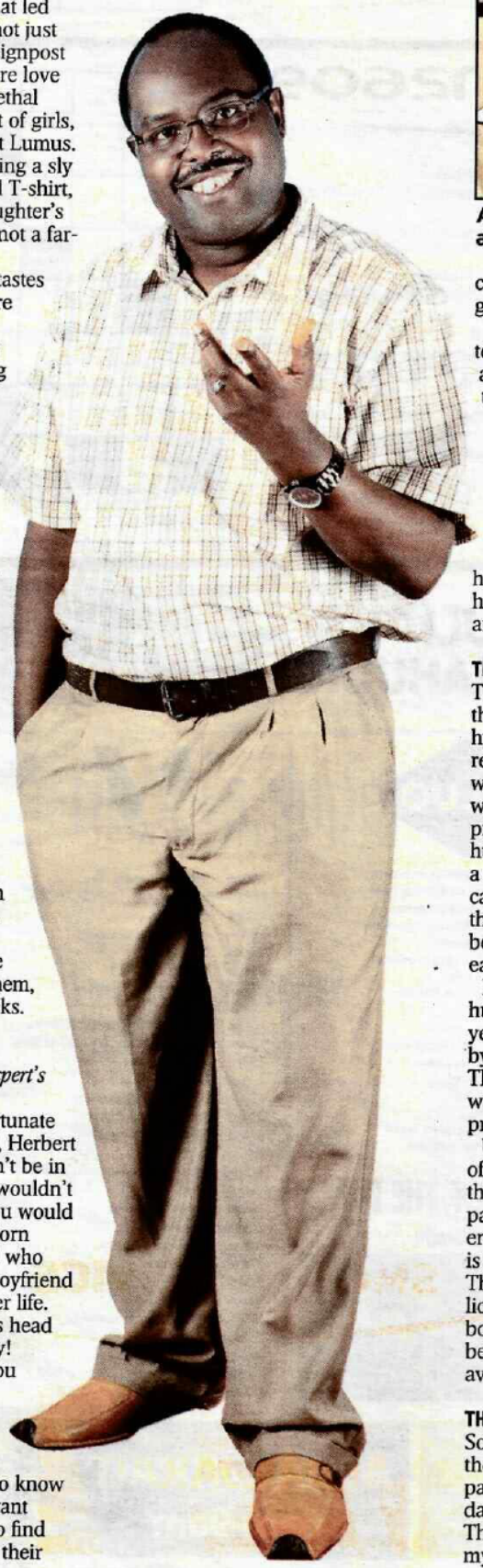
THE PRICE OF PARENTAL PANIC

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You have probably heard about Herbert Lumu Musasizi. Police says he found a young man in his daughter's bedroom on Valentine's Day and pounced on him with brutal venom. That young man, called Martin was an S.5 student and had sneaked in the Nansana home looking for love. His girlfriend's dad is said to have dispatched him to a new address, out of this earth! And, for that, the dad is a hero and villain in different shades of opinion.

The courts will handle the legal aspect, but our hearts must grapple with the profound failure that led to this catastrophe. This is not just a crime story; it is a brutal signpost of a crisis in parenting, where love and protection curdle into lethal control. As a modern parent of girls, you are all potential Herbert Lumus. The nasty possibility of finding a sly looking fellow in an Arsenal T-shirt, inside the closet of your daughter's bedroom, in your house, is not a far-fetched scare.

If girls knew how bitter it tastes to us, dads, they would spare us the torture of nocturnal pest imports. Yet most of us were once guilty of sneaking into people's homes with similar dishonourable causes. Parents of those days were so steel belted, cold hearted and unforgiving that if they caught you, they would stick you onto their spear as their noble fatherly duty. And everyone would clap for them for having saved the village a gate crushing rascal trying to jeopardise people's bride prices! But, in spite of such red hot risk, we still found ourselves swimming the darkness to play weevil! Many scaled tall gates, others innovated ways of taming vicious dogs and, others still, learned how to stop breathing, until the man of the house started snoring. Now it is our time to suffer infiltrators and, sadly, we are expected to negotiate with them, instead of breaking their necks.





A parent and child. We must be the parents who listen, who guide, and who are the last people our children would ever choose to lie to

HORMONAL ATTACK

I wrote in my latest book, *Expert's 100 Strategies For Love*, an explanation of such an unfortunate scenario. If my fellow parent, Herbert Lumu had read it, he wouldn't be in the cooler and his daughter wouldn't be wishing him dead too! You would imagine his daughter being torn between her love for the dad who brought her up and for the boyfriend who had just shown up in her life. But no; she wanted her dad's head too! How dare he kill her guy!

I argued in my book that you can never understand love without comprehending the role of hormones in behavioural choices. I wish all parents and children got to know this! The dating book is relevant for all, especially parents who find it a problem to walk through their children's love lives as guides not guards.

Love hormones influence a child to suddenly prefer the company, advice and security of a stranger to that of parents and close relatives. The family that brought them up suddenly ceases to matter and the stranger takes up pole position. You can swallow your own head, but she will choose him over you who sweated plasma trying to impregnate her mother with her! Your lamentations of paying her school fees would bounce like arrows off a battle tank.

THE LION MUST EAT

The first strategy is to develop the right mindset. I will use the hypothesis of the hunting lion to reorganise your philosophy. In the wild, a lion loves antelopes because without them, he cannot live. He is propelled by hunger and instinct to hunt them down but, for him to eat, a life must be lost. Herbert Lumu can crack the skull of a hunting lion, the remaining ones will still hunt because they are lions and they must eat!

In adolescence, boys start yearning, hunting and innovating for sex. Girls yearn for love and get disappointed by the lion whose appeal is just sex. They eventually have to innovate ways in which they don't become prey to the lion.

Unfortunately, it is not the work of the lion to save the antelope! It is the duty of the antelopes and their parents to save themselves and ensure that when the lion eats, it is not their daughter that is eaten! They must remain alert, know the lion's strategies, read Dr. Love's book, foretell the danger signs and be skilled, ready and strategic in avoiding the prey identity.

THE NEW PARENT

So, your role should be to explain the patterns of lion prowl. The old parent breathed out fire if a child dared to show any interest in dating. That strict, authoritarian model, my friend calls it the African Way, demands obedience without offering understanding. This new generation, however, wants its voices to be heard, and it values autonomy over raw authority. Being an original African parent doesn't stop the dating; it only forces the child to hide and keep the parent in blissful denial.

And the child misses out on parental guidance through this volatile time. Today, and increasingly so, many parents are encouraging their children to date and also bring home their best friend. Many parents who have dared to actively take part in the dating lives of their children, have sanitised the process and successfully instilled discipline into it. They have made the young people accountable. Often, when dating is supported, few mistakes are made.

When our children grow into teenagers, our parenting should also subtly shift. It should move from pure command to collaborative guidance. Change the lens from 'Catch' to 'Connect'. If your biggest fear is catching your child doing something wrong, it means your relationship is based on surveillance, not sanctuary. Teenagers will inevitably explore. Your role is not to prevent all exploration, but to ensure they explore safely and feel comfortable enough to ask you, their parent, for guidance when they are confused. You are their primary source of wisdom; stop outsourcing that job to fear.

Communicate, don't command. Engage, don't dictate. Ask open-ended questions. Listen to their perceptions of life, their talents, interests and ambitions. If you find your child in a compromising situation, your immediate response must be to secure their safety, followed by a calm, non-judgmental discussion. A panic-driven, violent reaction only teaches one thing: That their home is not a place of safety, and that violence is the answer to problems.

For this, you must prioritise time and presence. The holiday season, for example, is the time to interrupt your routine and do your parenting duties. Take the time to bond, to teach non-academic and social skills, and to truly understand their world. If your daughter felt she had to hide her relationship, you have lost the battle long before the boy sneaks into your house.

CHANGING STYLES

We, the parents, need to upgrade our operating system. We are running on Windows 95: Obey or be Obliterated, while our kids are on the latest iPhone Operating System: Autonomy and Emojis! Put down the *Kiboko*; you can't continue going ballistic over their lovers; you may even be giving them the drama they crave. The modern parent's weapon is the calm perception to dating which encourages the poacher to throw away his tools and get saved. If you want to make their rendezvous less than romantic, keep them in the light. When they find reason to hide from you, you won't know when the boy's trousers are ripped past the legal limit. Simply join them. Take them out, get to know their parents, discuss the non-sexual advantages of love and steer any sex questions into a scientific explanation of the miscalculation of premarital sex.

True, it is tough, but who says parenting is easy? Not me! Yes, it is your house, but you signed a contract when you became a parent: Your primary job is to create a safe harbour. If your child hides their relationship from you, they will meet in a place that is not your safe, brightly lit living room. And that is a failure of leadership, not surveillance. The solution to two teenagers wanting privacy is not to murder the one who isn't yours; it is to gently shepherd them towards public spaces. When a father finds himself choosing violence over dialogue, it is a testament to the bridges that were never built, the conversations that never happened and the trust that was never cultivated.

IN CONCLUSION

We all want to protect our children, but we must protect them from danger, not with it. Let us commit to raising children with the emotional muscle and moral foundation to thrive not just in the boardroom, but in life. We must be the parents who listen, who guide, and who are the last people our children would ever choose to lie to. Only then can we ensure that a moment of love and youthful folly does not end in a tragedy that breaks two families forever.

For this, let us be firm, yes, but also fun. When you roar, your rage is not a deterrent; it is an accelerate for bad decisions. Instead of teaching your child how to handle a boy, you end up teaching her how to hide him. Do not parent the children as we were; deal with the young adults they are.