

## SINCE WE LAST SPOKE

by

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Dear Pookie,

I wanted to write to you about feminist resistance, as a final practice of our love and a testament to the commitment we have for the revolution. I think of resistance as acts of defiance against material conditions that emerge from existing relations of domination, especially if you are in a subjugated position. It is often where the rubber meets the road or where you get up after saying *hapana imenifika kwa koo*. Now, the space between the realization of the thought and the act is usually a process but it's quite a relief when it happens. After having a conversation with a friend I recently made, I realized that I only valorize en masse resistance, like the protests we took part in, this year. I used recently loosely, to mean she's the only new friend I've made post our break up but we have been friends for months. The friend reminded me that our individual acts of resistance matter. It is a fact that individuals cannot go up against systems and that the only path to freedom is together but a clearer and important picture is that everyday acts of resistance are intertwined with collective dissent. An individual matters for the collective and a collective matters for the individual. What we do. What our bodies do. How we refuse with our bodies, as a way of surviving, of holding onto our dignity, and exercising our agency matters, not only for us but for other people who may be in our position.

I was around twelve years old when I was first exposed to discussions on abortion. The class had just read a passage from an English textbook. The gist was that abortion is a crime and the teacher reiterated this making sure we understood the doer and the doctor are criminals. I remember wanting to ask why they were criminals but the teacher did not appear to be in the mood to answer questions. The bell rang and we quickly changed to Mathematics. It was during this time that my mother started engaging with gossip about my forty year old childfree aunt in my presence. The gossip was that she had so many abortions that she was incapable of conceiving. As a medical student, it would be disingenuous to not emphasize enough how untrue this is. Your uterus can carry as many fetuses as you can safely abort. In highschool, we watched in despair, horror and confusion as our pregnant colleagues were unable to continue with their education. I was eighteen when people around me

started seeking abortion services. I was twenty one when I first needed abortion services. I told you about this and you said the same was true for you. That was the first piece of intimate information we had shared with each other. I was happy we had started being familiar. You were of the opinion that familiarity breeds contempt. A classic Swiftie, I thought. I should have seen it as a sign of incompatibility but I was too infatuated.

Now you need the services again and you come to me saying the guilt comes to you in insurmountable waves. You cannot make this decision again. This is not surprising, you are, after all, a catholic girl who grew up when our screens were filled with messages of abstinence. Schools were (and still are) wrought to bring up girls who do not think their bodies can serve themselves alone and who know little about their bodies. The government is unrelenting with its prohibitive abortion laws. What message is hammered into the heads of citizens when a government approves abortion services only for people whose lives are in danger? What quantifies or qualifies as the mother's health being in danger or as a need for emergency treatment? Are obstetric emergencies the only ones that count? How does that play out in and out of our hospitals? I'm filled with a lot of empathy for you and anger for us. A sob story should not be a pretext for an abortion. No pain nor adversity endured makes a person deserving of abortion services or undeserving of the shame after having one. As Mona Eltahawy puts it, our demands must be clear, nothing short of abortion on demand. Abortions can be a source of positive emotions, especially when done by people with marginalized identities. I felt free, content and relieved when I had my two abortions. They can be ways in which you control if, when and with whom you bring children to the systems we endure. They can be acts of caring for your body and care is an expression of love. They can be ways to ensure you survive and thrive. They can be ways you exercise agency. Let me tell you something I've learnt about shame. It festers in secrecy, and this is an unveiling. It is the dropping of shrouds that were put there in service of a capitalist cisheteropatriarchy. An act of resistance.

I don't know what decision you've made. I want you to know that any decision is understandable, that you will not be the first nor the last to make that decision. In another life, I'd be there with you when the pain is at its peak and we'd eat and laugh afterwards. In yet another life, I would have loved changing diapers and arguing

about sleep schedules with you. I have accepted that it won't be in this life for reasons best known to us. This is why I'm happy you have a support system. Take care! *Hata usiku uwe mrefu, kutapambazuka*. Do not contact me after reading this.

Your ex lover,

M.